

Dyspraxia – Tell-tale signs

The following information is taken from The Dyspraxia Foundation (<http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk>)

Children with dyspraxia may demonstrate some of these types of behaviour:

Pre-school children - 3 to 5 year olds

- Very high levels of motor activity, including feet swinging and tapping when seated, hand-clapping or twisting. Unable to stay still.
- May constantly bump into objects and fall over.
- Has difficulty in walking up and down stairs
- Hands flap when running
- Difficulty with pedalling a tricycle or similar toy
- Difficulty getting dressed/changing, cleaning teeth, doing up shoes laces, using cutlery (holding knives and forks at the same time).
- Continued messy eating. May prefer to eat with their fingers, frequently spill drinks.
- Laterality (left- or right-handedness) still not established. Persistent language difficulties.
- High levels of excitability, with a loud/shrill voice
- May be easily distressed and prone to temper tantrums
- Avoidance of constructional toys, such as jigsaws or building blocks
- Poor fine motor skills. Difficulty in holding a pencil or using scissors. Drawings may appear immature.
- Has little understanding of concepts such as 'in', 'on', 'in front of' etc
- Lack of any sense of danger (jumping from heights etc)
- Lack of imaginative play. May show little interest in dressing up or in playing appropriately in a home corner or wendy house.
- Limited creative play
- Isolation within peer group. Rejected by peers, children may prefer adult company.
- Sensitive to sensory stimulation, including high levels of noise, tactile defensiveness, wearing new clothes.
- Limited response to verbal instruction. May be slow to respond and have and have problems with comprehension.
- Limited concentration. Tasks are often left unfinished

By 7 years old - problems may include:

- Difficulties in adapting to a structured school routine
- Difficulties in Physical Education lessons
- Slow at dressing. Unable to tie shoe laces
- Barely legible handwriting
- Immature drawing and copying skills
- Limited concentration and poor listening skills
- Literal use of language
- Inability to remember more than two or three instructions at once
- May have trouble with maths and writing structured stories
- Slow completion of class work
- Continued high levels of motor activity
- Hand flapping or clapping when excited
- Problems with co-ordinating a knife and fork
- Tendency to become easily distressed and emotional
- Inability to form relationships with other children
- Sleeping difficulties, including wakefulness at night and nightmares
- Reporting of physical symptoms, such as migraine, headaches, feeling sick

Secondary school

Secondary school is a time of extensive changes, educationally, emotionally and physically. When a child with Dyspraxia moves up to secondary school it may expose their social weaknesses. They may struggle to keep up with their peer group when socialising and they may find themselves victim of bullying, as it becomes obvious that they are different.

If Dyspraxia is not identified and the child enters secondary education there may be a high incidence of low self-esteem, behavioural difficulties may be evident and disaffection.

Problems may include:

- 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
- May have trouble with maths and writing structured stories
- Confusion over laterality with the pupil interchanging between left and right hand for different tasks Experiences great difficulty in copying from the blackboard

- Writing difficulties both with style and speed - frequently children have an awkward pen grip.
- Poor short term visual and verbal memory - copying from the board, dictation, Unable to remember and /or follow instructions
- Poorly developed organisational 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

If dyspraxia is not identified, problems can persist and affect the child's life at school. Increasing frustration and lowering of self-esteem can result.