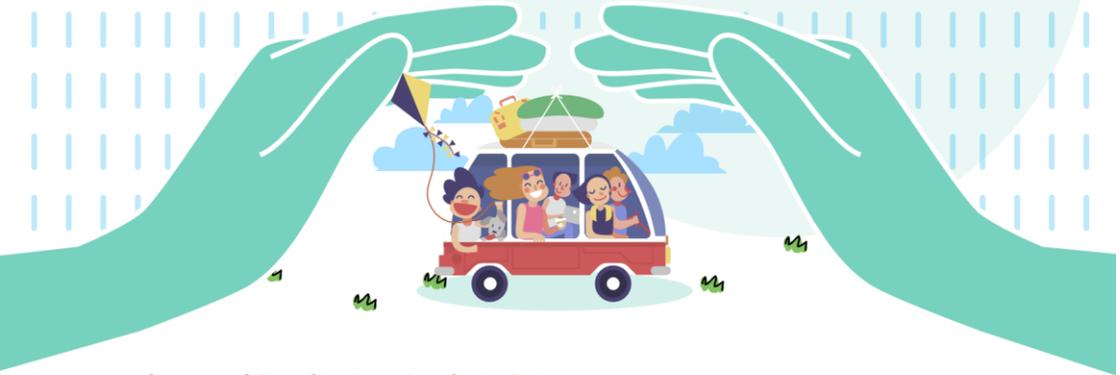




# From Awkward To Onward

# At A Glance



## Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

is an impairment in the development of motor coordination that affects fine and/or gross

## A Guide To Understanding Developmental Coordination Disorder

motor coordination in children, youths, and adults.



DCD has been found to affect 4 – 6 percent of school-aged children

(Source:<https://www.healthxchange.sg/children/childhoodconditions/child-problems-coordinationbalance>).



Aside from issues with fine and/or gross motor coordination, those diagnosed with DCD may also have poor planning, and organising skills, and find it difficult to follow routines in a proper sequence daily.



DCD may affect speech, perception, and including dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and social and behavioural impairment

DCD may coexist with various conditions, thought



The exact causes of DCD are not known, but some think it may be caused by issues with the system that transmits messages from the brain to the body

DCD is generally seen as a large umbrella diagnosis, which comprises conditions pertaining to motor or bilateral coordination issues, and motor planning issues, like Dyspraxia

**Early recognition of DCD is crucial in identifying a child's educational and social needs, so that appropriate intervention can be prescribed**

# Common Issues

## Gross Motor

- Coordination issues
- Issues with hopping, climbing stairs, sports
- Poor balance



## Organisation

- Issues with sequences and rules
- Needs visual reminders
- Issues with planning

## Fine Motor

- Issues with doing buttons, tying shoelaces
- Manipulation and formation difficulties
- Handwriting issues, poor pencil grip



## Classroom Difficulties

- Difficulties getting ideas on paper
- Problems in taking notes
- Poor listening skills



## Concentration

- Poor memory skills
- Fidgety / easily distracted
- Tasks need to be broken down; limited focus



## Communication

- Immature speech
- Words are muddled up





# ONE

might have DCD if he/she exhibits some/all of the following:

- Speech clarity issues, unclear speech, or being unintelligible
- Reading and writing difficulties, including messy handwriting
- Walking in an awkward manner.
- Avoidance of group activities and physical education sessions
- Difficulties in catching/throwing a ball
- Poor short-term memory
- Poor social skills
- Issues with dressing/feeding oneself
- Inability to grip a pencil/pen well
- Appearance of being clumsy, or a poor sense of body awareness.
- Issues with running, skipping, riding a bike, et cetera
- Inability to tie shoelaces.

# WHO Can Help?



An Occupational Therapist (OT) assesses, and determines one's motor and coordination skills, and capability in carrying out activities of daily living, such as independence in showering, eating, traveling, et cetera. An OT, may work alongside other professionals, such as a physiotherapist (PT), to support children through home intervention, school visits, and education and training, at home, in school, and the larger community. Recommendations include:

- Modifications of a child's environment
- Ideas on how to increase a child's participation in physical/sports activities
- Identifying community/recreational activities that match a child's capabilities



A speech disorder that may co-occur with DCD is Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS), which is a motor speech disorder. Those with CAS have problems saying sounds, syllables, and words, due to issues in planning the movement of the lips, jaw, tongue, et cetera, needed for speech.



A Speech Language Therapist (SLT) may be beneficial in helping to improve the planning, sequencing, and coordination of muscle movements for speech production, alongside providing useful feedback, and visual cues when a child practises speech.



In the event a child displays secondary emotional or behavioural issues, a psychologist may also be brought in to work with therapists to support the child holistically.



Although the motor coordination issues experienced may never disappear, appropriate intervention can help one perform tasks better, and boost integration in school, at home, and the larger community.



# How Can You Support a Youth with DCD? Caregivers



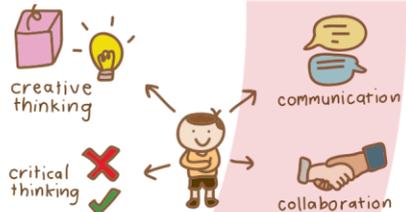
Provide verbal, systematic reminders, when a task involves multiple steps. For example, should your child/ward have issues packing his/her pencil case, ask questions like, "What do we need to do first? Unzip the pencil case, or place the pencil in?"



Encourage movement, by participating in physical activities together, such as swimming, and cycling.

Assist your child/ward in getting familiar with a new environment or playground, before allowing him/her to socialise and play independently.

