

# learning links



Helping Kids Learn

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Information Sheet 10

## Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia – A silent condition

By Jane Purcell, Speech Pathologist

**C**hildren with developmental verbal dyspraxia (DVD) have difficulty in producing sounds or combining these sounds into words. It can be very frustrating as they know what they want to say but find it difficult to communicate their needs, wants, thoughts and feelings.

DVD is a difficulty in a person's ability to organise their speech muscles to make the sounds they need, to say what they would like to say. This means a child might say papnee for nappy (the sounds are out of order) or tup, bup and gup for cup (errors in speech are inconsistent) or dip for skipping (words are simplified). Initiating and spontaneously using speech can be markedly difficult for a child with DVD.

We use the term "developmental" to indicate that it is present from birth and the term "verbal" to distinguish it from other types such as motor and oral dyspraxia. Although we don't know what causes DVD, some research indicates it is caused by a breakdown or immaturity in the neurological connections needed for speech.

DVD is often inherited. Many families have a parent or grandparent who is also dyspraxic or had difficulties learning to speak or read.

### Oral and Motor Dyspraxia

There are two other types of dyspraxia – oral and motor. Oral Dyspraxia, which involves the lips, tongue and palate, is difficulty in spontaneously producing movements of the mouth.

When asked to "put your tongue up to the top of your mouth" or "show me how you kiss" children with oral dyspraxia can find this very hard and may show searching mouth movements. They can often do these movements automatically (when not thinking about them) but are unable to do them when asked. Children with Oral Dyspraxia may have a history of or current difficulties with eating and drinking such as learning to eat a range of solid food.

### Helping Children with DVD

Dyspraxia is a very specific speech difficulty and requires very specific assistance. Intensive speech therapy and frequent practice at levels where children experience success are vital.

Pressuring a child to speak or speak more clearly only makes DVD worse rather than better. Encouraging, praising for effort and providing options such as using gestures or signs is more successful for a child with DVD.

Understandably, the social and self esteem implications for a child with DVD can be marked. It is easy to imagine how continual difficulties in initiating and clearly expressing your thoughts, feelings and concerns can effect your self-esteem and ability to interact with others.

At Learning Links we use a total communication approach to assist and support communication and foster self-esteem.

This means using one or more of a variety of alternative communication forms that may include photos, gestures, pictures or signing. For example a child who cannot yet use single words can be encouraged to point to a picture representing a song such as a star for 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' to choose a song at group time.

Our experience indicates that this assists the development of speech, increases social interactions and decreases frustration.

**Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.**

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

**Early Childhood Services** for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

**School Age Services** for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

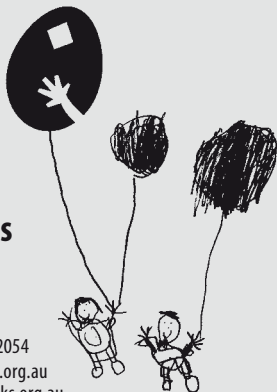
**Family Services** helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

**Professional Development** for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

**Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.**



## Learning Links

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We may also recommend the use of a “communication book” where all involved with a child can communicate about a child’s progress. Information about something special that happened in a child’s preschool day or on the weekend makes it possible for an adult to ask the right questions, prompt, give a child some signs to tell a story, or make it more likely that we will understand speech that is not clear.

### Specific Treatments

The most commonly used program for children with DVD is the Nuffield Dyspraxia Program where each consonant and vowel are represented visually. This type of therapy aims to give a child experience with producing all ranges of sounds, syllables and words and using these spontaneously.

Involving all the senses to assist dyspraxic children with learning to talk is vital. Examples are using visual cues such as linking a picture to a sound and tactile cues such as feeling how sounds are made.

Another approach that is sometimes used in conjunction with other programs is Cued Articulation. A hand signal is used to represent a sound and cue the child to produce it correctly. This is predominantly used with school aged children.

Another approach that has been used with the Nuffield program is called the ‘Suck Swallow Breathe’ technique. Some parents whose children have experienced this approach have reported improvement in oral skills and their children are more able to combine breathing and using more word combinations.

A few dyspraxic children are also helped by training the mouth to feel different shapes (usually infants and younger children). Some parents at a number of dyspraxia support groups have also trialed a dietary supplement called Efalex, although they have reported that results have been varied.

## How do you Recognise Verbal Dyspraxia?

**C**hildren with Verbal Dyspraxia may have some or many of the following –

- a good understanding of what is said to them;
- difficult to understand speech although the errors are not just ‘immature’ (the child does not just sound like a younger child);
- inconsistent speech errors, e.g. a child may say tup, bup and gup for cup;
- sounds in words are out of order, e.g. papnee for nappy;
- simplified words, e.g. dip for skipping;
- searching mouth movements as a child attempts to co-ordinate their structures and muscles to produce sounds/words;
- difficulty in initiating speech particularly when under pressure or excited;
- a marked variability in the quantity and quality of speech from day to day; and
- very communicative gestures and facial expressions developed through frustration with their difficulty in initiating and communicating their needs, wants, thoughts and feelings.

