

# Dyspraxia in the Workplace

## Help and guidance for job seekers and employees



Dyspraxia, or Developmental Co-ordination Disorder, is a recognised medical disorder, which impairs the organisation of movement. It is also associated with problems of language, perception and thought. It affects about 5 percent of the population – 2 percent seriously.

Many adults who have dyspraxia experience few problems in the workplace and have developed their own strategies for working effectively. They are usually determined, persistent, hard working and highly motivated employees. In some ways adults with dyspraxia are similar to those with dyslexia. They are often creative and original thinkers as well as strategic problem solvers. Every person with dyspraxia has a different profile of strengths and difficulties. However, some people with dyspraxia find it hard to achieve their true potential and may need specific support at work.

People with dyspraxia may have difficulties when looking for work, or at work. These may include:

- Choosing a job that suits strengths
- Having the confidence and organisation to apply effectively for jobs or promotion
- Operating office equipment and computers
- Organising workload and meeting time targets
- Verbal Communication - such as following oral instructions and taking part in discussions
- Written communication - Handwriting and general writing skills
- Memory and concentration.

Each person will have their own profile of areas of difficulty. However, there are steps that both people with dyspraxia and their employers can take to help them in seeking work or to make their working life better. This leaflet outlines some of those steps and more are available in the Dyspraxia Foundation's employment guide, *Working with Dyspraxia*.

### Job seekers

#### Planning for the world of work

Choosing a career is a difficult process for everybody. You need to be patient and flexible, and keep your options open.

You can get extra support from a specialist disability related Careers Advisor at your Local Careers Service, or a Disability Employment Advisor (D.E.A.) at main Job Centres, they may be able to call on a Department of Work and Pensions Occupational Psychologist for specialist advice.

- Make a list of all available sources of information, such as the Internet, local and national newspapers, Job Centres and job agencies specialising in disabled people (see list at end)
- Make a list of your strengths and challenges as you see them and as others have told you

- Choose a field and/or type of job that fits with those strengths and challenges - and that you would enjoy. Consider your hobbies and the skills you have gained from them as potential leads into jobs
- Think about what adaptations you may need because of co-ordination, organisation or communication problems and if they are practical in the role.
- Make a Disclosure Document that identifies your strengths first, then mentions the difficulties dyspraxia causes you and how they are minimised by your tactics, technology, or help from the employer (an example is available from the Foundation)
- Be prepared if necessary to take small steps at first towards achieving your goal. You may need to complete a course of study or training first
- Be realistic – if you are too ambitious you may be unsuccessful
- You may get the opportunity to do a job on a voluntary basis first. This can be very helpful for your CV and to find more about yourself
- Only apply for posts that you really want. There is little point wasting time and money on applying for a job that is really not suited to you, unless you want interview practice.
- Don't be too put off if a very small part of the job might be difficult for you some changes might be possible
- It may be possible to turn hobbies into jobs - for example, photography or writing
- Consider applying to organisations who have a positive record with people with disabilities, the Business Disability Forum members are a good start.
- Consider using the TwoTicks guaranteed interview scheme.

Of course, some people who have dyspraxia are very good at the jobs that can cause problems to others with dyspraxia, e.g. working with computers. We are all different!

### **Applying for a job**

When you have planned, prepared and made your choice, the next step is to apply for a job.

- Prepare your typed CV. Get as much help as you can, for example, by getting someone to assist you in drafting your covering letter. Nowadays everyone expects a typed letter so handwriting can be avoided.
- If possible, download the application form into your computer and type your answers. Otherwise, photocopy the application form and write it out in rough first, to ensure you send in a neat and well-presented form.
- Consider seeking help for any of the above from your local Careers Service or Job Centre

### **Interviews**

- Ask somebody to give you a mock interview
- Make a list of likely questions that you will be asked
- Think of an interesting question you can ask about the company/work at the interview
- Plan your route to the interview in advance – perhaps even have a trial run to make sure that you arrive on time
- Choose the clothes you are going to wear for the interview well in advance. Do not wear anything brand-new. You need to be comfortable and smart.
- You should not be asked any direct questions about your dyspraxia or any other health issues at interview, however you may be asked questions relating to skills or activities like “Would you be able to stand up all day?”

## **Disclosing dyspraxia**

Should you tell your potential employer about your dyspraxia? The law says you do not have to.

Each person's circumstances are unique: only you will have an idea of how your dyspraxia is likely to affect your ability to do the job. If your dyspraxia is only mild, for example, it may not affect your ability to do that particular job. If you do disclose, however, do so in a positive way and point out your strengths. For example, prepare a Disclosure Document and take it in with you.

