



Dyspraxia

and the older child

Compiled using information provided by the Dyspraxia Foundation.

DYSPRAXIA IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Dyspraxia is an impairment or immaturity of the organization of movement. Associated with this there may be problems of language, perception and thought.

Dyspraxia is an immaturity in the way the brain processes information and this results in messages not being properly or fully transmitted. Estimates put the number of children experiencing the condition at between 1 and 10% of the population. Boys are four times more likely to be effected than girls.

In some cases Dyspraxia is not identified until the child reaches secondary school. He/she may have managed to cope through their previous schools with only minor difficulties. However, the structure of secondary schools may prove to be too difficult for the child and it is at this point that problems manifest themselves especially in view of the organizational skills that are required in secondary education. If Dyspraxia is not identified and the child enters secondary education there can be such a high incidence of low self esteem and disaffection that behavioural difficulties are evident.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Difficulties with physical activities such as in P.E. with the child having difficulty with eye hand and eye foot co-ordination (i.e. ball skills), running or using equipment easily:
- Poor posture, body awareness and awkward movements:
- Confusion over laterality with the pupil interchanging between left and right hand for different tasks:
- Poor short term visual and verbal memory - copying from the board, dictation, following instructions:
- Writing difficulties both with style and speed - frequently children have an awkward pen grip:
- Poorly developed organizational skills and difficulty with planning essays:
- Activities which involve well developed sequencing ability are difficult:
- Problems with awareness of time, pupils need constant reminders:
- Often have poor exercise tolerance, tire easily and may require longer periods of rest and sleep:
- Some children may have phobias, obsessive or immature behaviour:
- Sensitive to external stimulation e.g. different levels of light, sound and heat intensity:

- Extremes of emotions, highly excitable at times and evidence of significant mood swings:
- Lack of awareness of potential danger, particularly relevant to practical and science subjects:
- Often loners and have limited development of social skills.

DYSPRAXIA - A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS IN FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

In many ways dyspraxia and dyslexia overlap and often co-exist in the same person. Dyspraxia is an impairment of the organization of movement that is often accompanied by problems with language, perception and thought. Dyslexia is primarily a difficulty with learning to read, write and spell and is also generally accompanied by other problems such as poor organization abilities. The pattern of difficulties in dyspraxia (or Developmental Co-ordination Disorder) may vary widely from person to person as with dyslexia.

A DYSPRAXIC STUDENT MAY HAVE DIFFICULTIES WITH:

Planning their movements and being aware of the space around them: They frequently bump into and trip over things. They may have a clumsy posture and poor muscle tone.

Perception: They find it difficult to judge heights and distances: this can make them appear clumsy.

Co-ordinating different parts of the body: They may find it hard to catch, throw and balance as well as moving the different parts of their body without looking. Sport and dancing can cause acute problems.

Laterality: It may be difficult to work out right from left without a reminder.

Manual and practical work: They may find it difficult to handle keyboards, tools, cars, bandages, laboratory and cooking equipment etc. safely and easily. They tend to knock over and spill things.

Hand-writing: They tend to write laboriously slowly and/or untidily and illegibly. Accurate copying may be difficult.

Language: They may find it difficult to pronounce some words and some may stutter.

Concentration: They may take a long time to complete a task and find it difficult to do more than one thing at a time.

Short term memory and sequencing tasks: They may find it hard to make sense of information when listening to or reading instructions, taking notes from books and lecturers and dealing with maps and charts. They may keep forgetting and losing things as well as finding it difficult to spell.

Organisation and thought: They may operate in a muddled way, having little sense of direction, time or weight. They may constantly miss appointments and hand assignments in late because they find it difficult to organize themselves and their work.

They find it difficult to express themselves easily.

A QUICK LOOK AT HANDWRITING PROBLEMS:

Written by Dr. Rosemary Sassoon - specialist in the educational and medical aspects of handwriting problems. She is the author of several books on the subject including:

The Practical Guide to Children's Handwriting (Thames & Hudson)
Helping Your Handwriting (Arnold-Wheaton)
Teach Yourself Handwriting (Hodder & Stoughton)

'Handwriting poses a problem for many children today, whether dyspraxic or not, both in the early stages with basic letters and later on when trying to develop a more flowing writing.

