A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a man's face. He has light skin with numerous freckles, particularly on his nose and cheeks. His eyes are a striking blue, and he has a slight, open-mouthed smile showing his teeth. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of his skin and the intensity of his gaze.

It takes all kinds  
of minds

Meeting and accommodating  
learning difficulties

# It takes all kinds of minds

## What are learning difficulties?

Well, they are quite simply a variation on normality.

Not being able to concentrate for long periods of time, getting bored rather easily, acting impulsively, tripping over things, trying to make sense of what you read or write, living in a world of your own, losing track of time, forgetting what you have just learnt, being single minded or extraordinarily talented – perhaps traits we all have?

### **Learning difficulty or learning disability?**

There is no single interpretation or consensual definition of the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability'.

Different organisations and local authorities appear to have adopted their own definitions of the term.

This is the Mindroom version...

**Difficulty** = Obstacle

**Disability** = Something that incapacitates

### **Learning difficulty**

Any learning or emotional problem that affects, or substantially affects, a person's ability to learn, get along with others and follow convention.

### **Learning disability**

A significant, lifelong condition that starts before adulthood, affects development and leads to help being required to:

- Understand information
- Learn skills
- Cope independently

*The NHS definition of a learning disability implies an IQ below 70.*

# Some of the more common conditions often associated with learning difficulties are:

## **ADHD**

Stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. People with ADHD are inattentive, easily distracted, impulsive and hyperactive. These characteristics are usually combined in varying degrees of severity.

## **ADD**

Attention Deficit Disorder without hyperactive and impulsive symptoms.

## **Autism spectrum disorders**

Difficulties in relating to and communicating with others, seen as living in a world of their own. Often inflexible and repetitive in behaviours and interests.

## **Asperger syndrome**

Asperger syndrome is at the higher functioning end of the autism spectrum, with intact language and normal IQs. Most have difficulties with social skills and in communicating with others. People with AS often have an obsessive interest in a favourite subject.

## **DCD**

Stands for Developmental Coordination Disorder. Involves impairments in coordination, motor control and planning, which can affect any or all movements.

## **Dyslexia**

Specific difficulties with reading, writing and spelling.

## **Tourette syndrome**

Involuntary movements or sounds which may come and go and vary in severity.

**It is very common for these difficulties to coexist in various combinations.**

# Meet Chloe

She is extremely creative

She is full of energy

She thinks outside the box

She has a great memory

But she can't always sit still and concentrate

**Understanding ADHD**

# Facts

## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition – which means that it is part of the make-up of the brain. It is one of the most common of all learning difficulties. Research indicates that the prevalence of ADHD is roughly equal in males and females, though males are more likely to be diagnosed at an earlier age.

A person with ADHD will almost certainly have difficulties with impulsiveness, inattention and hyperactivity.

They may be unable to sit still, plan ahead or finish tasks. Due to their short attention span they may also be unaware of what is going on around them. On a good day they may seem fine, leading others to think they can control their ADHD. This can lead to frustration and misunderstanding on both sides.

ADD – it is now recognised that some people have attention disorder without hyperactive and impulsive symptoms. These individuals often struggle to pay attention, plan, organise and complete work and may seem lethargic.

ADHD is a component of a condition referred to as DAMP (Deficit in Attention, Motor control and Perception), which is diagnosed by the coexistence of Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) and ADHD.

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Only by understanding  
both strengths and  
weaknesses can we  
bring the very best out  
of others and ourselves.

# What can you do to help people like Chloe?

## How to help

A person with ADHD often needs help with organisation and structure. It can be useful to provide reminders, particularly for taking medication.

