



## Not Just Clumsy Supporting Children and Young People with DCD in the Classroom

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## Acknowledgement of Country

*I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we gather today, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.*




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## When you hear "clumsy child"...

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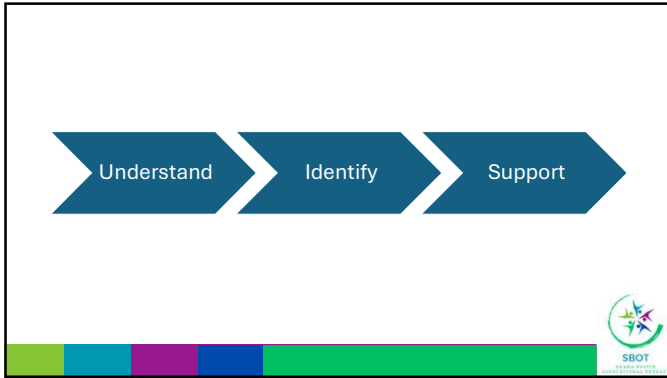
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### What is Developmental Coordination Disorder

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a **neurodevelopmental condition** affecting a person's ability to **learn and execute motor skills**. This makes it **difficult to perform common, everyday tasks**, like doing up buttons, writing, catching a ball, riding a bike or driving.

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### Understanding DCD

- 5% of the population
- More common in males (3:1)
- The causes of DCD are not well understood
- Does not affect level of intelligence, but...
- Lifelong disorder, not something a child will generally outgrow
- Often misunderstood

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### Core features

Understand Identify Support

- Delayed motor skill development
- Difficulty learning new motor tasks
- Poor balance, coordination, and motor planning
- Executive functioning challenges (common co-occurrence)



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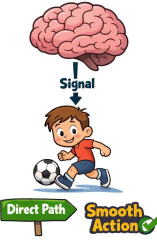
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### The scenic route..

Understand Identify Support

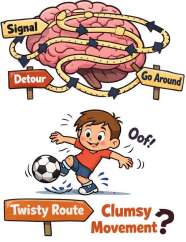
**Typical Brain**



Signal

Direct Path Smooth Action

**DCD Brain**




Signal

Detour

Go Around

Twisty Route Clumsy Movement?



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### DCD vs Dyspraxia

Understand Identify Support

Diagnosis


DCD

Diagnostic manual

Dys = difficulty  
praxis = action

Dyspraxia

No clear definition



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### Co-occurring Conditions

Understand → Identify → Support

- Overlap with
  - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
  - (Specific) Language Impairment
  - Autism
  - Learning Difficulties
- Childhood Apraxia of Speech
- Handwriting difficulties in DCD vs Dysgraphia



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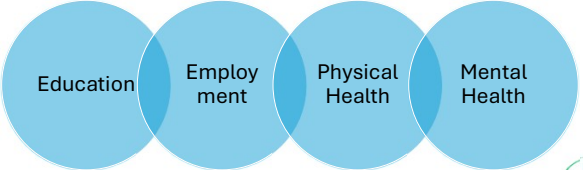
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### Impact of DCD

Understand → Identify → Support



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### Daily Participation Experiences of Adolescents With Developmental Coordination Disorder: A Qualitative Study (AJOT, 2026)

- Everyday tasks – effortful performance and inefficiency
  - motor coordination, organisation, and spatial orientation
- Participation is often exhausting. Many adolescents describe frustration and social comparison.
- Success and enjoyment came from choosing activities that matched strengths
- Ability and participation are not the same
- Strength-based approach can increase participation



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### Avoidance Behaviours

Understand → 
 Identify → 
 Support

Behaviour Observed	Could be misinterpreted as...	What it really means
Being overly assertive when playing with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bossy</li> <li>Domineering</li> <li>Bullying</li> </ul>	I need to control the players and the game so I can understand what's going on and where I fit in
Pretending to be hurt e.g. I have a sore knee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manipulative behaviour</li> <li>Lazy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No one wants to play with me</li> <li>No one wants to be my partner</li> </ul>

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### Causes

Understand → 
 Identify → 
 Support

- Pre-term birth
- Low birth weight
- Pregnancy hypertension (high blood pressure) and preeclampsia
- Emergency caesarean section
- Exposure to stress, high alcohol intake, smoking or cigarette smoke during pregnancy
- Genetic predisposition
- Brain lesion or impaired neurological processes

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## Dyslexia vs Dysgraphia vs DCD

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Understand → Identify → Support

# Identify

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Understand → Identify → Support

## How DCD shows up in the classroom

**What do you see?**

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Understand → Identify → Support

## Diagnosis

**EACD Education** 2012 → **DSM-5** 2013

**Criterion A:** Motor coordination is substantially below age-expected levels, causing clumsiness, slow, or inaccurate performance of motor skills (e.g., catching, writing, riding a bike).

**Criterion B:** The motor deficit significantly interferes with activities of daily living (ADLs), academic achievement, or work/leisure activities

**Criterion C:** Symptoms begin in the early developmental period (childhood).

**Criterion D:** Deficits are not better explained by intellectual disability, visual impairment, or another neurological condition.

