



Ward Psychology

Advice Training Assessment Expert Witness

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Advice note 114

Helping with Dyspraxia

The following pieces of information are downloads from the Internet with general advice about the difficulties that children with dyspraxia may face and some suggestions as to how school may help. The website reference for where the information can be found follows each entry.

1. Definitions and Symptoms

At school, a child with dyspraxia may have difficulty with maths and writing stories. They may avoid games, be slow at dressing and unable to tie shoelaces, be poorly organised or have a short attention span. They may find it hard to remember and follow instructions. Poor handwriting is one of the most common symptoms.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/physical_health/conditions/dyspraxia2.shtml

Symptoms in Older Children

- poor listening skills
- inability to multi-task and poor memory
- illegible handwriting
- difficulty tying shoelaces
- lags behind peers, academically
- difficulty coordinating the use of a knife and fork simultaneously
- emotionally charged
- sleeping difficulties

<http://www.safekids.co.uk/Dyspraxia.html>

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
- Slow completion of class work
- Continued high levels of motor activity
- Hand flapping or clapping when excited
- Tendency to become easily distressed and emotional
- Problems with co-ordinating a knife and fork
- 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

http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/services/gu_symptoms.php

2. Hints and tips for PE lessons

- Not all children can learn by watching others, those with coordination difficulties may need to be taught all skills.
- Help the child to position himself properly before starting an activity by placing his feet and hands correctly. Use the child as a model to demonstrate the starting position to the rest of the class. Provide hand-over-hand guidance to help children feel the movements.
- Give clear instructions one at a time, allowing the child time to organise their body into the right position before the next instruction is given.
- Children with coordination difficulties can find it hard to catch, throw and hit balls so have a variety of equipment available, for example balls with ribbon tails, larger bats and beanbags as well as ordinary balls
- Use music, counting or a rhythmic rhyme to reinforce movement patterns. Some children have difficulty getting started or knowing what to do next so using repetitive phrases such as “I can move my left arm, left arm, left arm, I can move my left arm just like this” may help.
- Provide children with a marked spot, gym mat or hoop on the floor to indicate the “space” that they should return to when directed by the teacher. It helps the child to have somewhere to aim for, rather than wandering aimlessly or getting in the way of other children.
- Use cones, lines on the floor or other markers to indicate the area in which the activity is to take place. This will help children to contain their movements if they are prone to “over-shooting” when moving around.
- Encourage the children to verbalise their plans for movement. For example ask the child what they are going to do next, do they need to throw harder? What could they try to improve their performance?
- Encourage children to beat their own records for example, how many times they are able to bounce and catch a ball. Asking the class “How many people beat their own record?” gives the child with dyspraxia the chance to share their success.
- Children with dyspraxia often cope with PE lessons that focus on learning skills. They struggle when they have to apply these skills in a group or team setting when the environment is constantly changing. They often feel they are letting their team down and may choose to opt out of team games. Where appropriate allow the child with dyspraxia to continue to focus on skill development, rather than team games.
- Reward effort and participation.

Encouraging general physical activity in children of all ages

Difficulties with motor co-ordination often affect children's participation in physical activities both at school and at home. Frequent failures mean that children may not be motivated to join in or to try new activities and their physical difficulties can make them feel isolated from their friends. If children continue to avoid physical games and activities, over time this will affect their overall level of fitness and well-being. With support and guidance however, children with dyspraxia/DCD can be encouraged to participate in physical activities which will help them to be healthy throughout their lives.

- Activities that don't require much hand-eye coordination may be easier to manage. They include yoga, swimming, hiking, running, cycling, skating, aerobics and tai chi.
- Emphasise fun and participation rather than achievement. Where possible avoid competitive sports, only comparing a child to their own previous performance.
- Break down the activity into smaller parts and practice individual skills in an un-pressurised environment before joining in with a group.
- Encourage the young person to think about what they are doing: do they need to throw harder or not quite so hard?

- If a young person is interested in a sport, even if they can't play it well, then their interest should be encouraged. They might become an expert on players and team form which can help to maintain their street-credibility with their peers.
- Above all, find something the individual can do, and encourage their improvement and participation.

http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/services/gu_pelessons.php

4. General Classroom Advice

The child may need extra supervision and positive encouragement to stay on task.

- Seating should allow the child to rest both feet flat on the floor and the child to be encouraged (with house points etc) to sit with an upright posture
- The desk should be at elbow height with a facility to use a sloping surface for reading and additional activities. Always communicate with local OT's and parents before providing a sloping surface.
- The child should be placed so he/she is able to view the teacher directly without turning the body and be close enough to hear/see instructions. Also try and seat away from distractions ie windows and doors etc.
- Always give instructions in chunks and break down activities or tasks into small components. By the time you have given 3 or 4 sets of instructions a Dyspraxic child will almost certainly have forgotten 1 and 2 already.
- Patience is the key. An overbearing or seemingly impatient attitude will not get the results you or the child want.
- Make prepared recording sheets available to reduce the amount of handwriting needed.
- Use alternative methods of recording, ie use a scribe / dictaphone / computer laptop etc..anything that gets the best results. Remember the Dyspraxic or Dyslexic child is generally of above intelligence they just cannot order their thoughts or spell well enough to record what is required.
- Teachers must stamp on any peer bullying or intimidation right from the start. If bullying verbal or actual is allowed to go unchecked the Dyspraxic child will lose confidence and self esteem very quickly and it may affect their entire school life.
- Reinforce verbal instructions by repeating more than once.
- If possible allow extra time for the completion of the work and in exams. Co-ordinate teaching in conjunction with parents and the school senco to get best results.
- Liaise with all the relevant professionals for further advice in the classroom and PE (a troubling subject for most Dyspraxics!!)
- On moving up from Junior to Senior schools Dyspraxic children can have major problems adjusting to the new regime. Help, encouragement and discussions with parents prior to the change can and will have positive benefits for all concerned. A mentor system in Yr7 can be a positive way to integrate the child into a new school environment.
- Most of all - An understanding of Dyspraxia and how it affects children is vital in order to understand their problems and their abilities. How a teacher reacts to a dyspraxic child in the classroom can make a big difference. The website goes some way to addressing the issues but there is still a long way to go.

<http://www.durhamdyspraxia.org.uk/teachers.html>