### **General**

- Talk to Chloe about the best strategies for her
- Let Chloe have breaks in the day

### **At home**

- Use a diary for notes and reminders
- Have a space for peace and quiet
- Keep routines consistent but vary activities
- Be consistent and clear with rules and boundaries

### **At school**

- Break large assignments into smaller blocks of work
- Check results regularly and give feedback and encouragement
- Review study plans daily, make schedules and lists
- Vary tasks and keep them fairly short

### **At work**

- Structure the day clearly
- Discuss and agree priorities
- Set achievable deadlines for each piece of work
- Where possible assign fresh duties to help Chloe stay on task

### **At the hospital**

- Explain any medical procedures clearly
- Provide activities to occupy Chloe
- Consider the best time of day for an appointment
- Ensure waiting times are as short as possible

# So what can Chloe do for you?

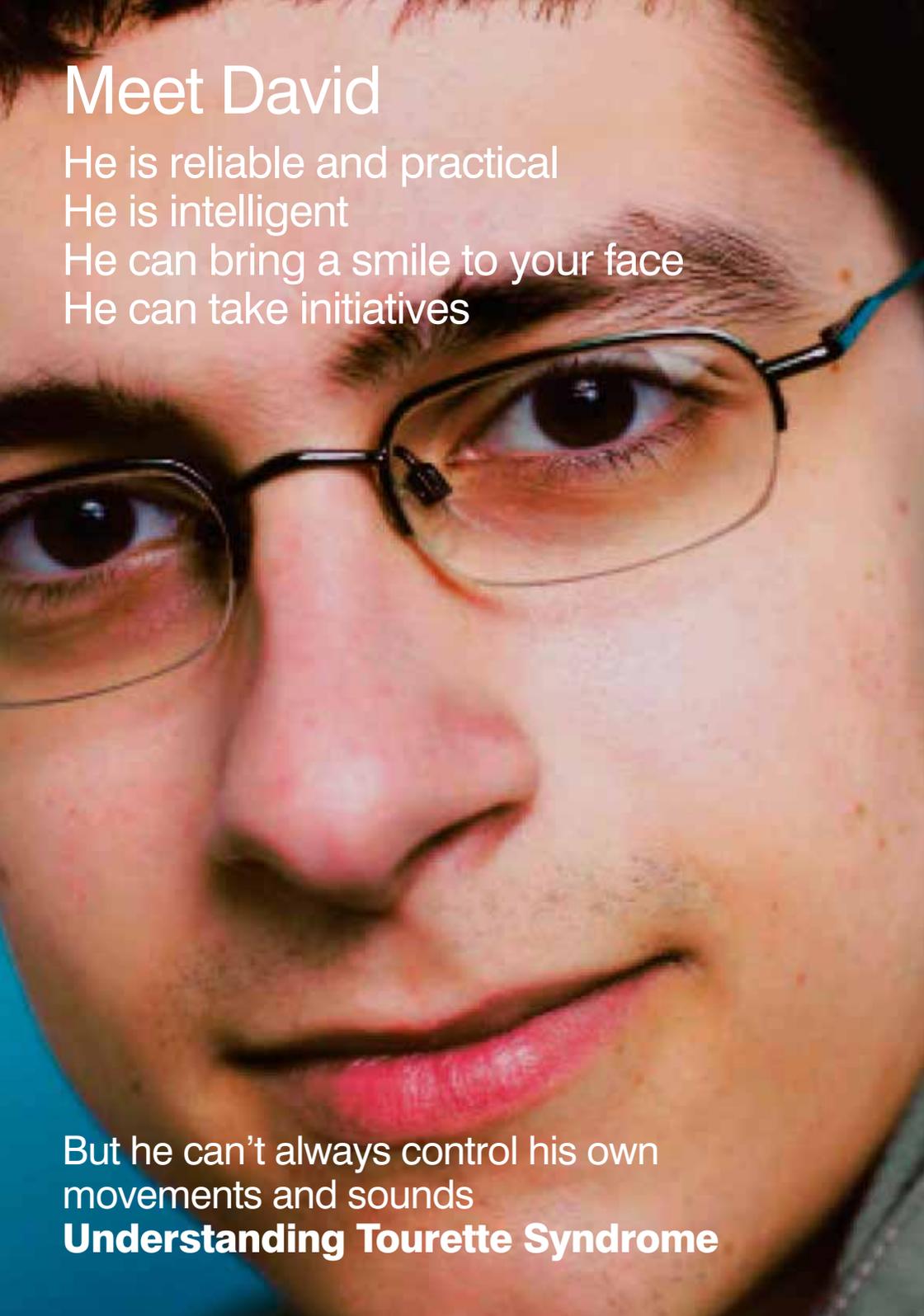
## Creating a mutual benefit

Try to put her in a position that demands short term bursts of concentration and give her good organisational support. A minimalistic environment would help to reduce stress and hyperactivity.