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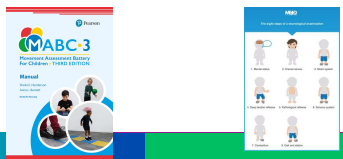

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**Diagnosis**

Understand → Identify → Support

- Diagnosis of exclusion
- Diagnosed in early childhood (but not too early!)
- Lifelong condition
- Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist + Paediatrician

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**Handwriting differences**  
Dyslexia vs Dysgraphia vs DCD



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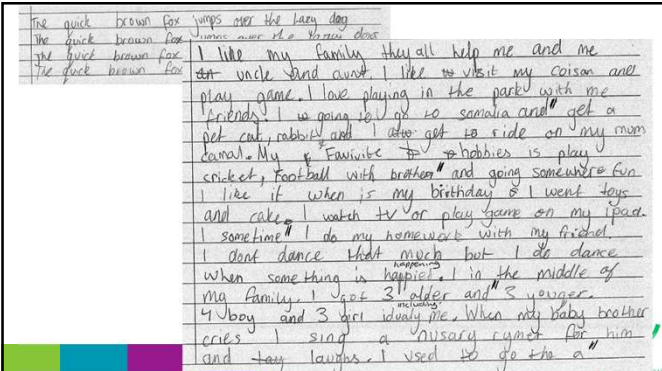
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The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog  
 the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog  
 the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog  
 the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

I like my family they all help me and me  
 at uncle and aunt I like to visit my cousin and  
 play game. I love playing in the park with me  
 friends. I go going to go to socia and get a  
 pet cat, rabbit and I also get to ride on my mom  
 dance. My favorite hobbie is play  
 cricket, football with brother and going somewhere fun  
 I like it when is my birthday I want toys  
 and cake. I watch tv or play game on my iPad  
 I sometime I do my homework with my friend.  
 I dont dance that much but I do dance  
 when something is happier. I in the middle of  
 ma family. I got 3 older and 5 younger  
 boy and 3 girl idaly me. When my baby brother  
 cries I sing a nursery rhyme for him  
 and say laurus. I used to go to a

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cf The fox quickly jumped over a dizzy brown mouse on the grass. The fox quickly jumped over a dizzy brown mouse on the grass. The fox quickly jumped over a dizzy brown mouse on the grass. The fox quickly jumped over a dizzy brown mouse on the grass.

walking through the damp old bush where litter blankets the forest. The noise of my blacknes envelopes the sky & bleaching black the animals slowly stalk my shadow, oak trees sway gently in the wind gently speaking to each other.



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I <sup>in</sup> the holidays I am going to Menorca near Spain. It's always really hot and I love it there. We have been going to Menorca for 4-5 years now and my family still love it. In my family there is my sister Maura/my mum Nicola and my dad called Paul. We have a cat called Frankie but she is really old and fat. My hobbies are playing on the playstation and my cat with my friends & playing lots of sports like football and tennis. I also like watching TV and one of my favourite programmes is Top Gear. I also like to read books.

Prunty et al 2014



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### When to refer

Understand → Identify → Support

- Motor difficulties persist despite practice
- Impact is seen across multiple domains
- Concerns are ongoing for ≥ 6 months
- Child shows distress or frustration
- Family expresses concerns

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Understand → Identify → Support

# Support

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Understand → Identify → Support

## What does the evidence tell us?

Motor outcomes	Inhabited outcomes	Play	Function	Self manage	Feeding
Effective OT, AOT, COT, etc.	Effective OT, AOT, COT, etc.	Effective OT, AOT, COT, etc.	Effective OT, AOT, COT, etc.	Effective OT, AOT, COT, etc.	Effective OT, AOT, COT, etc.
Worth it line	Worth it line	Worth it line	Worth it line	Worth it line	Worth it line
Ineffective	Ineffective	Ineffective	Ineffective	Ineffective	Ineffective

Novak & Honan, "Effectiveness of paediatric occupational therapy for children with disabilities: A systematic review" Australian Occupational Therapy Journal 66 (2019); 258 - 273.

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Understand → Identify → Support

## What does the evidence tell us?

- **Do it**
  - Handwriting Task Practice
  - CO-OP
- **Probably do it**
  - Assistive Tech/VR
  - Skills Training Mental Rehearsal
  - Ball skills (functional outcomes)
- **Probably don't do it**
  - Sensory Integration
  - Sensory Approaches
- **Don't do it**
  - Handwriting sensory approach

