

Dyspraxia/DCD in the Workplace

Help and guidance for job seekers and employees



Dyspraxia, also known as developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) is a common condition affecting gross and fine motor coordination in children and adults. Associated non-motor difficulties include poor working memory and poor planning, organisational and time management skills. These non-motor difficulties appear to have more impact on daily life than motor difficulties in adulthood.

Dyspraxia/DCD is a specific learning difficulty and is formally recognised by the World Health Organisation. It is a unique condition, but often occurs alongside other conditions including ADHD and dyslexia. Dyspraxia/DCD varies in its presentation and severity, and the impact of difficulties may change over time depending on environmental demands, life experiences and therapy interventions.

Many adults who have dyspraxia/DCD experience few problems in the workplace and have developed their own strategies for working effectively. They are usually determined, persistent, hard-working and highly motivated employees. In some ways adults with dyspraxia/DCD are similar to those with dyslexia. They are often creative and original thinkers as well as strategic problem solvers. Every person with dyspraxia/DCD has a different profile of strengths and difficulties. However, some individuals find it hard to achieve their true potential and may need specific support at work.

People with dyspraxia/DCD may have difficulty with the following:

- Choosing a job that suits strengths
- Having the confidence and organisation to apply effectively for jobs or promotion
- Operating office equipment and computers
- Organising workload and meeting time targets
- Verbal communication - such as following oral instructions and taking part in discussions
- Written communication - handwriting and general writing skills
- Memory and concentration.

Each person will have their own profile of strengths and difficulties. However, there are steps that individuals and their employers can take to help them in seeking work or to make their working life better. This leaflet outlines some of those steps and more are available in the Dyspraxia Foundation's employment [guide](#) for employers.

Job seekers

Planning for the world of work

Choosing a career is a difficult process for everybody. You need to be patient and flexible, and keep your options open.

You can get extra support from a specialist disability related Careers Advisor at your Local Careers Service, or a Work Coach at main Job Centres. They may be able to call on a Department of Work and Pensions Occupational Psychologist for specialist advice.

- Make a list of all available sources of information, such as the Internet, local and national newspapers, Job Centres and job agencies specialising in disabled people (see list at end)
- Make a list of your strengths and challenges as you see them and as others have told you
- Choose a field and/or type of job that fits with those strengths and challenges - and that you would enjoy. Consider your hobbies and the skills you have gained from them as potential leads into jobs
- Think about what adaptations you may need because of co-ordination, organisation or communication problems and if they are practical in the role.
- Make a Disclosure Document that identifies your strengths first, then mentions the difficulties dyspraxia/DCD causes you and how they are minimised by your tactics, technology, or help from the employer (an example disclosure document is available from the Dyspraxia Foundation)
- Be prepared to take small steps towards achieving your goal. You may need to complete a course of study or training first
- Be realistic – if you are too ambitious you may be unsuccessful. You may need a stepping-stone job first.
- You may get the opportunity to do a job on a voluntary basis. This can be very helpful for your CV and to find out more about yourself
- Only apply for posts that you really want. There is little point wasting time and money on applying for a job that is really not suited to you, unless you want interview practice.
- Don't be too put off if a very small part of the job might be difficult for you. Some changes to the role might be possible
- It may be possible to turn hobbies into jobs - for example, photography or writing
- Consider applying to organisations who have a positive record with people with disabilities. Business Disability Forum members are a good start.
- Consider using the guaranteed interview scheme operated by employers who have subscribed to the "Disability Confident Scheme" (this has replaced Two Ticks scheme).

Of course, some people who have dyspraxia/DCD are very good at the jobs that can cause problems to others with the condition, e.g. working with computers. We are all different!

Applying for a job

When you have planned, prepared and made your choice, the next step is to apply for a job.