Capitalise on her enthusiasm, her energy and her curiosity. Chloe is best at projects and tasks that can be completed quite quickly. She is probably personable and good at looking after people. She thrives on new challenges with a short term deadline.

The so called 'norm' would not 'norm'-ally include Chloe, yet she has plenty to offer and a contribution to make. By working together to understand the strengths and weaknesses of people like her, we create the opportunity to bring the best out of them – and out of everyone they encounter.

We are all unique in our personal make-up and in the way we function. So these general guidelines are just that. Please interpret them and adapt them to suit each individual and each situation.

A close-up portrait of a man with dark hair, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a light-colored shirt. He has a slight smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a solid teal color.

# Meet David

He is reliable and practical

He is intelligent

He can bring a smile to your face

He can take initiatives

But he can't always control his own  
movements and sounds

**Understanding Tourette Syndrome**

## Facts

### Tourette syndrome

Tourette syndrome is a neurodevelopmental condition – which means that it is part of the make-up of the brain. It affects around 1 in 100 people, is more common in males and may run in families.

People with TS sometimes lose control over the movements and sounds they make. Without warning, they may twitch, nod, jerk or make grunting, coughing or other noises.

These actions are completely involuntary and are known as 'tics'. Tics can come and go and vary in severity. Most people will have a combination of physical and vocal compulsions, and may also experience difficulty managing their emotions. A well-known feature of TS is an uncontrollable use of obscenities ('copulalia'), but in reality this is not very common.

More and more people are being diagnosed with TS as understanding improves. Symptoms often begin around the age of 7 and are generally most prominent during the early teenage years.

TS is often associated with other conditions such as ADHD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and coordination difficulties.

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# What can you do to help people like David?

## How to help

Above all, people with Tourette syndrome need to be seen as the human beings they are, despite their tics. While the tics are involuntary, certain strategies may help to reduce and manage them. It is important that in every environment, David has a space for peace and quiet.

### **General**

- Avoid responding to the tics
- Keep David busy and focused

### **At home**

- Have reliable routines
- Provide structure to the day
- Find a hobby to focus on

### **At school**

- Break assignments down into smaller manageable sections
- Talk together to agree the best classroom strategies
- Make sure David can have regular breaks
- Give plenty of time to complete tasks and allow extra time for tests

### **At work**

- Try to ensure David is able to work in a familiar place with the same people
- Build in opportunities for regular breaks
- Ensure workload is manageable and clearly broken down
- Minimise disruption and available distractions

### **At the hospital**

- Ensure David sees the same staff regularly
- Provide activities to occupy David
- Consider the best time of day for an appointment
- Ensure waiting times are as short as possible

# So what can David do for you?

## Creating a mutual benefit

Work and talk together with David to establish a way to manage his tics. David works best with consistency in the surroundings and people he comes across, as sudden changes and new situations may be hard to handle.

Put him in a position that capitalises on his reliability and energy; use his intelligence and constructive ideas; give him an environment where he can be focused and stay readily on task; draw on his sense of responsibility and willingness to work hard. Most importantly, see past the tics to help David reach his potential.

The so called 'norm' would not 'norm'-ally include David, yet he has plenty to offer and a contribution to make. By working together to understand the strengths and weaknesses of people like him, we create the opportunity to bring the best out of them – and out of everyone they encounter.

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# Meet Amber

She is full of curiosity and energy

She can remember everything

She is usually right

She can light up a room with her smile

But she can't always act appropriately  
in social situations

**Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder**

# Facts

## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorders are neurodevelopmental conditions – which means that they are part of the make-up of the brain. They are more commonly found in males and thought to affect around 1 in 100 people.

The autism spectrum covers a range of levels of functioning and the variation among individuals with ASD is huge, though there are key similarities. The core problem for all is in making sense of the world. The three main areas of difficulty are known as the 'triad of impairments': social interaction, communication, and inflexibility and repetitiveness in behaviours and interests. The degree to which different parts of this 'triad' impact day to day life can range enormously from person to person. In some cases behaviour may be extreme and an individual may seem closed off from everything around them.

