

Clumsy kids who don't 'grow out of it'

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, is widely recognized by the medical community, and there are a number of therapies in place. But as many as six percent of all children suffer from the less familiar Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD).

Demonstrating a lack of refined motor skills, children with DCD tend to have a more difficult time playing sports and staying organized at school. They appear to be uncoordinated — and many parents think they'll grow out of it. But research shows that may not be true.

Now Dr. Orit Bart and her colleagues at Tel Aviv University's Stanley Steyer School of Health Professions have developed a questionnaire to assess how DCD kids socialize, and participate in daily activities, which

may lead to new treatments and interventions.

"DCD kids are often described as clumsy. Because they're usually of average to above-average intelligence, their disorder is rarely considered grave," says Dr. Bart, a world-recognized expert in DCD. But she cautions that the disorder can have a profound effect throughout their lives.

Results can be crippling

Dr. Bart's continuing research demonstrates that, if untreated, children with DCD may also have to cope with more severe social and emotional issues as adults. Children with DCD report feeling more lonely, are more likely to try drugs and alcohol, and have more difficulty in mastering basic life skills like driving. Her recent research, reported in the journal *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, concludes that a voluntary lack of participation in after-school activities can exacerbate the problem.

But if the disorder is diagnosed, intervention is possible. Children diagnosed with DCD can be monitored and, if they show a lack of interest in group activities, can be encouraged to participate. It is generally accepted in the field of education that participation in group activities is a key to health and well-being, a vital part of the emotional development of children and teenagers.

Links to ADD

In their study, Dr. Bart and her colleagues monitored 50 five-to-seven-year-olds who met the diagnostic criteria of DCD. They also observed 25 children without DCD. For both groups, they applied a number of motor assessment tests recognized by American and Canadian school boards.

The results confirmed a relationship between participation patterns and motor ability. Kids with DCD participated less. Dr. Bart says that these low participation levels should be studied in more depth so that therapists can help them grow into fully functional and satisfied adults.

Previous research of Dr. Bart's found a link between DCD and the attention deficit disorders ADD and [ADHD](#). About half of all children with ADD or ADHD also have DCD. Medication for attention deficit disorders appears to work in alleviating some of the motor coordination symptoms expressed in DCD, but more research is needed.

Dr. Bart's continuing research suggests that [children](#) with DCD tend to feel more emotionally isolated, less coherent and less optimistic about life than kids without DCD. "DCD appears to run in the family, although we have not yet identified any genes for it," says Dr. Bart. "We hope to know more about this disorder so we can help youngsters live fuller, more productive lives."

Provided by Tel Aviv University

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