

Impact of dyspraxia on children's moods

Imagine your school aged child struggled to climb stairs, brush their teeth or use cutlery. Wouldn't you want schools to be aware of their problems and make allowances or, even better, find solutions so they were not singled out in the classroom?

'Dyspraxia has a significant impact on all aspects of daily life from the moment a child wakes up,' explains researcher Professor Elisabeth Hill from Goldsmiths, University of London.

When I wrote the book [How to Help Your Dyslexic and Dyspraxic Child](#) I interviewed parents and children and came to realise that dyspraxia could have an impact on the whole family. Matt was described by his mum as 'an unhappy little boy. He did not make eye contact and his language problems got in the way of making friends. He was also chronically inflexible and had the most explosive tantrums if things didn't work out as expected. This can be very humiliating when it happens in public.'

Dyspraxia also known as developmental coordination disorder (DCD) affects 5–6 per cent of children in the UK. In addition to motor skill problems, latest research shows that young children aged 7-10 with dyspraxia have poorer social skills than their peers, and 60 per cent of children find it hard to make friends and are less willing to play with their classmates.

'Coordination and movement is absolutely fundamental to a child's early development,' Professor Hill explains. 'We found that children that stood and walked independently sooner were rated as having better communication and daily living skills

at ages 7-10. In fact, as soon as a child can raise their head independently and look around, or stand and attract adult attention, then they have far more opportunities to interact with the world and gain social skills. Children with DCD are generally slower to achieve these important early motor milestones or miss them completely – indeed 23 per cent of our sample never crawled at all. This delay may underpin many of their later social difficulties.'

Initial findings from a survey completed by primary school teachers across England also demonstrate that two-thirds of children with dyspraxia are more anxious, tearful, downhearted, nervous of new situations and less confident than their classmates but researchers believe that some teachers are not aware that poor motor skills may go hand in hand with poor social skills.

Teachers need to be vigilant especially in early years' settings because the sooner the child receives help from an occupational therapist the sooner they can develop functional, transferable skills which will improve their self-esteem and help with their social interactions.

Professor Hill believes parents need to help children set targets: 'Parental support could be targeted at identifying what is important to the child to achieve, breaking down the task into manageable chunks, and supporting skill development through short but regular practice sessions.'

Refs


The role of motor abilities in the development of typical and atypical social behaviour: a focus on children with developmental coordination disorder (DCD) and children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Research funded by The Leverhulme Trust. Principal Investigator: Prof Elisabeth Hill, Postdoc: Dr Emma Sumner.

[My dyslexia book is proving popular](#)

I have just received this lovely comment from handwriting expert Amanda McLeod, “Just to let you know it’s on my table and quite a few parents have looked through and then gone out to buy it. They like its practical nature.”


The book in question is [How to Help Your Child with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia](#) which is available from Crimson Publishing and has a foreword by Tom Pellereau who won The Apprentice last year.

The [McLeod Centre for Learning](#) is in Pimlico (London SW1).  It is a centre for children who are under-achieving in English and Maths. Children attend mornings and are taught by specialist dyslexia teachers in small groups, or on an individual basis. Children attend up to four days per week and usually stay for two to three terms. They go back to their main schools for the afternoons.

[Up to one in ten affected by dyspraxia](#)

Dyspraxia affects, “up to ten per cent of the population and up to two per cent severely. Males are four times more likely to be affected than females.” (Dyspraxia Foundation).

Dyspraxia Awareness Week runs from 6-13 November. Why do we need these awareness weeks? Many conditions get a lot of recognition and media coverage –think autism, dyslexia, and behavioural issues. Lesser known conditions get overlooked and so parents, teachers and therapists are less clued up and children's needs can be overlooked.

My new book ***How to Help your Dyslexic and Dyspraxic Child***  features two boys with dyspraxia, Matt and Jake. You will also meet Rupert who has both dyspraxia and dyslexia. This means that not only does he have problems with words and symbols (dyslexia) but also with the messages from brain to body (dyspraxia) so he may also find tasks involving fine motor skills or organising himself a challenge.

Children with dyspraxia may demonstrate some of these types of behaviour:

- Can't keep still
- Very excitable and may have a loud/shrill voice
- Prone to temper tantrums
- May constantly bump into objects and fall over
- Hands flap when running
- Finds it hard to pedal a tricycle or similar toy
- A very messy eater. May hate the texture of certain foods
- Over reacts to noise and lights
- Has problems holding a pencil or using scissors.
- Can be slow to respond to what people say and have problems with comprehension

So what did our parents notice?

- He was very slow to do things such as doing up buttons, tying laces, catching a ball, riding a bike.
- He held his pencil in an odd way and was always writing with his hand twisted over so he was writing back on himself
- His reading was good too; it was his writing which let him down
- He was so accident prone, we used to joke that he would fall over his own shadow.

For more information, buy the [BOOK](#) which is out at the end of the year

[Dyslexia and Dyspraxia](#)

I am writing a book for Crimson Publishing called How to Help your Dyslexic and Dyspraxic Child. It is aimed at the parent market and gives ideas for activities to do at home, how to get an assessment, confidence building. I have just typed a plan and pasted the text into Wordle which makes a word cloud from any piece of text. The more often a word appears in the text, the more prominent it is in the Word Cloud.

☒ Looks like the key words are games, co-ordination, spelling activities and memory. Yup that seems about right.. Better stop playing and get writing!