Novak & Honan, 2019

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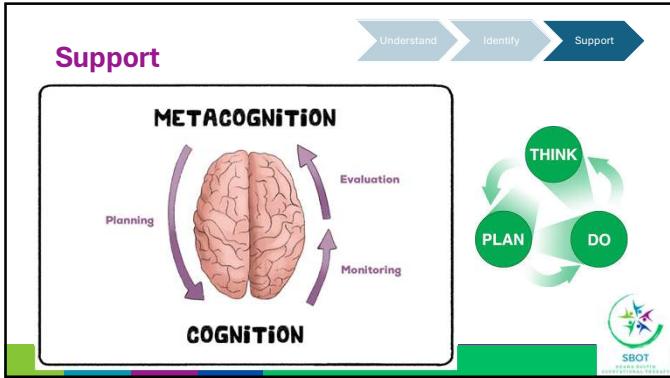
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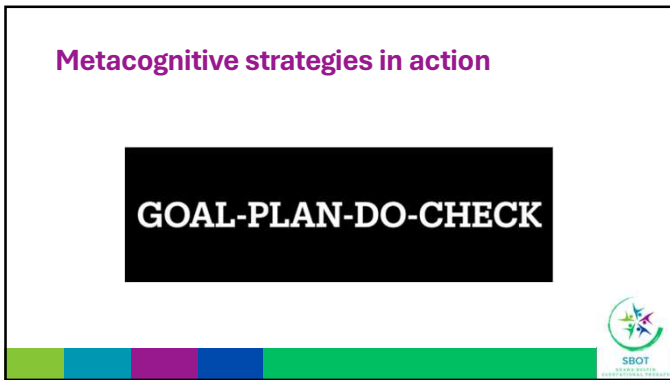
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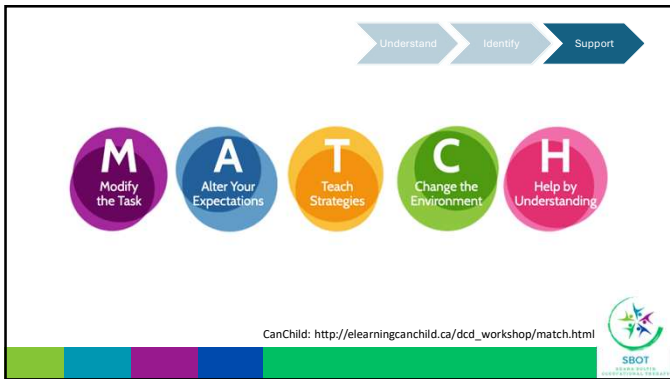
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Understand Identify Support

**M**  
Modify the Task

- Reduce handwriting load (typing, voice>text)
- Provide extra time
- Pre-teach steps using visuals
- Break down tasks into "chunks"
- Provide "finish later" options to reduce pressure
- Allow practice before group activities (PE)
- Teach motor skills explicitly
- Smaller, lighter equipment



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Understand Identify Support

**A**  
Alter Your Expectations

- Assess based on **learning**, not handwriting quality
- Celebrate effort and strategy, not speed
- Use strengths (verbal reasoning, creativity)
- Offer alternative ways to demonstrate knowledge (videos, oral responses)
- ++++ Practice



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Understand Identify Support

**T**  
Teach Strategies

- Think>Plan>Do>CHECK
- Checklists
- Coach, don't tell
- ++++ Practice



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**Resources for Schools**

Understand Identify Support

DEVELOPMENTAL COORDINATION DISORDER AUSTRALIA INC.

**CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS HANDWRITING**

Handwriting, when not mastered, can be a real barrier to learning. Handwriting, when not mastered, can be a real barrier to learning. Handwriting, when not mastered, can be a real barrier to learning.

**TEACHING TIPS AND CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS**

To help children with DCD to shine

**NAVIGATING HIGH SCHOOL WITH DCD**

To transition into high school

**NAVIGATING UNIVERSITY WITH DCD**

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**Resources for Schools**

Understand Identify Support

DEVELOPMENTAL COORDINATION DISORDER AUSTRALIA INC.

**Developmental Coordination Disorder**

**Handwriting and DCD**

**Classroom Setup for Children with DCD**

**Physical Education and DCD**

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**Further learning module**

**Developmental Coordination Disorder**

[Click here to access the online workshop.](#)

**Sitting in Class**

Although children with DCD have difficulties with motor coordination when they are young, their difficulties are often not recognized until elementary school when classroom expectations and demands increase.

- While sitting at their desk at an desk, children with DCD tend to:
  - Have slumped posture
  - Hold their head in their hands
  - Lean on others
  - Use other

[https://elearningoanchild.ca/dcd\\_workshop/index.html](https://elearningoanchild.ca/dcd_workshop/index.html)

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One new thing you have learnt

One student you now see differently

One strategy you will try in the next week



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**More...**

- [DCD for Children and Young People NHS Tayside \(video\)](#)
- [Understanding Dyspraxia/DCD video BRAIINS \(video 6.45min\)](#)
- [MATCH E-learning \(CanChild\)](#)
- [MATCH Flyers](#)
- [Dyspraxia Foundation \(UK\)](#)
- [DCD Australia Resources](#)
- [DCD E-learning \(CanChild\)](#)
- [DCD Clinical Practice Recommendations \(EACD\)](#)
- [Children with DCD Booklet](#)



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