### Dyspraxia Support Groups (DSG)

There are a number of Dyspraxia Support Groups throughout New South Wales and Australia.

Joining a DSG allows opportunities to meet other parents and gives access to a wide variety of resources.

The central group in Australia is the Australian Dyspraxia Support Group and Resource Centre at South Windsor (02 4577 6220). They produce a newsletter approximately every 2 months and can provide you with a local contact.

- a marked difficulty in saying longer words (e.g. caterpillar) or tongue twisters (e.g. puh tuh tuk);

# My child has Dyspraxia

## Elizabeth and Andrew

Andrew is four years old and has verbal and slight motor dyspraxia. His sister Chloe is now 18 months old and doesn't show any signs of the same difficulties Andrew has experienced.

At Learning Links preschool Andrew enjoys painting, chasing games, and playing in the sandpit. He also likes other children and is a very happy person.

Andrew's parents first noticed something was wrong when he was about two. "We felt that there was a problem, he wasn't verbalising at all", said Elizabeth. "Our gut feeling was that he should be communicating a lot better.

"He also had a lot of feeding problems, which a lot of dyspraxic children do have."

At the time a speech therapist suggested that Andrew might have dyspraxia and while this was a diagnosis, it caused Elizabeth and her husband a great deal of anxiety. It was also a very confusing time as they did not know anything about the condition. Elizabeth is a teacher but had no experience with dyspraxia at all.

They joined a support group at Menai and this helped enormously – both in terms of information and the support of other parents.

Andrew will go to school in the year 2000 and Elizabeth is worried because of the lack of support staff in schools. Her support group is currently trying to lobby to increase this support at schools.

## Web Sites

<http://indigo.ie/~dysprax>

<http://homepages.nildram.co.uk/~nicklee/dtrust.htm>

<http://www.avenza.com/~apraxia/speechpro.html>

<http://www.sutton.lincs.sch.uk/parents/dysprax.html>

<http://www.cchs.usyd.edu.au/Academic/CD/clinic/dyspraxia.html>

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/members/madeleine.portwood/dysprax.htm>

"It is a silent condition in that these children appear to act and behave normally and have normal intelligence. However, they have a communication problem and many of the more severely dyspraxic children learn to sign," says Elizabeth.

"I worry about him coping. Sometimes he gets extremely frustrated and hurt because people can't understand him."

Andrew has been at Learning Links since he was about two and a half and Elizabeth is pleased with his progress.

"I can't speak more highly of the work they are doing with him," says Elizabeth. "He also has a communication book."

For other parents whose children have been diagnosed with dyspraxia, Elizabeth says keep your chin up.

"There is help out there if you go searching for it. We have tried everything and have been to everyone. At first it was really confusing because we were being bombarded with so much information. However, if you keep at it, keep a clear head and know your child, you'll get there.

"Look for early intervention. The fact that we started so early with Andrew has helped.

"I would recommend a support group for people who don't know much about dyspraxia. The beauty of them is that you don't have to attend every week, but you know you've got someone to turn to if things really do get tough."

**"... At first it was really confusing because we were being bombarded with so much information. However, if you keep at it, keep a clear head and know your child, you'll get there.**

**Look for early intervention. The fact that we started so early with Andrew has helped."**

## Contact Phone Numbers

### Blue Mountains / Penrith / Hawkesbury

Chris Meredith (02) 4577 6220  
 (Australian Dyspraxia Support & Resource Centre)  
 Cynthia O'Neill Lapstone Preschool (02) 4739 2606

### Sydney Metropolitan

Susan McGee, Bondi (02) 9389 6370  
 Jane Purcell, Peakhurst (02) 9534 1710  
 Menai Community Health Centre  
 (Megan Craig) (02) 9543 1111  
 Sally Gulson, St Ives (02) 9488 9705  
 Helen Rayment, Como (02) 9589 1175  
 Mark & Brenda Lenic (02) 4733 4513

### Other NSW Country

Michelle Laurie, Gloucester (02) 6558 5540  
 Lynette & Ross Sayers, Oakdale (02) 4659 6407  
 Julie Walsh, Lennox Head (02) 6687 6789  
 Robyn Stone, The Channon (02) 6688 6452  
 Lyn Anlezark, Tascott (02) 4324 2414  
 Colleen Peace, Mt Ousley (02) 4228 7963

### ACT

Yvonne Anthoney, Mitchell (02) 6241 1343

**Telephone Learning Links for contact names and numbers in other states.**



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**Early Childhood Services**  
– all enquiries to Head Office

**School Age Services**  
– contact your local branch

**Family Services**  
– contact your local branch

**All other enquiries**  
– Head Office

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms): \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation/Business: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (Home): \_\_\_\_\_ (Business): \_\_\_\_\_

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