



DYSPRAXIA

EARLY YEARS GUIDELINES



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COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- Delays in reaching motor milestones e.g. rolling over, sitting, standing, walking, running, jumping and hopping

PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Falls over frequently
- Difficulty walking in straight line, bumps into people and things
- Difficulties running, hopping, jumping, catching, kicking balls, riding a tricycle

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Walk on different surfaces such as thick mats, balance or wobble boards
- Walking slowly on a straight line, circle or other shape chalked or taped on the floor
- Hand to hand passing or throwing (across the body midline) using bean bags or other small toys - encourage the child to watch the passage of the toy as it moves
- Catch balloons, scarves, juggling balls and different sized balls
- Catch bubbles in the air with both hands
- Obstacle courses
- Go around obstacles such as cones whilst walking on knees, walk backwards, crawling (forwards or backwards)
- Skittles (both with throwing and kicking)
- Encourage sitting on rockers, see saws, and ride-on toys and gently encourage moving on it
- Put the child's feet on the pedals and push along using an adult handle so that the child experiences the movements required to move forward.



COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- Slow or poor at dressing and hesitant in most actions



- Difficulty with fine motor skills

PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Difficulty pulling clothes over the head
- Poor balance when pulling on socks and trousers
- Difficulty fastening clothes
- Difficulties remembering the order of component parts of a task
- Poor orientation of clothes

- Difficulty using tools, pencils, utensils
- Late at developing hand dominance
- Lack of hand strength and difficulty maintaining grip
- Difficulty using two hands together
- May not manage jigsaws or shape sorting games

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Sit down to get dressed with back against something for extra support
- Suggest loose-fit easy on/easy off clothing and Velcro fastenings
- Break down each task into small sections to be mastered one by one. Provide pictures to prompt the sequence.
- Stick to a familiar routine about which items go on and in which order.
- Choose clothes with a logo on the front or v-neck so they are easier to orientate
- Make sure the child is sitting with feet flat and bottom back when working on fine motor tasks.
- Provide chunky pencils and crayons
- Larger equipment is often easier to handle e.g. inset puzzles with round knobs rather than small pegs to hold
- Magnetic games and toys provide some resistance which builds hand strength and are less likely to be knocked
- Playdough can be rolled into a sausage, rolled into a ball, pinched and squeezed.
- Work at an easel to build arm/shoulder/wrist stability





COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- Messy eater

PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Spills food on table and down themselves
- Difficulty using cutlery efficiently
- May dislike certain food textures

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Ensure the child is sitting with feet supported and that the table is of an appropriate height
- Provide a piece of non-slip mat underneath the plate (available from high street discount shops)
- Provide cutlery that has a chunky handle as these are easier to hold and manipulate
- Be sensitive to a child's preferences for food textures
- Keep food separate on the plate if necessary and introduce new textures gradually.

COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- Delayed speech and language development
- May present with social communication difficulties

PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Difficulty in explaining needs or answering a question
- Difficulty in retelling an incident
- Unable to remember and/or follow instructions
- Attention and listening difficulties
- Speech may be unclear
- Difficulty understanding body language and personal space

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Get the attention of the child before giving instructions, and reduce distractions
- Only give 1-2 instructions at one time and ask the child to repeat them before carrying them out
- Use simple language with visual prompts.
- Provide time for the child to process the information
- If speech is unclear, model correct production, but do not correct unless guided to do so by speech and language therapist
- Role play activities
- Provide photos to help recollection of personal experiences; use home/school book to support
- Use closed questions rather than open ended questions
- Practice meanings of different facial expressions
- Encourage child to think about how far they are away from others (keep an arms-length away)





COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- May have difficulty in making and keep friends, or judging how to behave in company

PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Difficulty in developing play skills and following game rules
- May have no concept of personal belongings
- Difficulty keeping friends
- Difficulty in understanding the feelings of other people and the effect of their own behaviours on other people

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Focus on teaching necessary play skills such as turn-taking, negotiating etc
- Introduce a circle of friends or buddy system to help the child in building relationships
- Use social stories and role play to practice how to act in given situations
- Work on understanding emotions
- Use strategies such as comic strip conversations



COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- May have little understanding of spatial concepts such as 'in', 'on', 'in front of'

PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Difficulties with planning, directions,
- Difficulty with time concepts such as 'before' 'after' 'future'
- Poor awareness of days of the week/months/seasons

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Use the phrases 'now' and 'next' to reinforce the sequence of events.
- Talk about the time of significant daily events as they happen e.g. "Break fast, it must be 8 o'clock"
- Make a visual timetable with your child, using pictures to illustrate significant events in the child's day/week (e.g. swimming, no school)
- Have a daily timetable and a monthly calendar somewhere that the child can see often
- Make concepts relevant to child's own experience so s/he can build on what s/he already knows and can do



- Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia (DVD) - affecting a small number of children

- Some motor difficulties, but the primary difficulty is with speech and language.
- Often present as very late talkers, who are quiet and shy/withdrawn.
- When they develop some language, words are very unclear due to frequent consonant and vowel substitutions and omissions.
- They may also have difficulties with oral skills such as blowing, licking and sucking and have feeding difficulties

- Children with DVD need to be managed by a speech and language therapist, who can provide advice specific to the child's needs.

- Resistance to changes

- Difficulty coping with sudden changes, leading to anxiety

- Keep the room as orderly as possible -everything with its own place
- Use visual timetables to give advance notice of any changes
- Use role play and drama to explore different outcomes and scenarios





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COMMON DIFFICULTIES

- Appears not to be able to learn anything instinctively but must be taught skills



PROBLEMS AT PRE-SCHOOL

- Finds it difficult to engage or concentrate
- Can do something one day but not another
- Reacts to all stimuli with out discrimination
- Flits between activities
- Disturbs others

HELPFUL STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

- Give a distraction-limited learning environment when focusing on new skills
- Reduce the social demands while learning – allow the child to work alone
- Allow child to choose activities which meet child's own interests
- Break each new task down into its component parts and be prepared to demonstrate the task several times
- Set time limits and use a sand timer



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For more information, help or advice please contact The Dyspraxia Foundation

For general enquiries:

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