

Developmental Coordination Disorder



Developmental coordination disorder (DCD) is a motor skills disorder that is fairly prevalent, but can frequently go unrecognized. Research suggests a range of between 5 to 10 percent of school-age children are affected by this condition. This disorder interferes with a student being able to perform common, everyday tasks. Frequently described as “clumsy” or “awkward” by their parents and teachers, students with this disorder often have difficulty mastering simple motor activities, such as tying shoes or going down stairs, and are unable to perform age-appropriate academic and self-care tasks. Students with DCD may avoid tasks that require fine and/or gross motor coordination and this can lead to frustration and/or under achievement.

Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support this student’s needs related to coordination. This could include finding out about:
 - the student’s strengths, interests and areas of need
 - successful strategies used at home or in the community
 - activities that the student enjoys and is successful with.
- Learn as much as you can about how developmental coordination may affect learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to qualified professionals will build your understanding and help you make informed decisions to better support the student’s success at school.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student’s coordination difficulties and successful strategies.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student’s parents.

Implications for Instruction

- Consider alternate forms of written output and/or demonstration of comprehension. Investigate how technology can be leveraged to increase the student’s capacity to produce and share written work.
- When teaching a new motor skill, break it down into components. Each component is practised several times until it becomes more automatic and fluid before adding a new component. Make activities in physical education classes as successful and enjoyable as possible. Focus on being active and having fun. Have quick ways for students to find partners and form teams that ensure everyone is included and no one student feels like the “last one picked.”



- Use consistent verbal descriptions and visual demonstrations of the movement patterns as you “talk” the student through new patterns (e.g., “up, down, around”). Perform them slowly and exaggerated so the student can adjust and follow.
- In the very early stages of learning a new movement task, the student may also need physical guidance to “learn the feel of the movement.” Use this strategy as needed and then fade back to the verbal descriptions of the movement.
- Besides breaking the new motor skill down into components, also break it down according to body parts. Have the student focus on learning movement in only one body part at a time (e.g., this is what you do with your arm).
- Use visual cues for correct body part placement (e.g., footprint on floor to encourage step forward when throwing ball).
- Give the student lots of rehearsal time to learn new movement patterns. As well, make sure to allow extra time to complete tasks that are difficult or require more physical effort.
- Focus on the purpose of the learning activities (e.g., ignore messy writing if the purpose is to create a story, ignore awkward dance movements if the goal is to be active to music).
- When needed, allow the student extra time for self-care activities (e.g., getting ready for recess, dressing for gym, assembling supplies for project work).
- Encourage students to develop personalized organizational systems by having scheduled times each week to clean up their locker or desk. Provide an organizational system (e.g., colour-coded binders/folders, checklists).

Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Engage the student and parents in planning for transitions between grade levels and different schools to ensure strategies and supports that benefit this student continue to be available across grade levels and from school-to-school.
- Since activities requiring gross motor and fine motor coordination are more difficult for the student, teach the student how to use positive self-talk to reduce frustration and/or to increase motivation to try physical activities he or she finds challenging.
- Partner the student with supportive peers so he or she does not feel left out during recess, gym or other school activities. Try to find alternative ways to promote involvement; the student will be more successful with motor activities that he or she is familiar with and has had practice doing.

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.



As you consider the implications for this condition, think about the following questions:

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student's strengths and needs? Yes No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning? Yes No
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore?
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required? Yes No
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Regional Educational Consulting Services, Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children's Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)? Yes No
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
5. Are further assessments required to assist with planning for this student? Yes No
If yes, what questions do I need answered?
6. Is service to the student from an external provider required? Yes No
If yes, what outcomes would be anticipated?

Links for further information:

CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research: Overview of DCD
<http://dcd.canchild.ca/en/AboutDCD/overview.asp>

CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research: Educational materials
<https://canchild.ca/en/diagnoses/developmental-coordination-disorder/dcd-educational-materials-for-home-school-physicians-and-other-health-professionals>

LDAO Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
<http://www.ldao.ca/introduction-to-ldsadhd/articles/about-parenting/developmental-coordination-disorder-dcd/>

Please note:

These websites are for information only and the user is responsible for evaluating the content and appropriate uses of the information.