Those on the autism spectrum find changes very difficult to deal with and often become fixated on certain objects or actions. They may or may not be able to express themselves with language and some people may use alternative communication systems, for example signs or pictures. Many people with ASD also experience sensory difficulties, where they may be much more (hyper) or sometimes much less (hypo) sensitive to touch, taste, smell, sound, light or pain than most people.

## Asperger syndrome

Asperger syndrome (AS) is part of the autism spectrum and is a diagnosis given when IQs are within or above normal range, though the 'triad of impairments' still applies. A key feature of AS is a difficulty understanding and knowing how to behave in social situations. Many people with AS have obsessive interests in a favourite subject. They may be high achievers and many are able to learn strategies to engage socially.

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Only by understanding both strengths and weaknesses can we bring the very best out of others and ourselves.

# What can you do to help people like Amber?

## How to help

A person with an ASD needs a safe, organised and reliable daily routine. They will function best in familiar surroundings and do not respond well to sudden changes.

### **General**

- Use simple language and speak literally
- Keep routines consistent
- Give ample warning of change, Amber will need time to adapt

### **At home**

- Use visual cues such as objects or pictures to help communication
- Tell Amber what she should do, not what she should not do
- Make charts and write lists
- Identify stress triggers and try to work around them

### **At school**

- Provide a predictable environment
- Be clear about classroom rules
- To explain harder tasks, use lists, cards or pictures
- Capitalise on Amber's memory skills

### **At work**

- A structured or even rigid routine will work best
- Assign work in a few small steps
- Assist with prioritisation of tasks
- Capitalise on Amber's ability to focus for long periods on repetitive tasks

### **At the hospital**

- Be aware that Amber may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to touch, pain, smells and sounds
- Explain any medical procedures clearly
- Ensure that Amber sees the same medical staff regularly
- Consider what would be the best time of day for an appointment
- Ensure waiting times are as short as possible

