

I CAN Factsheet 4



SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONALS: Pupils with speech dyspraxia

This factsheet is aimed at mainstream teachers who may have children with speech dyspraxia within their classes. The aim is to provide a brief overview of speech dyspraxia and the problems it can cause the pupil at school, as well as some simple and practical techniques that may help these pupils.

What is speech dyspraxia?

The term dyspraxia means that there is a difficulty with co-ordinating and controlling movements, even though there is no damage to the muscles or nerves involved in making the movements.

When speech is affected it is called 'verbal dyspraxia'. This means children find it hard to make the quick accurate movements in the mouth that are needed to speak clearly. Children may have difficulty with a whole range of different speech skills which can make them very difficult to understand, for example:

- There will be some individual speech sounds that a child with dyspraxia cannot make at all
- They may have difficulty co-ordinating sequences of sounds for words, making longer words much more difficult to say and sentences difficult to combine
- The mistakes they make in attempting sounds and words can be extremely variable and this can make their speech very hard to understand.
- They may have difficulty with things such as rate of speech or putting expression into what they say, so speech may sound slow or monotone when talking

First things first:

Children with communication problems can face many difficulties in a new class. Teachers and learning support assistants can help by beginning with the basics: all children with communication difficulties are very different, and this applies to children with dyspraxia. It is therefore useful to know what they can say and understand. Also how they make their basic needs known, such as how they let people know they are hungry, or hurt or that they need to go to the toilet. Some children will be able to tell adults this information, for others with more severe difficulties, they may use signs or symbols. Communication between home and school is really important. A home school diary can prove really useful and give parents a cue for discussion at the end of the school day.

Is the child receiving speech and language therapy?

For children with verbal dyspraxia, it is really helpful if everyone involved is aware of the child's strengths and areas of need. Try and find out from home or the speech and language therapist what the child is working on and try to include a few of those ideas into their classroom routine. If there are some functional words or phrases he is learning, it's useful for him to get lots of practice with using these words. The aims for therapy and how it can be built into what happens in school may have been discussed in a transition to school meeting or as part of the child's IEP.

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Make it easier

Encourage the child to answer questions in class, but try to make sure that the answer they need to give is short. This will help them to be understood. If the child needs to give “news”, ask the family to fill in a simple daily news diary. It can be helpful for them to bring an object to talk about, which helps set the context for others – so a conker from a walk in the park, or swimming goggles from a swimming trip – or a photo of what they did. Children are more likely to want to talk if they are interested in the topic. Ask the child to bring in a favourite toy or item they want to talk about. If children are under a lot of pressure or going through a stressful time, speech can get worse, keeping things relaxed and not making demands which are outside of their ability can help to make things a little easier.

Learning new words:

If possible sit them near the front and make sure that they look at you when you are talking and give praise for good looking. Say new words slowly and clearly. Give them the chance to say the word if they want to and praise their attempt. Sometimes, giving additional information about words can be helpful – for example saying whether it is a long word, giving information about the number of syllables. Be aware that children with verbal dyspraxia can be inconsistent in how they say things – they may be able to say a word reasonably clearly one day, though be unclear the next. This is completely outside their control.

Keep it short:

When giving an instruction, be concise, e.g. instead of “Before you wash your hands for lunch, tidy up the cars” try “Cars in the box, then wash your hands.”

Be positive:

The child’s speech may be very unclear, but try not to correct them all the time, particularly in front of the class. If they try to say ‘elephant’, say ‘yes, elephant’, saying the word slowly and clearly.

Getting things in the right order

Children with speech dyspraxia often have difficulty making sounds or movements in the right order. Try activities where the child has to remember and copy longer and longer sequences of sounds – like hit a drum, blow a whistle then shake a tambourine. You can help children with speech dyspraxia practice sequencing words in simple ways: Write short sentences on strips of paper, cut them up into individual words and let him stick them onto paper in the right order. You could also try a similar idea with letters: Cut up words into individual letters for the child to arrange in order. Again, follow the advice from the speech and language therapist for activity ideas.

Reading:

This can be a good time to help the child talk more clearly by saying new words very slowly and clearly, stressing all the sounds in the word. In early reading books many new words are repeated several times and this will give them a chance to have several tries at saying the word. Put a note in the reading book for the family to work on the new word in the same way. Be aware that some words will be very difficult for different children, so may not be the best to practice. Again discussion with the SLT is helpful to know which can improve and which are best left until the child is ready.

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Time to talk:

Talking is really hard work for many children with speech dyspraxia and they often talk more clearly if they speak slowly. Give him time to plan what to say and chances to have another try if he cannot say what he wants the first time. Accept a short answer even if he obviously knows a lot more. Encourage other people to do the same – adults and children. Plan opportunities for the child to use sounds that are easy for them.

Keep it visual:

to explain something. Being able to point to a picture, show or demonstrate something will take the pressure off and may make a huge difference to their confidence and willingness to respond in class.

Knowledge is key:

Knowing what children are capable of and what they are going to do next can be really helpful, both in supporting their progress and also enabling them to be part of their peer group and encourage communication to their full potential.

Useful contacts:

Afasic

2nd Floor

50-52 Great Sutton Street

London

EC1V 0DJ

Helpline: 08453 55 55 77

(Local call rate 11am—2pm Monday - Friday)

For information, advice or if you just need to talk.

Tel: 020 7490 9410

www.afasic.org.uk

The Dyspraxia Foundation

8 West Alley

Hitchin

Herts

SG5 1EG

Helpline: 01462 454 986

www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Further reading:

Dyspraxia: A guide for teachers and parents

Kate Ripley, Bob Daines, Jenny Barrett

David Fulton, 1997

ISBN 1-85346444-9 £15.00

Inclusion for Children with Dyspraxia: DCD

Kate Ripley

David Fulton, 2001

ISBN 1-85346-762-6

Kate Ripley and Jenny Barrett also offer strategies for dealing with dyspraxia on an I CAN course:

Dyspraxia: Fundamentals and Practice. Visit www.ican.org.uk/workforcedevelopment for further information.

I CAN, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V QE

Telephone: 0845 225 4073 Fax: 0845 225 4071 Email: info@ican.org.uk

Websites: www.ican.org.uk www.talkingpoint.org.uk

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I CAN Factsheets:

You may also find these I CAN Factsheets helpful:

For professionals:

- **Factsheet 1**
Language Difficulties in the Early Years
- **Factsheet 2**
Classroom Strategies for Primary Schools
- **Factsheet 3**
Classroom Strategies for Secondary Schools

For parents:

- **Factsheet A**
Speech and Language Difficulties - help in the early years
- **Factsheet B**
Speech and Language Therapy - help in the early years

Further support:

- **Factsheet C**
Useful Contacts
- **Factsheet D**
Useful Reading

I CAN:

I CAN is the children's communication charity. Communication is the essential 21st century life skill – the foundation on which children learn, achieve and make friends. I CAN works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children. I CAN's particular focus is children who find communication hard.

I CAN works to ensure all people who have a responsibility to children, either directly or indirectly, from parents and teachers to policy makers, understand the importance of good communication skills.

Visit www.ican.org.uk for further information on I CAN's work and to register for I CAN's monthly newsletter.

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