



**The  
Discovery  
Centre**

# Top Tips

## A day in the life of a child with DCD/Dyspraxia

This booklet has been written for parents and schools highlighting areas in a child's day that may prove more challenging for children with DCD/Dyspraxia.



Each of the three areas in this booklet – **home**, **school**, and back to **home again** – offers quick and easy tips/strategies that can be easily implemented within the home and school.

The booklet has been designed in this way in order to consider the whole day and to show that difficulties at home can impact at school and vice versa.

Difficulties with motor co-ordination affect the child in all aspects of the day, from the minute the child gets up in the morning to clean his or her teeth, till the end of the day back in bed at bed time.



# Home

## Getting up in the morning

Some children may take more time and be slower getting out of bed and dressed.

### Ideas to help



- Have an alarm clock/radio in the child's room set 10 minutes before they need to get up.
- Check the calendar to see what's on next day in case the routine needs to be changed.
- Don't give the child too many instructions at once as they may become confused.

## Dressing

Dressing skills may take longer to learn due to sequencing difficulties.

Fastenings on clothes and shoes may be harder to do with fine motor co-ordination difficulties.

These may also impact on teeth cleaning and bottom-wiping.

Try practising these skills in the holidays and not on a school day when time is more precious!

### Ideas to help



- Put out clothes the night before in the order they will be put on.
- Where possible try using clothes with easy to use fastenings such as Velcro and elastic laces to make dressing faster.
- Socks with coloured heels make it easier to see which way round to put them on.
- A label at the back of a jumper or shirt reminds the child which way round they need to put it on.
- Try using wet wipes instead of toilet paper for bottom-wiping. If the child finds this easier give them a small pocket-size pack for school.
- For girls – consider putting a spare pair of pants with a sanitary pad at the bottom of the school bag for emergencies if periods suddenly start.
- Try an electric toothbrush with a timer for teeth cleaning.
- Use a timer so that the child knows how long they have to get dressed. This will help keep the child on task and give them an idea of time.

## Meal times

Using cutlery may be difficult. The child may be a messy eater and spills may happen.

### Ideas to help



- Try easier to use cutlery such as 'caring cutlery' which has a moulded section to show finger positioning.
- Don't overfill the bowl or plate, as this will help prevent food being spilt over the edge on to the table.
- Try placing a damp facecloth or tea towel under the bowl to stop it slipping.
- Give the child breakfast before they get ready in their school clothes as this will avoid spilling food on their clothes.
- Set a timer so that your child knows how long they have to eat their breakfast.

## Going to school

Children often find they are not sure of how much time it takes them to reach school. They may also not be so good at recognising other time concepts such as how long a task takes to be completed.

### Ideas to help



- Use a timer or watch if walking or driving to school so that the child can get to know distances and time concepts. For example: it takes 10 minutes to grandma's, 20 minutes to the supermarket.
- Talk about familiar activities and outings that take the same time to encourage concepts of time.
- If the morning has been stressful for you and the child, use this time to talk about their interests and hobbies in a calm tone to help them relax before going in to class.



# School

## Around school

Children often have difficulties finding their way around a school or new building and remembering the names of teachers.

### Ideas to help



- A board with faces and names of teachers helps all children.
- Colour coding rooms for different subjects and linking this to the curriculum and timetables can make a big difference.
- Maps around the school showing where 'you are' also can help all children and visitors to the school.

## In class

Poor handwriting is a common problem as is copying from the board.

Some children may be fidgety and need to move around a little.

Some children will find sitting on the floor for assembly or circle time uncomfortable.

Some children with DCD/Dyspraxia have difficulties with mathematical concepts such as geometry.

## Ideas to help



- Teach touch-typing as well as practising handwriting skills.
- Reduce the amount of written work by having photocopied notes.
- A resource kit of different types of pencils and pens, different pencil grips, 'ridged rulers' and angle boards that children can try out is useful to have in the school.
- Visual timetables can be useful for lots of children so that they can see what is happening next.
- Some 'fidget' toys are also useful to have in the classroom (even a bit of Blu Tak to fiddle with can help, or a white board to doodle on).
- Make mathematics 'real' so the child can see what he or she needs to do - cut out the shapes, use kit like 'Numicon' to help understand number concepts.

## At break time

Some children may find this a lonely time as they may have fewer friends and find it harder to play ball.

