

Dyspraxia – Implications for learning and possible strategies to support learners

Fine motor skills

These may be seriously impaired, affecting drawing, writing and related tasks.

Hand to Eye Coordination

Holding small pieces of equipment steadily without dropping them can be difficult. Difficulties with dressing and fastening clothes, using scissors, controlling a computer mouse and pressing the keys on a small calculator.

Support Strategies

- Suggest loose-fit easy on/easy off clothing and Velcro fastenings
- Allow the individual to start getting ready before the other students
- Find a quieter area of the changing room for them to use
- Check laces are tied correctly before starting lesson
- Use large key calculators.
- Monitor the use of scissors in younger children.
- Allow and encourage the individual to use special equipment they find helpful e.g. looped scissors, circle scribe compass etc
- Try a range of alternatives for mouse, left hand models, roller balls etc.
- Adjust the repeat button speed on mouse
- Provide clear instructions about how to use equipment if needed

Handwriting

Handwriting quality deteriorates rapidly during long handwritten tasks. Pen grip may be fierce and as a result the wrist soon aches. A learner may not judge that a word will not fit into the end of a line and will cram it in. He/she may not keep writing on the line, and letters may be poorly and unevenly formed. Learners may have problems labelling small diagrams, writing in framed boxes, or writing numbers clearly. Shading in areas of a diagram can be difficult. Problems with motor memory may cause the substitution of letters that have similar motor movements (for example: r/b/h or d/g/a). Making legible notes is difficult and sometimes impossible.

Support Strategies

- Have a whole school approach to teaching cursive handwriting style
- Practice multi-sensory letter formation e.g. sandpaper letters, sky writing, rice and sand trays, and interactive board to practise letter shape.
- Use pencil grips, writing lines, stencils and a pen that the learner prefers.
- Give plenty of space for labelling diagrams or use ready made labels.
- Provide non slip mat
- Provide a sloping desk
- Don't sit too close to peers
- Use assistive technology to record responses instead of writing.
- Use a Dictaphone to record notes instead of copying of the board.
- Provide handouts/notes or information on assistive technology to reduce handwriting
- Use a scribe.
- Teach touch typing
- If student finds typing easier use note book/l pad or laptop
- Rest breaks
- Give extra time to complete tasks (do not keep individual in during break time)

Gross motor skills

Learners often have difficulty with balance and other gross motor skills such as throwing and catching. Learners may drop objects when asked to hold them. They tire quickly and have problems with team games.

Support Strategies

- Provide balance or wobble boards, walking on the line and hand to hand throwing using bean bags or water-filled balloons
- Look for alternative physical activities, particularly individual sports such as golf, running, climbing, cycling, yoga, dancing and martial arts.
- Don't draw attention to awkwardness of movements
- Break down activities into component parts and teach these separately
- Be aware that these individuals take longer to reach increasing skill levels compared to other children.
- Offer graded motor activities that gradually increase stamina over time, e.g. number of lengths swam
- Be aware that performance will deteriorate during the lesson.
- Pair the individual up with someone who is sensitive and knows what they are doing.

Reading

Poor fine motor skills can affect the turning of pages in a book. Learners may crumple page edges or turn over two or three pages at a time.

Limited concentration and poor listening skills, and literal use of language may have an effect on reading and spelling ability.

A child may read well, but not understand some of the concepts in the language. The child may also be reluctant to read aloud because of articulation difficulties or because they lack self-confidence.

Spelling

The child with developmental verbal dyspraxia has an impaired speech processing system, which affects their ability to make sound letter links and to carry out phonological awareness tasks (e.g. segmenting, blending, rhyming etc) essential for literacy acquisition. **Spelling is usually more affected than reading.**

Support Strategies

- Have a whole school approach to teaching cursive handwriting style as this will aid the flow of the spelling pattern.
- Use multi-sensory approach to teach the spelling patterns and sounds
- Practice multi-sensory letter formation e.g. sandpaper letters, sky writing, rice and sand trays, and interactive board to practise letter shape and spelling patterns.

Writing

Learners may have difficulties with combining thoughts with physical aspect of writing or hasn't understood the task. They are easily distracted.

Support Strategies

- Position individual away from busy thoroughfares
- Allow individual extra time to complete work, with motor breaks when needed.
- Provide part-prepared handouts or photocopied sheets to reduce unnecessary writing.
- Provide lists of key concepts or vocab. spellings
- Check the individual knows what to do
- Provide templates with headings to help individuals
- work through an activity
- Teach mind-maps, spider diagrams, lists

Language and communication

Learners may be able to say something when not under pressure but be unable to repeat it when asked by a teacher. They could have difficulties with picking up non-verbal cues so appears tactless to peers. They may be unable to remember and/or follow instructions.

Support Strategies

- Get the attention of the child before giving instructions.
- Use simple language with visual prompts.
- Provide time to process the information.
- Use activities, demonstrations and pictures.
- Role play to develop understanding of the concepts of private and public
- Have consistent explicit classroom rules
- Use social stories to explain the social rules and expected behaviour

Personal organisation

Poor organisational skills are common. Learners may struggle to remember their timetable. There may be a tendency to borrow books and materials from the library and peers and mislay or forget to return them.

Support Strategies

- Supply time-tables (Use colour and symbols on the timetable), daily diaries and instructions for specific activities in sequenced picture cards
- Encourage them to wear a watch they can read with an alarm set just before the end of break/lunch
- Write down instructions if plans change from the norm (and make sure the special instructions are removed the next day so they aren't carried out again!)
- Encourage use of a mini tape recorder or recording pen for short messages about routine changes
- Use coloured post-it notes put into planner for special messages
- Develop a "daily procedures" book to reinforce routines
- Allow to pack up a bit early
- Encourage use of colour-coded plastic wallets or a concertina file to hold loose papers
- Teach the individual how to file papers