

A close-up portrait of a young woman with freckles and a bright smile. She has brown hair and green eyes. The background is a soft, warm light.

# Meet Jennifer

She is determined and hardworking

She can think creatively

She works wonders on the computer

She loves to read

But Jennifer often avoids physical activity  
and dislikes new or unpredictable situations

## **DCD and coronavirus**

**We have adapted our guide to learning difficulties to take account of coronavirus. Find out new ways to support Jennifer in the current crisis.**

# Understanding DCD

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a neurodevelopmental condition - which means that it is part of the make-up of the brain. It is often used interchangeably with the term 'dyspraxia', though DCD is the diagnosis most likely to be given by health professionals. DCD is more commonly diagnosed in males and sometimes runs in families.

DCD is characterised by impairments in coordination, motor control and planning which can affect any or all movements. These difficulties interfere with daily living activities and academic achievement. The condition varies in severity and may also affect language, perception and thought.

Core problems involve difficulties in planning and carrying out complex, sequenced actions. As a result, those with DCD may be seen as clumsy and delayed in their actions.

Someone with DCD may struggle with everyday tasks such as: using pens or cutlery, getting dressed, walking up and down stairs, tying shoelaces and spatial awareness. They commonly have difficulties with organising their time and activities.

DCD often coexists with other neurodevelopmental conditions such as dyslexia and autism.

# DCD: strengths and challenges

Jennifer usually needs help with structure and organisation. She will benefit from positive encouragement, as difficulties with everyday activities can become very frustrating.

Jennifer will be at her best when given time and reassurance to complete activities. Talk with her to find out what activities she struggles with most and work on coping strategies together. Structured environments will help her to develop motor skills and confidence.

Being positive and focusing on what Jennifer can do, not what she can't, will help her motivation and self-esteem.

## **In the coronavirus crisis, children and young people with DCD may:**

- Feel especially anxious
- Be aware of the news, but be unable to process everything they hear, leading to a lot of confusion
- Struggle to understand a concept like 'social distancing'
- Find handwashing is difficult due to sensory issues or difficulties co-ordinating hand movement
- Find it very hard to adapt to learning at home
  - managing to start and complete tasks could be a challenge

## **Here are a few ways we can all support Jennifer during the coronavirus crisis and lockdown:**

### **General**

- Be encouraging and supportive
  - Make sure you have support to deal with your own worries, so that you can be supportive and calm with Jennifer
  - Encourage socialisation e.g. via technology, with siblings if possible
- Give clear and specific instructions

## At home

- Help her to use a diary for notes and reminders
  - Involve Jennifer in creating colourful signs to remind the family about handwashing. Put these up in plain sight
  - Add handwashing stickers and symbols into her diary
- Plan each day with simple lists and schedules
  - Schedules don't need to mirror the school day, find the routine that works best for Jennifer, and for you
  - Help her to plan out activities or tasks, and help her to get started, stay on task and finish the task
- Encourage her to practise motor and coordination skills
  - In lockdown, there may be fewer opportunities, but helping around the house with tasks like cooking, washing up or folding laundry can help with these skills
  - Encourage use of fine motor skills by playing with games/toys such as beads, Lego, Jenga
  - Encourage use of gross motor skills by playing in the garden, if possible, playing with balls, exercise activities in the home and on the permitted daily outing
- Give support with activities Jennifer finds challenging

**When you help Jennifer to keep learning at home, think about these general tips for schools and see if you can also do these things:**

### **At school**

- Break large assignments down into smaller blocks
- Allow time for breaks
- Check results regularly and give feedback
- Offer a computer as an alternative to handwriting
- Give extra support in PE and practical subjects

### **At the hospital**

- The hospital might have some different processes than usual, find these out in advance if you can
- Explain any medical procedures clearly
- Be aware that she may be over (hyper) or under (hypo) sensitive to touch, pain, smells and sounds
- Consider the best time of day for an appointment
- Make waiting times as short as possible



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