

Dyspraxia affects children's well-being. How parents and caregivers can help

January 4 2024, by Carolyn Dunford, Mellissa Prunty and Peter Wilson



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It's likely [at least one child](#) in every classroom has movement difficulties

in the form of developmental coordination disorder (DCD), also known as developmental dyspraxia.

DCD is a disorder that affects a child's ability to perform and learn everyday tasks that require [motor coordination](#). Children with DCD typically struggle with academic tasks such as handwriting, as well as dressing themselves and using cutlery and tools. They may [find it difficult](#) to play ball games or to learn to ride a bike or swim. Parents also report that their [children](#) with DCD are [more tired](#) than other children at the end of the day.

When these skills are hard and frustrating to learn—and tiring too—a child's motivation to take part in them can wane, along with their self-belief.

Hidden struggles

DCD is a [common childhood disorder](#). Children with DCD often also have one or more [other developmental disorders](#), such as ADHD, autism and developmental language and learning disorders. But because children with DCD often avoid the tasks they struggle with, their issues may become invisible.

Children with DCD often have lower [academic attainment](#) than their peers. Parents in Australia reported that they believed the [main challenges](#) at school for their children with DCD were "teacher awareness of the condition, fatigue and keeping up in class, making friends and socializing, inclusion in the playground, and bullying."

Children with DCD are likely to take part in less [physical activity](#) than peers. This can be exacerbated by adult leaders not knowing how to successfully integrate children with DCD into a [team sport environment](#). Children with DCD are more likely to choose [sedentary activities](#), such

as reading and playing computer or board games.

This can result in less physically active lifestyles and lower physical fitness and [cardiovascular health](#).

What's more, avoiding group and [social activities](#) can lead to a child with DCD becoming left out—and this has an impact on their happiness. Children with DCD often [score lower](#) on quality of life measures than their peers in areas including physical well-being and friendships. DCD [also affects parents'](#) and siblings' well-being, [family life](#) and the parents' work.

Adults with suspected DCD [report issues](#) with anxiety and depression and rate their life satisfaction fairly poorly.

Taking action

Seeking a referral to a health professional who is versed in pediatric treatment can be a positive first step to help a child deal with DCD. Telehealth programs—remote health care that takes place, for instance, over video call—to help improve motor skills are just starting to emerge, with [preliminary evidence](#) suggesting they are effective.

School- and other group-based activity programs are [also beneficial](#) for [skill development](#), social interaction and fitness, but are not widely available. Active video games [may also be useful](#) to hone skill and fitness. [Online resources](#) can help point parents towards ways to assist their child with activities they find difficult.

Raising awareness of DCD matters. It has consequences for the child and their families, but also for society. [Research has found](#) that in the UK, the average direct health care cost to parents of a child with DCD over a six-month period was £700. But this does not take into account

any changes to employment—affecting the workforce—that might be needed to accommodate care needs.

Awareness of DCD remains low, which means children are not receiving the support they desperately need. Parents also report difficulties [accessing services](#) for their children.

For parents or caregivers, it is recommended that their child with DCD receive intervention delivered by health care professionals with the relevant [training and expertise](#). Informed intervention that considers the individual aspirations and preferences of the child, and that integrates sound motor learning strategies will enable them to improve their [motor skills](#), build confidence, and meet their life goals.

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