

# What is developmental coordination disorder

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Children's therapy services [Patient information](#)

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## What is developmental coordination disorder?

A child with developmental coordination disorder (DCD) has difficulties carrying out daily tasks due to a delay in the development of motor skills or difficulties coordinating movements. A paediatrician can make a diagnosis by ensuring that the movement difficulties are not caused by any other known physical, neurological, or behavioural conditions.

The characteristics of children with DCD are usually noticed by people closest to the child because the motor issues interfere with educational progress and/or daily activities (e.g. dressing, playground skills, handwriting and sports). DCD is thought to impact 5-6% of school-aged children, with boys being more affected. DCD can be present on its own or in combination with learning challenges, speech/language issues, and/or attention deficit disorder. The coordination issues mentioned in this leaflet are those that are most noticed in children with developmental coordination disorder.

## How do coordination difficulties occur?

Although the causes are unknown, evidence suggests that children with DCD may struggle to learn how to plan, organise, perform, and/or coordinate their movements. One thing we do know is that children with DCD have a hard time learning new motor skills.

Researchers believe that in addition to finding moving their bodies difficult, children affected by DCD also have problems using strategies to assist them with motor-based tasks.

Due to children with DCD finding motor skills challenging, they need to put more time and effort into completing motor-based tasks, even if they have been learnt previously. Children with DCD may not recognise the similarities between different motor skills. This makes transferring one motor skill to another demanding. A good example of this is: catching a large ball and then a small ball.

It is common for parents and teachers to be told that the child will 'grow out' of the difficulties they are having. Studies show this is not the case. While children may learn to perfect some motor tasks, they will continue to have difficulty with new motor tasks that are age appropriate. It is important to remember that studies show children with DCD are more likely to struggle academically, demonstrate low self-esteem, develop anxiety and depression and are at risk of poor physical health.

# The role of therapists

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists have specific experience and knowledge of working with children with coordination difficulties. This allows the therapists to gain an overall view of your child's motor skills and promote their independence in occupations that are important to them such as riding a bike, dressing, and eating.

The therapist will observe your child performing motor-based tasks and provide recommendations and strategies to help. This can be achieved at home and school by making small changes to your child's environment, promoting physical activity and providing guidance for activities that are in line with their interests and abilities. The therapists will also set achievable goals to help them be successful.

## Useful websites:

[Developmental Coordination Disorder | CanChild](#)

[www.movementmattersuk.org](http://www.movementmattersuk.org)

[The Dyscovery Centre | University of South Wales](#)

[Developmental co-ordination disorder \(dyspraxia\) in children - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Developmental Coordination Disorder in Children | Understood - For learning and thinking differences](#)

## Contact details

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