A letter is the visible trace of a hand movement, a product of the body as well as a concept of the mind. At its simplest this means that a relaxed arm produces relaxed handwriting, a tense one - tense handwriting. Maybe the most relevant to you is that awkward bodies may well produce awkward writing, however much help the writers may receive and however hard they try.

Handwriting is an indicator of problems and a valuable diagnostic tool. Faced with children who have writing difficulties it is first necessary to decide whether these difficulties have been caused by the pupil's own condition, perhaps a motor or visual

problem, or whether they have arisen because of inadequate or inappropriate teaching.

Poor handwriting is seldom the fault of the writer, and once this understood, those who suffer from handwriting problems through no fault of their own, can be judged more fairly. If it is more difficult for certain children to control the precise movements that are needed to form letters, yet they may manage to achieve legible script, they deserve more praise for the extra effort, rather than criticism because they cannot match their friend's conventionally neat handwriting.

Attitudes need changing, and changing fast, not only about how to cure problems but how to prevent them in the first place. All children, not only dyspraxic ones, need clear and structured teaching to help them to develop sound strategies for writing. The most vital time is in the early stages.

As far as letters are concerned the most important lessons concern the correct movement of basic letters. A visual approximation of the shape of the letter is not enough. The hand needs to be trained in the right movement to form letters correctly and if this movement is allowed to become wrongly automated then it becomes increasingly difficult for the writer to change. Incorrect movement stops the formation of legible joins, and at an early stage, stops the development of a writing rhythm. If the hand is sometimes pushing up from the baseline and sometimes going the wrong way around letters then it is performing all kinds of unnecessary contortions. Writing should be a smooth progression from one letter to another, whether they are joined or not, so the precise 'model' is far less important than the correct movement.

Dyspraxic children may need more repetition and re-inforcement along the way, but that is quite feasible within a systematic teaching method. They also profit from plenty of encouragement and praise, but all too often face just the opposite. Handwriting reflects the writer's moods so tension, unhappiness or just lack of confidence can be mirrored in the letters. This in turn can be the cause of the features that invite criticism, tense, uneven, jagged letters stressfully impressed into the paper.

Handwriting posture is also important. How children write in terms of how they sit, place their paper and hold their pen inevitably affects the written trace. Good posture can be fostered by making sure that children have appropriately sized furniture. This means both chairs and tables that allow them to sit comfortably to

write. A slanting surface is better than a flat table to work on. While this is not always possible in the classroom it can easily be arranged in a one-to-one situation, and is specially beneficial where there is any indication of a tremor.

The children may need to be shown where it is best for them to place their paper so they do not have to twist their hand around to see what they are doing, or their whole body to reach the line to write on. Optimum paper position is usually to the side of the writing hand over to their left side. None of this comes naturally, everything about handwriting needs to be taught. Children soon become automated in whatever posture they adopt when starting to write. Later on, even when an awkward position makes writing painful, they may not realize what is causing their arm or neck to ache.

Penhold is another complex story and there are no absolute rights or wrongs. Modern pens work in a different way and at a different elevation to pencils and traditional fountain pens. Children are gradually finding ways of dealing with this, but not all of the unconventional penholds that they adopt work well under tension or at speed. Parents and teachers can do their part by providing a variety of different writing implements, different in both the size and shape of the handle as well as in the point or nib. When children are given a choice there is a good chance that they will find something that suits both their hand and their handwriting.

Poor handwriting, from whatever cause, soon affects all areas of school work. Children need support and informed help - not criticism. One way forward is to press for better initial and in-service training for all our teachers, both in the teaching of handwriting and identifying and dealing with handwriting problems.'

