How to obtain a diagnosis

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Dr Kirby is the medical director of The Discovery Centre in Cardiff. She has had published several books on the subject of Developmental Co-ordination Disorder including her most recent "The adolescent with Developmental Co-ordination Disorder". She has lectured both nationally and internationally.

If you consider that your child could have Developmental Co-ordination Disorder sometimes known as Dyspraxia, you may want this confirmed.

First ask yourself the following questions:

Does your child have difficulty dressing compared to other children of the same age?
Does your child have or had difficulty with shoe lace tying?
Does your child have difficulty riding a bike?
Does your child have difficulty writing neatly, especially at speed compared to others of the same age?
Does your child have difficulty with ball games and especially when taking part in a team game?
Is your child a messy eater and tends to spill things when eating?

If you have said Yes to most or all of these then your child may have DCD, but could also have other difficulties that could affect their co-ordination.

The first stage before trying to get a diagnosis would be also to ask your child’s teacher if he or she has noticed any difficulties in class, such as with using scissors, or with writing, or playing ball, or undressing for PE. This helps to look at what sort of problems your child may have in school as compared to home and is useful information if you go to see a health professional for a diagnosis.

If school is concerned they may go through the educational system to access help. In some areas joint clinics exist between health and education and assessments may be carried out within the school setting.

There are several people that could be involved with a diagnosis as DCD can overlap with other conditions such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), Asperger’s Syndrome and Dyslexia. Often the person your child ends up seeing is related to the major “problem” for your child.

The professionals who see your child may be:
A Paediatrician
A Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
An Occupational Therapist
A Physiotherapist
A Speech and Language Therapist
A Psychologist
This may vary from area to area and depends on who first sees your child or if your child is referred to more than one professional.

The first person to visit is your GP, where you should express your concerns for your child and explain what he or she finds harder to do, and if this has always been a problem.

He or she is likely to refer your child to the local paediatric service, and depending on the way they work at a local level will send your child an appointment to be seen by one of the clinical team. In some areas multi-disciplinary teams have been set up, where a number of professionals work together and may see your child all at once. In other areas you may have to see different professionals at different times.

It sometimes helps if you write down who you have seen and when and keep a file of all appointments. It may even be useful to write down your child’s developmental milestones such as walking, talking etc so that you have them to hand when asked. Write down any concerns you may have regarding your child. If you are feeling nervous (most people do), you often remember what you were going to say once you get home.

Ask your GP to find out how long the waiting time is for the particular professional concerned, so you know what to expect.

In the meanwhile you could read any number of books on DCD/Dyspraxia that can give you some practical advice so you can start to help your child with or without the diagnosis. NB The Dyspraxia Foundation sells a wide range of publications-see Publications list and Order form.

**ASK ASK ASK**

If you don’t understand – ask for an explanation- sometimes jargon can be used without full explanation.

Ask if a report will be produced and will you get a copy
Ask also if they will liaise/advise school with any ideas or treatment plans
Ask if Occupational Therapists go into school in the area- and how the service works and what can you expect
Ask are there any holiday groups running that your child could access?
If you don’t know any other parents in the area with children with similar problems, you could ask if they know anyone they could put you in contact with

If there is a long waiting time in your area, you may want to consider a private referral. There are a number of private Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists around the country as well as Paediatricians who could see you. Contact their professional bodies to get a list of these (see below). There are also a number of centres around the UK that offer services as well. Do ensure that they are appropriately qualified as there are also a number of charlatan organisations around as well. Ask for their qualifications and ask exactly what they do and what evidence is their for treatment. Ask your GP for his or her opinion if you are unsure.
Professional Bodies:

College of Occupational Therapists,  
106-114 Borough High Street, Southwark, London SE1 1LB.  
Tel: 020 7357 6480  
Website: www.cot.org.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy  
14 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4ED  
Tel: 020 7306 6666 /Fax: 020 7306 6611  
Website: www.csp.org.uk

National Association of Paediatric Occupational Therapists (NAPOT)  
37A Star Street  
Ware  
Hertfordshire  
SG12 7AA  
Tel: 01920 469 083  
Email: admin@napot.org

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)  
2 White Hart Yard  
London SE1 1NX  
England, UK  
Tel: 020 7378 1200  
Website: www.rcslt.org

British Psychology Society  
St Andrews House  
48 Princess Road East  
Leicester  
LE1 7DR  
Tel: 0116 254 9568  
Website: www.bps.org.uk

Further information available from:  
Dyspraxia Foundation, 8 West Alley Hitchin Herts SG5 1EG  
Helpline Tel: 01462 454986  
Admin Tel: 01462 455016  
Fax: 01462 455052  
Web: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk  
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