- Prepare your typed CV. Get as much help as you can for example, by getting someone to assist in drafting your covering letter. Nowadays everyone expects a typed letter so handwriting can be avoided.
- If possible, download the application form into your computer and type your answers. Otherwise, photocopy the application form and write it out in rough first, to ensure you send in a neat and well-presented form.
- Consider seeking help for any of the above from your local Careers Service or Job Centre

Interviews

- Ask somebody to give you a mock interview
- Make a list of likely questions that you will be asked

- Think of an interesting question you can ask about the company/work at the interview
- Plan your route to the interview in advance – perhaps even have a trial run to make sure that you arrive on time
- Choose the clothes you are going to wear for the interview well in advance. Do not wear anything brand-new. You need to be comfortable and smart.
- You should not be asked any direct questions about your dyspraxia/DCD or any other health issues at interview; however, you may be asked questions relating to skills or activities like “Would you be able to stand up all day?”

Disclosing dyspraxia/DCD

Should you tell your potential employer about your dyspraxia/DCD? The law says you do not have to. You can choose when you tell them.

Each person’s circumstances are unique: only you will have an idea of how your dyspraxia/DCD is likely to affect your ability to do the job. If your dyspraxia/DCD is only mild, for example, it may not affect your ability to do that particular job. If you do disclose, however, do so in a positive way and point out your strengths. For example, prepare a Disclosure Document and take it in with you. *See: Disclosure Document (Example)*

The Disability Provisions of the Equalities Act

The Equalities Act provides additional rights to people with “protected characteristics”. Disability is one of those characteristics and the definition covers those people whose ability to carry out normal day to day activities is adversely affected by a physical or mental impairment on a long-term basis. Under the terms of the Act, an employer must make reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled employees’ needs.

If you feel that your dyspraxia/DCD falls into the definition as described in the Act (and for many people with dyspraxia/DCD it does) it is best to let your employer know before you start the job that you may need extra support. You can do this after you have been offered and accepted the job.

Be prepared to educate your employer about dyspraxia/DCD, to ask for the support to which you are entitled and be ready with information about the condition. The Dyspraxia Foundation has some useful information and resources you might want to share including an information sheet *Dyspraxia in the Workplace for Employers* and a larger publication *Working with Dyspraxia – a hidden asset*. Further information about these is included at the end of this document.

Strategies at work

Employers can do a lot to help staff with dyspraxia/DCD, but often their lack of knowledge means that they are not sure what to do. You can help by providing some personal guidance regarding simple things that help you to work more efficiently. If you think that specialist advice would be helpful you can also look for this from the Jobcentre Plus Access to Work team. This scheme provides a free assessment of the adjustments that would help you and will part-fund their implementation. Small businesses will get more funding than large ones, up to 100% of costs. Help is also available for the self-employed, usually at no cost.

The following strategies have helped a large number of people with dyspraxia/DCD. You will need to identify those which are most appropriate for the work you are doing.

Time management: Before you start work, plan what you have to do that day and prioritise your tasks. Use a list or if it works for you; visual aids such as mind maps; flow

charts; and spider diagrams. Ask your employer to help you with planning and prioritising and at the same time make clear (tactfully!) that you would prefer them not to 'hover over' you and that you find being put under additional pressure difficult.

Many people with dyspraxia/DCD respond well to routines – if this is appropriate for your job ask your employer to provide a structured timetable to help you focus on each task. Ask your employer if there is a time management course which you can attend and request plenty of advance warning of deadlines. Ask your employer for a clock nearby, or bring one in and put it on your desk to help with your allocation of time to task.

Make use of a diary or calendar on your computer to help with planning by adding tasks as you agree them and also putting in reminders of deadlines for tasks before they are due.

Organisation: Organise your workload into urgent and non-urgent piles. Break down tasks and projects into manageable chunks. Think of large projects as a series of small tasks with a beginning and an end. Reward yourself when you have finished a task. Make sure that you take regular breaks to maximise your productivity and concentration, but do that when you have finished a task or are stuck and need a break. Don't interrupt your flow.

Make your employer aware that colour-coding folders and files for particular tasks can be helpful. Other employees may benefit too.

Instructions: Write down instructions clearly and keep them for safe reference. Ask your employer to clarify instructions if necessary. Follow the instructions the first time you do a job, even if you think you remember how you were shown. In that way you can be sure they work for next time. At meetings, use a tape recorder to help you to remember what you have to do.