RECOMMENDED READING LIST:

'Write from the Start' (previous sold as the Teodorescu Perceptuo-Motor Programme) by Ion Teodorescu and Lois Addy
Available from LDA, CA98, Duke Street, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2AE
Telephone: 01945 463441 Fax: 01945 587361

'Perceptuo-motor difficulties'

Theory and Strategies to help children, adolescents and adults
By Dorothy E Penso, Senior Paediatric Occupational Therapist
Available from Stanley Thorne Publishers Limited ISBN 0412398109

'Working With Clumsy Children. A Practical Approach for Teachers'

Compiled by Shirley Parkin and Margaret Padley
Available from The Bannerdale Centre, Bannerdale Road, SHEFFIELD S7 2EW
Telephone: 0114 250 6842

'Handwriting, A New Perspective'

By Rosemary Sassoon

Published by Leopard Learning ISBN 0-7487-0167-2

'Handwriting, The Way to Teach it'

By Rosemary Sassoon

Published by Leopard Learning ISBN 1899929-00-2

'Keyboarding Skills for Children with Dissabilities'

By Dorothy E Penso

Published by Whurr Publishers ISBN 1861561067

'Teaching Your Child the Language of Social Success'

By Elizabeth A Martin M.Ed, Stephen Nowicki, Nr. PhD

Publisher Peachtree Atlanta ISBN 1-56145-126-6

'Read and Type - a Gift for Life'

By Patricia Mayhew

Gift for Life Publications ISBN 1901494020 (Worksheet file ISBN 1901494047)

'Sensory Motor Activities for Early Development'

ISBN 086388153

**THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL IS AVAILABLE FROM THE
DYSPRAXIA FOUNDATION:**

Living with Dyspraxia - Handy Tips

A Dyspraxia Foundation Publication

Clumsy Children, Breaking the Cycle of Failure

By Delia Curry, Chartered Physiotherapist

Children with Developmental Dyspraxia

Information for Parents/Teachers, by Sidney Chu MSc. SROT. OTR

Occupational Therapy for Children with Developmental Dyspraxia

By Sidney Chu MSc. SROT. OTR

Developmental Dyspraxia, General Considerations

By Nancy Milloy

Dyspraxia - A Headteachers Perspective

By Margaret Pope. Ex Headteacher and Researcher into Children with Learning Disabilities

A Quick Look at Handwriting Problems

By Rosemary Sassoon

Physiotherapy - Applied to the Treatment of the Child with Dyspraxia

By Sally Wright MCSP

Basic Exercises for Articulatory Dyspraxia

By Veronica Connery

The GCSE Exam - What Help is Available for the Dyspraxia Child

The Dyspraxic Child at School - Where to get Help

By Christine Air

Therapy for Handwriting - A Case Study

By Delia Curry

Standing on Your Head

Coping with the behavioural problems of children with Developmental Dyspraxia. Motor co-ordination difficulties. Sensory Integration Problems by Eddie Street

BOOKS:

Praxis Makes Perfect 11

A Dyspraxia Foundation Publication, and essential guide for parents and teachers

Developmental Dyspraxia - 2nd Edition

By Madeleine Portwood, Snr Education Psychologist. A practical manual for parents and professionals

Dyspraxia - A Handbook for Therapists

By Michele Lee and Jenny French. Essential reading for Paediatric Physiotherapists and a useful reference for parents/professionals

Dyspraxia - The Hidden Handicap

By Amanda Kirby. A parent's guide from pre-school to adulthood

Handwriting Helpline

By Jean Alston. A guide for parents, teachers, adults and children with handwriting difficulties

Getting Extra Help

By The Advisory Centre for Education, a guide for parents on Special Education

Take Time

By Mary Nash-Wortham & Jean Hunt. Movement exercises for parents, teachers and therapists for children with difficulties in speaking, reading, writing and spelling

Dyspraxia - A Guide for Teachers and Parents

Resource materials for parents and teachers

Tips with Teens

By Dr Lilian F.C. Baettie M.B. B.S. Senior Clinical Medical Officer. Aylesbury Vale Health Authority. A practical guide for parents with teenagers

Solutions, for Specific Learning Difficulties: Identification Guide

By Jan Pousite et al. An identification guide for parents and professionals

Life Skills, Practical Solutions for Specific Learning Difficulties

By Jan Pousite. A guide to the difficulties in acquiring life skills by those affected with Learning Difficulties

Discover Yourself

By Gill Dixon. A book aimed at 7 - 10 year olds with dyspraxia. Illustrated by children.