# So what can Amber do for you?

## Creating a mutual benefit

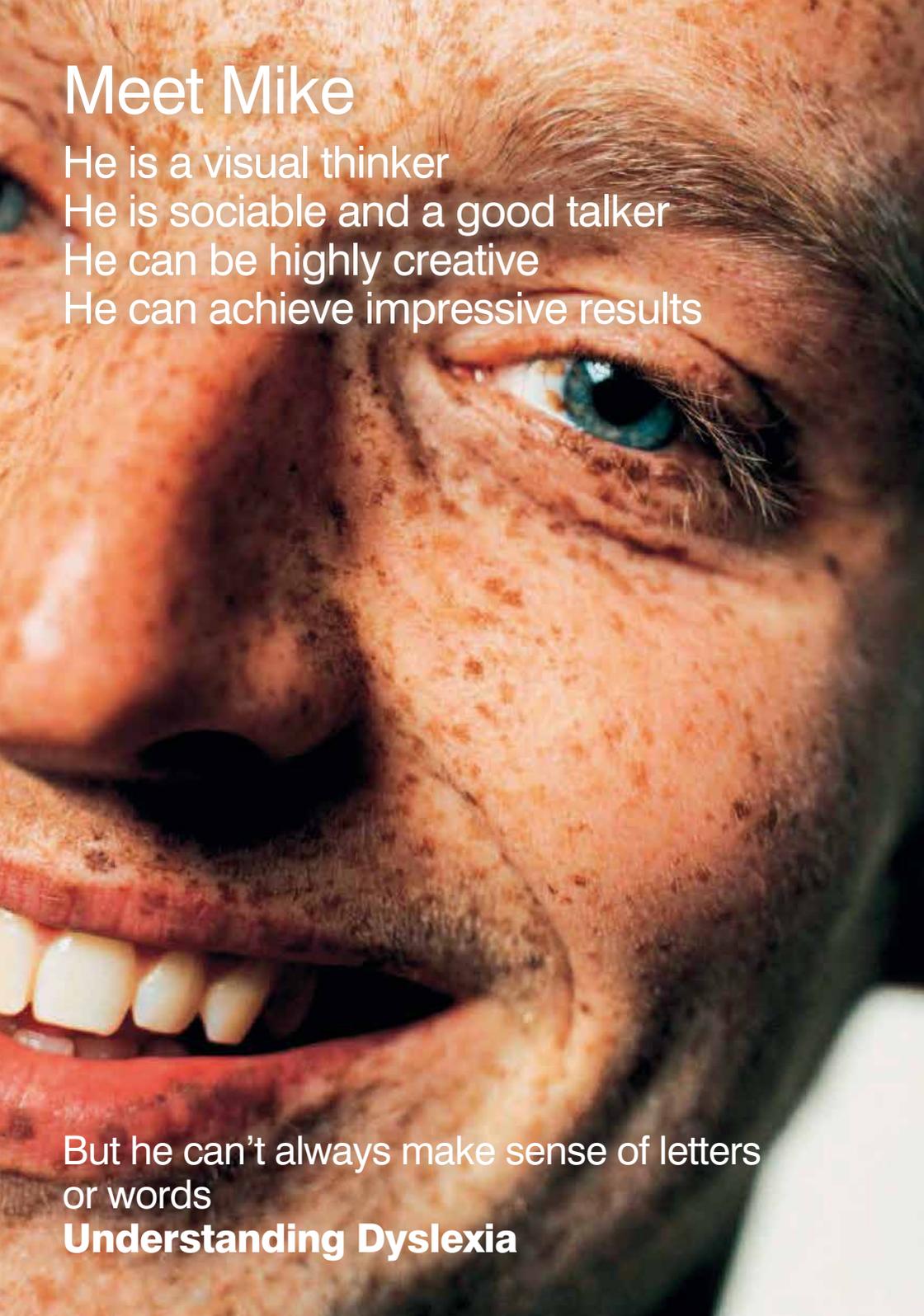
Amber is best suited to detailed, repetitive tasks where her attention to detail is a real asset. She is able to work accurately and will deliver consistently good performance on tasks which match her skill level. For her, quality rather than quantity is the driving force during her day.

Amber will almost certainly have difficulties with social interaction and would not be suited to situations that rely heavily on social or communication skills.

Amber's autism means that she will struggle to explain when a problem arises, so try to provide regular supervision and help in order to minimise her frustration. She will be at her best in quiet environments with few distractions.

The so called 'norm' would not 'norm'-ally include Amber yet she has plenty to offer and a contribution to make. By working together to understand the strengths and weaknesses of people like her, we create the opportunity to bring the best out of them – and out of everyone they encounter.

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# Meet Mike

He is a visual thinker

He is sociable and a good talker

He can be highly creative

He can achieve impressive results

But he can't always make sense of letters  
or words

**Understanding Dyslexia**

## Facts

### Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a neurodevelopmental condition – which means that it is part of the make-up of the brain. It is the most common cause of reading, writing and spelling difficulties. It affects about the same number of males and females and often runs in families.

Dyslexia is best described as a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning processes for words. This can be for one or more of reading, writing and spelling. It is often a result of not being able to sort out the sounds that make up words.

Although this can cause significant problems – especially if not spotted early – having dyslexia does not hinder intelligence. Many are high achievers, particularly in creative walks of life such as music and art.

Dyslexia commonly coexists with any of the other neurodevelopmental conditions. Some individuals may also have difficulties with maths (dyscalculia) or poor handwriting (dysgraphia).

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# What can you do to help people like Mike?

## How to help

A person with dyslexia needs you to make the most of their social, visual and creative talents and minimise reliance on text and documents.

### **General**

- Use as much visual material as possible
- Make sure written information is easy to read with big clear fonts
- Be direct and to the point—avoid long sentences

### **At home**

- Encourage creative and visual talents
- Give Mike the use of a computer

### **At school**

- Use personal instruction rather than written
- Let Mike use a computer for written pieces of work
- Provide a scribe or reader
- Use Mike's creative capacities

### **At work**

- Take time to discuss the best ways of working
- Avoid 'paperwork' as far as possible
- Go through new tasks and duties face to face
- Build in time for breaks throughout the day

### **At the hospital**

- Talk to Mike instead of giving written information
- Provide help with forms or paperwork
- Explain any medical procedures clearly

# So what can Mike do for you?

## Creating a mutual benefit

Mike will achieve most in a position that capitalises on his energy and his sociability. He is very good at engaging with people, he enjoys varied tasks and has a capacity for lateral thinking.