When working with external parties, take the time to explain to others about DCD, and how to support your child/ward's needs and challenges.



Assist your child/ward in practising independent skills, such as buttoning clothes or fastening zippers.

Keep your child/ward motivated and avoid mishaps during games, by ensuring they are equipped with protective gear, such as knee pads, and helmets.



Celebrate your child/ward's achievements when they succeed in non-motor tasks, such as being able to read fluently.



## How Can You Support A Youth with DCD? - *Education Personnel*

Here are some pointers you can adopt to support a student's integration and participation:

### **In class:**

- Assign a seat close to the teacher
- Provide opportunities for the student, and his/her classmates to move around with mini-breaks
  - Label shelves accordingly
- Use visual cues, and provide simple, concise feedback
- Provide extra time during tests, and extended deadlines for projects
  - Allow a student with DCD to sit when he/she needs to change in and out of clothes/uniform
- Allow the student to use paper that has clear sections, such as highlighted margins or lines
- Allow the student to use pencil grip, and loop scissors
  - Break down instructions into small steps
- Allow the use of a computer for homework/assignments
- Assign a buddy to help a student with DCD write/copy notes

## During sports and games:

- Encourage, and reward a student for his/her efforts to participate in an activity.
- If feasible, provide one-to-one coaching/training when it comes to picking up a new skill, such as throwing or catching.
- Provide specific, clear, audible instructions, in a systematic, step-by-step manner
- Allow a student extra time to practise sports/games that encourage, and require coordinated movements, like bouncing a ball, or hockey.
- Focus on understanding the purpose and the rules of various sports or physical activities. When a child understands clearly what he/she needs to do, it is easier to plan the movement.





# Youths with DCD !

The specific causes of DCD are not known, but what matters is that you do not let your condition define you. While it may be useful to receive support from others, being independent would be most beneficial to you in the long-run. For starters, have realistic expectations, and set suitable goals.

## **Be creative**

- Break complicated tasks down into parts, and think of ways to simplify or modify certain aspects. Having issues with tying shoelaces? Remove the need to depend on them, and invest in shoes with Velcro straps instead. If an assignment seems overwhelming, create a skeleton of the various steps you need to take in order to complete it. The use of a calendar can also aid you in planning your work, and completing it in a timely manner. Even using a mirror to complete tasks while showering, or dressing up, could be useful.

## **Be flexible**

- If you have challenges trying to focus on a task at hand due to the structure of external distractions (i.e. a noisy television in the living room) or facilities, make your environment more friendly by either moving to a quieter place, or asking for support from others. Being independent does not mean you only need rely on yourself to solve everything.

## **Be helpful**

- Learn about DCD, so that you can educate, and explain it to others. Explain the symptoms of the condition so that others do not judge you for things that are not within your control. Be upfront about the challenges you face, and provide others with clear strategies on how they can assist you. If you experience bullying or are unfairly treated because of your condition, inform a caregiver, teacher/professor.

## **Be social**

- If you are apprehensive about participating in activities, explain to your friends of some of the challenges you anticipate you might face. Offer to take care of the logistics, such as games planning, dining options. That way, you'll be able to participate, but also ensure the nature of the activities cater to everyone's needs.



## Be Creative !

Parents and teachers often ask me what the best intervention methods are to support youths with DCD. Given that DCD presents itself in various ways, with varying levels of severity, there is no one tried and true method. My advice is this – be creative when helping your child along – if your child thinks it's plain intervention, he/she might not be motivated. For example, incorporate fun games with the use of handy equipment, like throwing/ catching bean bags on a balance board. Better still, participate in the activity with a balance board of your own, so your child sees intervention as a team activity. You'll be amazed at how infectious creativity is, especially when children work out their own ways to compensate, and carry out tasks accordingly to their preferred styles.

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**Evonne Mah**

Occupational Therapist

AWWA Community Integration Service



## About AWWA

Established in 1970, AWWA is a social service organisation, serving over 6,000 of the disadvantaged across life stages. Services include early intervention for pre-schoolers, education and disability support for children with special needs, assistance to low income families, caregivers, and health and social assistance for vulnerable seniors. AWWA is Singapore-based, with an Institution of a Public Character (IPC) status.

## About Community Integration Service

Started in 1991, Community Integration Service (CIS), formerly known as TEACH ME, aims to support the integration of children and youths into their schools and the community.

CIS serves youths from mainstream schools to Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) with the following conditions:

- Physical Disabilities
- Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)\*
- Speech and other related disorders\*
- Low vision



Pictured: A member of our team supporting a child with balance and coordination, during a social activity

Members of our team provide intervention services via:

- Case consultations with school personnel to identify and address the students' integration needs within the school
- Assessment, recommendations and trainings for school personnel and students on the use of education assistive technology
- School transition support for youths moving into a different educational environment
- Therapy services (Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy)
- Psychological Intervention
- Functional Numeracy and Literacy Training
- Independent Living Skills Training (ILS)
- Career Guidance
- Sport and Enrichment
- Parent/Caregiver Training and Support

#### Admission Criteria

- Singaporean Citizen or Permanent Resident
- Currently enrolled in a mainstream school/Institute of Higher Learning
- Medical diagnosis of the conditions mentioned above

## Know someone who may benefit from the programme?

Fill in the referral forms online, or get in touch!

Website: [www.awwa.org.sg](http://www.awwa.org.sg)

Email: [communityintegration@awwa.org.sg](mailto:communityintegration@awwa.org.sg)

Contact: 6511 5210

Address: AWWA Ltd, 9 Lorong Napiri, Singapore 547531



Website: [www.awwa.org.sg](http://www.awwa.org.sg)

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