The Neurodivergent Classroom

Dyspraxia (DCD) at a Glance

DCD stands for developmental coordination disorder, often called dyspraxia. Planning, learning and carrying out movements can be harder, slower or less precise, while understanding of the subject stays intact.



What you may notice in class

- Handwriting, drawing or cutting takes a long time.
- Copying eats up attention they need for the next step.
- Materials and finished work look messy.
- New movements are learned slowly or unevenly.
- Switching materials or changing for PE takes longer.
- Performance varies with the task, time pressure and setting.
- Avoids moving after failing too often.
- Can explain things clearly and to the point.
- Younger kids find cutting, writing and new moves in PE hard. (elementary school)
- Older students struggle with note-taking, switching materials and timed tests. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Grasps the content despite motor barriers.
- Can explain clearly out loud.
- Finds their own ways to cope and join in.
- Knows more than their handwriting suggests.
- Shows what they can do with the right setup.
- Keeps going despite extra physical effort.

What helps

- Break tasks into short, visible steps.
- Hand out copies, guided notes or digital notes.
- Allow typing, speech-to-text, spoken answers or sketches.
- Build in extra time for writing and switching materials.
- Use checklists for materials, organizing and handing in.
- Show movements slowly, one part at a time.
- Grade the learning goal, not general dexterity.
- Keep the workspace and materials clearly organized.
- Allow plenty of practice time for new movements.
- Adapt the task, room or materials as needed.
- With younger kids, break movements down, model them and keep materials tidy. (elementary school)
- With older students, plan for digital notes, extra time and materials checklists. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- Mistaking slowness for a lack of knowledge.
- Asking for more copying than necessary.
- Grading handwriting or neatness when it isn't the goal.
- Making time pressure the default.

Words that carry

"You've got the idea. Let's find a good way to show it."

"Take your time. We'll go through it step by step."

"You can type, say, sketch or write the answer."

"Let's try it in small moves." (elementary school)

"Feel free to take notes on a device and plan your own steps." (middle and high school)

Where to find support

CanChild (McMaster University)
canchild.ca
Canadian research center with free DCD resources for teachers.

NHS: Dyspraxia (DCD) in children
nhs.uk/conditions/developmental-coordination-disorder-dyspraxia
Clear health information from the UK National Health Service.

Understood.org: Accommodations for DCD understood.org/en/articles/at-a-glance-classroom-accommodations-for-dcd
Classroom accommodations at a glance.

Local support
Many countries have a dyspraxia or DCD association. An occupational therapist can advise on motor skills at school.

More in the Teacher Portal: neurodivergentclassroom.com/teacher-portal/dyspraxia/

Sources: Blank et al.: International clinical practice recommendations on developmental coordination disorder · World Health Organization: ICD-11, 6A04 Developmental motor coordination disorder · CanChild: Children with Developmental Coordination Disorder at home, at school and in the community