

Manager's guide to understanding and supporting those with dyspraxia

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NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
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1. Introduction

This guide provides information about dyspraxia that will assist both line managers and those who have or who think they may have this 'specific learning difficulty' (SpLD); to recognise, understand and raise awareness of dyspraxia. It outlines some practical options for support and will help deliver a more understanding approach to both supporting and managing colleagues so they can maximise their effectiveness at work and thereby minimise the impact of work on their home life.

2. What is Dyspraxia?

Approximately 7-10 % of the general populations are affected by dyspraxia; it is the most common learning difficulty which is caused by differences in the language area of the brain. Dyspraxia, or development co-ordination disorder (DCD), affects co-ordination, spatial awareness and sensory perception.

While DCD is often regarded as an umbrella term to cover motor coordination difficulties, dyspraxia refers to those people who have additional problems planning, organising and carrying out movements in the right order in everyday situations. Individuals may vary in how their difficulties present: these may change over time depending on environmental demands and life experiences. An individual's coordination difficulties may affect participation and functioning of everyday life skills in education, work and employment.

Dyspraxia can affect articulation and speech, perception and thought. Although dyspraxia may occur in isolation, it frequently coexists with other conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, language disorders and social, emotional and behavioral impairments.

Adults with dyspraxia may also have social and emotional difficulties, as well as problems with time management, planning and personal organisation. These may affect the person's education or employment

People with dyspraxia, are often determined, hardworking and highly motivated, they develop their own strategies for working effectively. In many ways, people who

have dyspraxia are similar to those who have dyslexia: they are often creative and original thinkers as well as strategic problem solvers.

3. Types of Dyspraxia

There are a few different types of dyspraxia:

- Motor - Causing Problems With Things Like Writing, Dressing Or Skipping
- Verbal - Causing Problems With Speech
- Oral - Causing Problems with Movements of the Mouth and Tongue

4. What causes Dyspraxia?

Although the exact causes of dyspraxia are unknown, many believe that genetics could play a role. It is thought to be caused by a disruption in the way messages from the brain are transmitted to the body. This affects a person's ability to perform movements in a smooth, coordinated way. The symptoms of dyspraxia can vary between individuals and may change over time.

5. Impact of Dyspraxia

- May have difficulty telling others they have dyspraxia.
- Difficulty remembering appointments or finding their way around unfamiliar buildings or areas.
- May forget to bring or lose things – for example paperwork.
- Difficulty in learning new skills or completing tasks.
- Can experience continued periods of low-level pain in joints.
- Difficulty with dress sense or presenting themselves appropriately.
- Can find it difficult to wake from deep sleeps.
- Dyspraxia links to poor mental health – for example anxiety and depression
- The co-ordination difficulties associated with dyspraxia can reduce the person's ability to participate and function in education and employment.

6. Reasonable Adjustments

Requests for adjustments may come from a variety of sources. In the case of dyspraxia the individual will have a specialist report from an educational psychologist or other approved person, which details the areas of 'need' and the adjustments required. Reasonable adjustments recommendations may come from an occupational health department or from suitably qualified professionals including doctors and occupational therapists.

A request for a specific adjustment may come directly from the individual concerned as they will have the greatest insight into their particular areas of need.

These requests should be considered in the same way as recommendations from more formal sources. The key factor in determining eligibility for an adjustment is the formally diagnosed presence of a disability, not the source of the request.

However, those in a management, supervisory or mentorship/preceptorship role will need to ensure that colleagues and those for whom they are responsible are allowed any reasonable adjustments which have been agreed.

Supporting staff who have Dyspraxia-

- Explore what coping strategies are already used by the employee.
- Job coaching should be considered when an individual starts a new job or experiences a job change. A buddy or mentor may be helpful.
- Avoid giving complex multiple instructions and check they are understood, encourage staff to write instructions down clearly and to keep them for easy reference.
- Regular breaks to allow the concentration of effort to be targeted correctly.
- Talking positively about the challenges- how they can overcome them and support you can give.
- Providing a computer or laptop if writing by hand is difficult-maybe considering assistive equipment.
- Encourage colleagues to seek out support through access to Work for awareness training, and personal coping/coaching strategies support.

- Employees who have dyspraxia respond well to routines. They benefit from provision of a structured timetable and the opportunity for training in time-management. Providing calendar or diary to improve organisation-synchronise this with a phone and computer if possible.
- People with dyspraxia should be encouraged to break down their work into manageable chunks and to use different coloured folders for different tasks to help with organisation.
- Allowing regular breaks can improve productivity as they allow the concentration of effort to be targeted correctly.
- Speech recognition and proof reading programs may be helpful. Templates can be used for detailed work such as reports and provide a framework for writing.
- Ergonomics keyboards can be of great benefit as can changing or slowing down the mouse.
- If staff with dyspraxia uses machines such as fax machines and photocopiers, keep a list of the operating procedures nearby.
- Consider whether it is possible to arrange for staff with dyspraxia to come in early or to stay late, to reduce distraction. A partition around their desk, own room or allow staff to wear earphones to reduce distractions may also help.
- Encourage staff who have dyspraxia to approach tasks in a calm and positive manner.

7. Treatment

There is no cure for dyspraxia but there are many strategies that can help. The first person to contact if you think you may have undiagnosed dyspraxia or co-ordination difficulties is your GP. It's a good idea to take in information with you, such as a checklist with examples of how the symptoms and signs of dyspraxia apply to you. You may be referred for an assessment by a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist, who will assess your movement and how it affects you day to day.

Occupational therapists will look at fine motor and perceptual skills, together with activities of daily living such as household tasks and organisational skills, and help develop strategies to improve these. They can suggest suitable

equipment to help with these tasks. Speech therapists can help with speech or language problems and also sometimes with communication and social skills. Counseling can help to overcome some of the problems.

Useful Links

www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

www.dyspraxiauk.com

<http://www.standrews.ac.uk/hr/edi/disability/dyspraxia/adjustments/http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/help-information/learning-disability-a-z/d/dyspraxia>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Dyspraxia-in-adults/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://www.npaa.org.uk/what-we-support/>