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Gifted Children and Dyspraxia

For some gifted children the complication of having an additional condition such as dyspraxia can be confusing and difficult to deal with. This is equally true for parents who want to address both concerns, and for schools who may feel more confident in dealing with the dyspraxia rather than the giftedness.

What is Dyspraxia?

A child with dyspraxia may well be a late developer i.e. walking and talking later. They may find it hard to undertake simple physical activity such as walking up and down stairs. In school, subjects like numeracy and literacy can be a problem as well as P.E. They may seem very forgetful, lose things easily and find tasks such as dressing and tying shoes difficult. This means some of the more common traits seen in gifted children can be masked by the dyspraxia, and not identified.

Some of the more common characteristics include:

- **Fine motor co-ordination**
 - · Poorly formed handwriting
 - · Slow handwriting
 - · Messy work presentation
 - · Accurate copying can be difficult
- **Large movement and co-ordination difficulties**
 - · Planning movements
 - · Bumping into and tripping over things
 - · Dropping things
 - · Difficulties with catching and throwing
- **Perception difficulties and spatial difficulties**
 - · Problems with judging height and distance
 - · Inability to tell left from right consistently
- **Organisational difficulties**
 - · Difficulty with organising work and daily life
 - · Difficulty in structuring essay material into a logical order
 - · inability to keep appointments or cope with timetable changes
 - · forgetting and losing things
- **Concentration**
 - · Takes a long time to complete a task
 - · Difficult to do two things at once

Dyspraxia and Handwriting

Dyspraxia based handwriting problems are due to difficulty with fine motor skills, organisation and control relating to the hand. Writing for the individual with dyspraxia is not the mainly "automatic" skill which is enjoyed by other children. There may be difficulties with forming letters, applying

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correct pressure, writing on the line and writing with an even slant. There may be a preference for printing rather than cursive script. Writing is likely to deteriorate when sustained for lengthy

periods and under conditions of pressure such as in tests. When the child has to concentrate on the actual writing process, this will distract from the information they are trying to present and they may well lose the thread of their work. Dyspraxic children may also have difficulties with spatial relationships when trying to lay out work and draw diagrams and charts.

Support for children with Dyspraxia

- The school should support a dyspraxic child with the planning and organisation of their work, and help develop strategies to allow for their poor memory.
- The school should also give a dyspraxic child extra time to complete work, particularly in any tests.
- Provision of a scribe for some work, or allowing work to be word processed can help alleviate the stress of writing which can be frustrating, particular for a child who is gifted and yet struggles to physically write.
- Using lined or graph paper can help to produce neater, more legible work at school
- A school should realise that the dyspraxia could be contributing a gifted child under-achieving and therefore needs support to overcome that to allow their potential to be reached.
- Allowing a child to use other methods of recording information or showing their abilities besides writing/performing can aid a dyspraxic child and help the giftedness to be recognised

Helping a gifted child with dyspraxia can involve a lot of emotional support as they will often feel more frustration and anxiety about themselves than other children, as both exceptionalities can cause these emotions. They may benefit from joining a local society or school club which explores one of their interests e.g. astronomy or chess to help their emotional wellbeing and provide some socialisation and relaxation.

Above all, it is important for gifted dyspraxic children to receive support for both needs, which may well come from different sources/ school departments, but both are equally important to enable the child to fully utilise their gifts and talents in their lives.

Resources

www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk	National support organisation
www.dyspraxiaconnexion.org.uk	Another good organisation with a lot of online information, and they arrange weekly clubs and holidays.