Working at a computer: Shortly after you take up a new job you should ask for a DSE (Display Screen Equipment) assessment (this is a Health and Safety procedure which should be carried out for all staff regardless of disability). This will help you to adopt the most comfortable position at your desk in relation to your computer and may help to identify adjustments which are specific to you. It may help to use a specialist ergonomic keyboard or mouse. Slowing down the mouse can help, as can using keyboard shortcuts if you find the mouse particularly difficult to manipulate. You may also want to change the background colour of your computer. Ask for a document slope if you are copy-typing to allow you to keep a good posture and follow the text of the original document down the page.

Depending on the main areas affected by your dyspraxia/DCD you may also benefit from a specialist chair or footrest. The Access to Work scheme can help with the cost of these.

Operating office machines: Keep clear instructions on how to operate photocopiers, fax machines, printers etc. Store the instructions in a fixed place next to these machines – these can serve as a memory jogger for other people too.

Written work: Use your word processor's grammar and spell-checks and consider asking someone to proof-read your work. If you are proofreading your own work, then put the draft to one side for a while before going back to read it with "fresh eyes". If appropriate, ask for speech recognition software to help with writing and proof-reading tools that read back to you.

Make use of templates for documents which are often used. If you use a computer keep these in a master templates folder. You may also find it helpful to make a template for telephone messages to make sure that you capture all the key information.

If you are required to read large quantities of written work it can help to enlarge the text and print the documents for reading. For some people, use of a coloured transparency overlay or printing documents on pale coloured paper can be easier on the eye than black print on white. You may be able to ask your employer for help by suggesting that other members of staff read long documents and then provide a resume.

Coping with distraction: You could look into the possibility of flexi-time - coming in early or leaving late. A partition around your desk or wearing headphones can also help to reduce distractions. Colleagues should be made aware that your concentration is easily disturbed. A “do not disturb” sign will help others to understand when you need to concentrate. It may not be possible to make use of this all day so you may need to agree with your employer that this would be helpful for certain periods of time.

Attitude: Try to be as calm and positive as possible. You might want to think about using basic mind and body relaxation exercises to help you to reduce your stress levels and thus improve your overall performance. Assertiveness training may help you to communicate more effectively at work. It is important to show your employer that you have many strengths; and that you want to do a good job and can achieve this, with the right support.

Further Reading

Dyspraxia: Dyspraxic Adults Surviving in a Non-Dyspraxic World edited by Janet Taylor and Mary Morris, an e-book published by the Dyspraxia Foundation and available [here](#).

Transition Employability & Job Retention for Young People with Developmental Co-ordination Disorder/Dyspraxia and Related Difficulties. Pub: The Discovery Centre 2001

Working with Dyspraxia - Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers by Key 4 Learning from the Dyspraxia Foundation, 2012

Dyslexia in the Workplace by Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody. Published by Whurr Publications, 2000

Further Information

Equality and Human Rights Commission, Freepost RRL- GHUX-CTR Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester, M4 3EQ Tel 0845 604 6610

Equality Advisory Support Service is a government funded helpline that has replaced the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Helpline. It provides information advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues. May be able to help in cases of unfair dismissal. Tel: 0800 444 205 www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Jobcentre Plus. Access to Work – A service for those already in work or self-employed. For further details, <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview> or ring 020 8426 3110. Ask to see the Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) at your local major job centre. They will also be able to advise you on training, supported employment, *Access to Work* and *Work Choice* and other schemes for disabled people etc. <https://www.gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled>

Disability Rights UK 12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London, EC1V 8AF,
Tel 0207250 3222 Publishes material on employment for disabled people

Shaw Trust Shaw Trust Enquiries, Fox Talbot House, Greenways Business Park, Belling Close, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN15 1BN Tel: 01255 716350 Training and employment for disabled people www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Evenbreak Job Agency www.evenbreak.co.uk Tel: 0845 658 5717

Further information available from:
Dyspraxia Foundation, 8 West Alley Hitchin Herts SG5 1EG
Helpline Tel: 01462 454986 (Monday to Friday 9-1pm)
Admin Tel: 01462 455016
Fax: 01462 455052
Web: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
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