They may also be less socially confident.

Some children with DCD/Dyspraxia may also find they need a bit of 'time out' at this time to rest before the next class.

## Ideas to help




- Think about a buddy system or organising a circle of friends where others will invite them to join in if they are alone in the playground.
- Have games available that a few children can join in with so they are not left alone.
- Structured games may give opportunity for children to join in – chess or draughts for example.

## In PE

The child may be slower changing for PE and find playing team games where listening, following and predicting what others are doing, as well as planning their own movements, may be just too hard.

## Ideas to help



- Break down the tasks into smaller stages.
- Think of smaller groups and alternative forms of exercise as well as team games.
- Allow extra time for changing.





## Lunchtime

Queuing for food, balancing a tray, choosing food and using cutlery may all be difficult.

Going to the toilet can also be scary, coping with clothing and washing and drying hands. Different schools may have different systems in place for all of this.

### Ideas to help



- If possible give the child a copy of the week's menu; that way they can plan ahead so that they know what they want when they reach the counter.
- Limit the need for carrying trays too far.
- Make sure the rules for sitting down at tables and clearing trays etc. are very clear.
- Visit a new school and check out the lunch arrangements and the toilets so the child is familiar with these.

## Home time

Writing down homework at the end of a lesson may be difficult, especially in a rush.

### Ideas to help



- Homework could be written at the start of the lesson to give extra time, or stickers could be printed to put in homework diaries, or a school intranet could be used to 'post' it up.



# Home Again

## After school

Many children are tired at the end of the day.

### Ideas to help



- Give the child some cool down time - walking the dog, going for a swim, having a chat through the day.
- The child may need a snack before they are ready to start homework or activity clubs.
- Talk through the day and let the child tell you the high and low points. See if there are any patterns on certain days where the child has greater difficulty such as in PE or in certain subjects. Make these days easier after school as they may be more tired.

## Homework

Getting down to homework can be hard to do, especially when there is any writing involved.

### Ideas to help



- Make this a regular place and time. Have homework 'kit' at the ready with a spare pencil case with rulers, pens etc. and have a drink already poured to minimise stops and starts.
- Start by making a 'to-do' list so the child can see what he or she needs to do. Use a timer so the child knows when work will end. Get the child to tick off as they complete each task.
- If there is lots of writing, then do some of this for the child while they dictate their answers to you. Discuss this with the child's class teacher so that they are aware.



## Tea or supper time

Eating together is a valuable time to practise good eating and social habits, as children with DCD/Dyspraxia often find making friends harder to do, and this will provide a safe environment for them to practise their social skills as well as practising using cutlery.

### Ideas to help



- Encourage the child to help prepare the meal with you. This may be cutting up vegetables, laying the table, making some fruit kebabs.
- When there is more time at weekends doing some baking for example will help with fine motor control needed for manipulating and using cutlery.
- Use mealtimes as an opportunity to talk about the day's events and to encourage good eating habits.
- You can talk about how to act in different situations in a more relaxed way at this time.

## Preparing for next day

There always seems to be more time at the end of the day than in the rush to school in the morning.

### Ideas to help



- Have a timetable on the wall and then check with the child what he or she needs to do the next day.
- Pack the bag together and then place it by the door ready to go the next morning.

## Bedtime

A good bedtime routine means the child is ready for the next day.

### Ideas to help



- A shower or bath will allow the child to relax.
- Avoid active computer games 1-2 hours before bedtime if you can.
- Encourage the child to have time to talk through worries and to wind down before bedtime.

## Weekends

Weekends are a time to try out new hobbies that the child can succeed in.

### Ideas to help



- Swimming, martial arts, fencing, riding, trampolining, archery, running, cookery and photography can all be examples where children with co-ordination difficulties can excel given adequate time and practice.



For 100s more great ideas to help children and adolescents day-to-day and with ideas on books to read and organisations that can provide support go to: **[www.parent-plus.org](http://www.parent-plus.org)**

or call The Dyscovery Centre for advice from the internationally renowned expert team.

**Tel: 00 44 1633 432330**

<http://dyscovery.newport.ac.uk>

and for a range of practical and easy to use skills packs and resources:

- Organisational skills at home
- Organisational skills at school
- Independent living skills
- Handwriting skills

