

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

Understanding DCD

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a neuro-developmental 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 neuro-developmental 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.

Here are a few ways we can all support Jennifer:

General

- Be encouraging and supportive
- Give clear and specific instructions

At home

- Help her to use a diary for notes and reminders
- Plan each day with simple lists and schedules
- Encourage her to practise motor and coordination skills
- Give support with activities Jennifer finds challenging

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 work

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

At the hospital

- 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