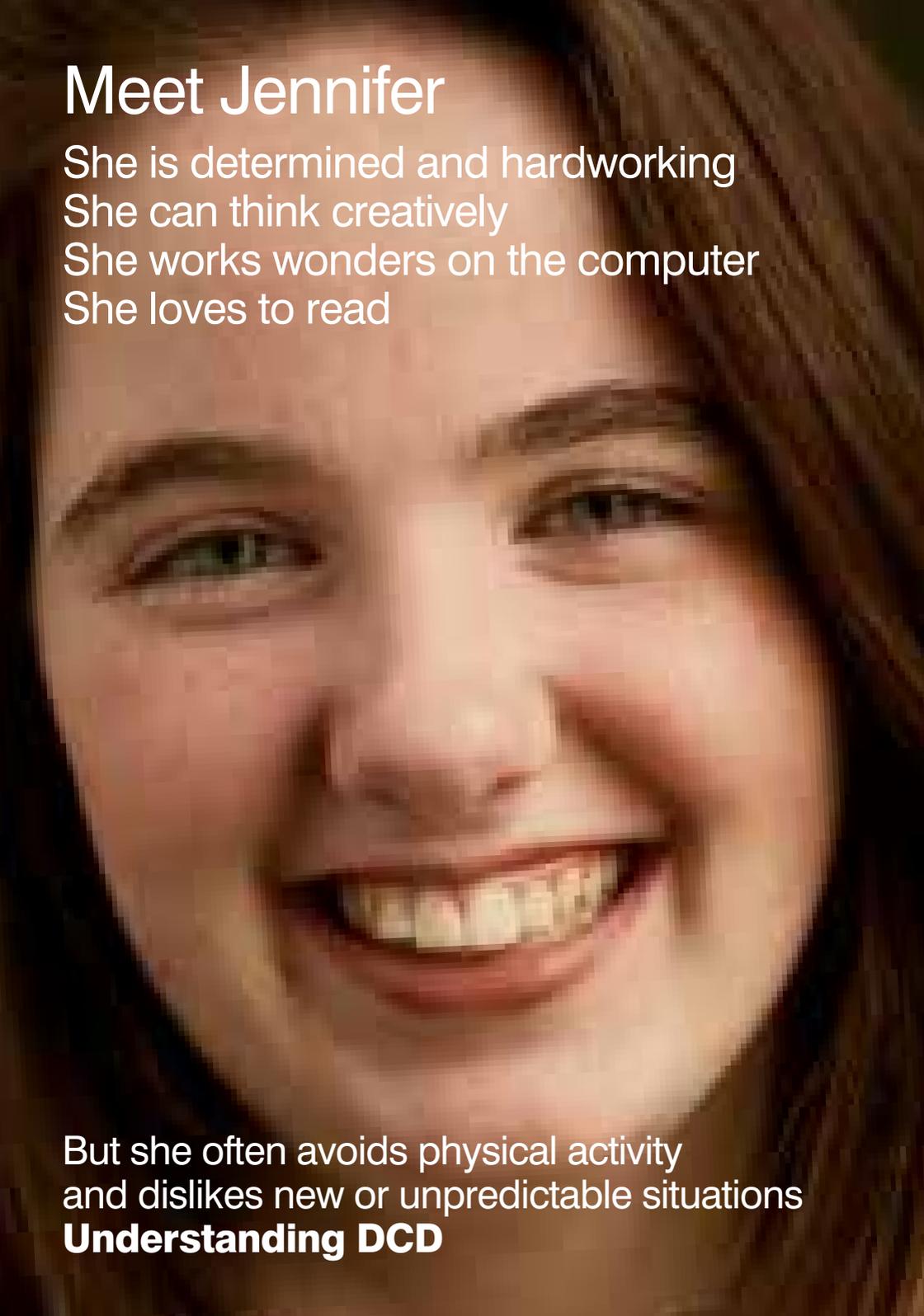
Though he may find purely academic situations challenging, he likes working with computers and is comfortable with technology.

Take advantage of Mike's creativity and don't hesitate to put him in charge of projects. He has the capacity to do this, he may just need some support with his note taking.

Remember that although he may have difficulty with simple writing challenges, he probably has many compensatory strengths. These are incredibly valuable if you work with him to profit from them.

The so called 'norm' would not 'norm'-ally include Mike, yet he has plenty to offer and a contribution to make. By working together to understand the strengths and weaknesses of people like him, we create the opportunity to bring the best out of them – and everyone they encounter.

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# Meet Jennifer

She is determined and hardworking  
She can think creatively  
She works wonders on the computer  
She loves to read

But she often avoids physical activity  
and dislikes new or unpredictable situations  
**Understanding DCD**



# Facts

## 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' and is thought to affect 5–10% of the population. It is more common in males and may run 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. Some examples of everyday tasks that people with DCD may struggle with include: using pens or cutlery, getting dressed, walking up and down stairs, tying shoelaces and spatial orientation. They also commonly have difficulties with organising their time and activities.

DCD is also a component of a condition referred to as DAMP (Deficit in Attention, Motor control and Perception), which is diagnosed by the coexistence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and DCD. DCD often coexists with other neurodevelopmental conditions such as dyslexia and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

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# What can you do to help people like Jennifer?

## How to help

A person with DCD usually needs help with structure and organisation. They will benefit from positive encouragement, as difficulties with everyday activities can become very frustrating.

### **General**

- Be encouraging and supportive
- Give clear and specific instructions

### **At home**

- Use a diary for notes and reminders
- Plan each day with simple lists and schedules
- Practice motor and coordination skills
- Give support with activities Jennifer finds challenging

### **At school**

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

### **At work**

- Discuss and agree priorities
- Set achievable deadlines for each piece of work
- Encourage use of lists and schedules
- Build in regular short breaks throughout the day

### **At the hospital**

- Explain any medical procedures clearly
- Be aware that Jennifer may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to touch, smells and sounds
- Consider the best time of day for an appointment
- Ensure waiting times are as short as possible

# So what can Jennifer do for you?

## Creating a mutual benefit

Jennifer will be at her best when given time and encouragement to complete activities. Talk with Jennifer 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. Using a computer may help to compensate for motor weaknesses and allow Jennifer to reach her potential.

The so called 'norm' would not 'norm'-ally include Jennifer, yet she has plenty to offer and a contribution to make. By working together to understand the strengths and weaknesses of people like her, we create the opportunity to bring the best out of them – and out of everyone they encounter.

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# Mindroom is a charity dedicated to helping children and adults with all kinds of learning difficulties.

People with learning difficulties need urgent help. Most experts agree that at least five children in every classroom have some kind of learning difficulty. Among adults, less than 7% of people with a learning disability are in paid work.\*

But statistics don't tell the whole story. If it's someone in your family or in your care who is affected, the experience can be confusing, frightening and isolating. Knowing where to turn is the first important step, and that's where Mindroom comes in.

We are an independent Scottish charity committed to raising awareness of all types of learning difficulties, and to providing practical advice, essential information and tailored support to everyone who needs it.

At Mindroom, our vision is of a world in which every child and adult with a learning difficulty gets the recognition and help they need. We believe that early intervention and support can transform lives and create a more positive future for everyone. Today, we do so by raising awareness, promoting understanding – among the public and the policymakers – and by providing one-to-one help and support for families.

\*Mencap Employment Briefing

**mindroom**  
no mind left behind

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A recognised Scottish Charity SC 030472



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This information pack has been written and produced by Mindroom in consultation with relevant professionals to ensure the highest standards and up to date information.

We would like to thank all of those people with learning difficulties who have helped us write this booklet.

Thank you also to the Scottish Government who understand the complexities of learning difficulties, who recognise the need to do something about it and who provided the budget to produce *It Takes All Kinds Of Minds*.

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