## **The Disability Provisions of the Equalities Act**

The Equalities Act provides additional rights to people with "protected characteristics". Disability is one of those characteristics and the definition covers those people whose ability to carry out normal day to day activities is adversely affected by a physical or mental impairment on a long-term basis. Under the terms of the Act, an employer must make reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled employees' needs.

If you feel that your dyspraxia falls into the definition as described in the Act, (and for almost all people with dyspraxia it does) it is best to let your employer know before you start the job that you may need extra support. Be prepared to educate your employer about dyspraxia, to ask for the support to which you are entitled and be ready with information about dyspraxia. The Dyspraxia Foundation publishes a leaflet, *Dyspraxia in the Workplace for Employers* and a larger Guide *Working with Dyspraxia – a hidden asset*. (See at the end of this leaflet for details.)

## **Strategies at work**

Employers can do a lot to help staff with dyspraxia, but often their lack of knowledge means that they are not sure what to do. It may be helpful if you can provide some personal guidance with simple things which will help you to work more efficiently. If you think that specialist advice would be helpful you can also look for this from the Jobcentre Plus Access to Work team. This scheme provides a free assessment of the adjustments that would help you and part funding for their implementation. Small businesses will get more funding than large, up to 100% of costs. Help is also available for the self employed, usually at no cost.

The following strategies have helped a large number of people with Dyspraxia. You will need to identify those which are most appropriate for the work you are doing.

**Time management:** Before you start work, plan what you have to do that day and prioritise your tasks. Use a list or if it works for you visual aids such as mind maps, flow charts, and spider diagrams. Ask your employer to help you with planning and prioritising and at the same time make clear (tactfully!) that you would prefer them not to 'hover over' you and that you find being put under additional pressure difficult.

Many people with dyspraxia respond well to routines – if this is appropriate for your job ask your employer to provide a structured timetable to help you focus on each task. Ask your employer if there is a time management course which you can attend and ask for plenty of advance warning of deadlines. Ask your employer for a clock nearby, or bring one in and put it on your desk, to help with your allocation of time to task.

Make use of a diary or calendar on your computer to help with planning by adding tasks as you agree them and also putting in reminders of deadlines for tasks before they are due.

**Organisation:** Organise your workload into urgent and non-urgent piles. Break down tasks and projects into manageable chunks. Think of large projects as a series of small tasks with a beginning and an end. Reward yourself when you have finished a task. Make sure

that you take regular breaks to maximise your productivity and concentration, but do that when you have finished a task or are stuck and need a break, don't interrupt yourself.

Make your employer aware that it can be helpful for you to be able to colour code folders and files for particular tasks – you may find that other employees find this helpful too.

**Instructions:** Write down instructions clearly and keep them for safe reference. Ask your employer to take time to clarify instructions if necessary. Follow the instructions the first time you do a job, even if you think you remember how you were shown. In that way you can be sure they work for next time. At meetings, use a tape recorder to help you to remember what you have to do.

**Working at a Computer:** Shortly after you take up a new job you should ask for a DSE (Display Screen Equipment) assessment (this is a Health and Safety procedure which should be carried out for all staff regardless of disability). This will help you to adopt the most comfortable position at your desk in relation to your computer and may help to identify adjustments which are specific to you. It may be good for you to use a specialist ergonomic keyboard or mouse. Slowing down the mouse can help, as can using keyboard shortcuts, if you find the mouse particularly difficult to manipulate. You may also find it useful to change the background colour of your computer. Ask for a document slope if you are copy-typing a document to allow you to keep a good posture and follow the text of the original document down the page.

Depending on the focus of your dyspraxia you may also benefit from a specialist chair, or footrest. The Access to Work scheme can help with the cost of these.

**Operating office machines:** Keep clear instructions on how to operate photocopiers, fax machines, printers etc. Store the instructions in a fixed place next to these machines - then they can serve as a memory jogger for other people too.

**Written work:** Use your word processor's grammar and spell-checks and consider asking someone to proof-read your work. If you are proofreading your own work then put the draft to one side for a while before going back to read it with "fresh eyes". If appropriate, ask for speech recognition software to help with writing and proof-reading tools that read back to you.

Make use of templates for documents which are often used- if you use a computer keep these in a master templates folder. You may also find it helpful to make a template for telephone messages to make sure that you capture all the key information.

If you are required to read large quantities of written work it may be helpful to enlarge the text and print the documents for reading. For some people, use of a coloured transparency overlay or printing documents on pale coloured paper can often be easier on the eye than black print on white. You may be able to ask your employer for help by suggesting that other members of staff read long documents and then provide a resume.

**Coping with distraction:** You could look into the possibility of flexi-time - coming in early or leaving late. A partition round your desk or wearing headphones can also help to reduce distractions. Colleagues should be made aware that your concentration is easily disturbed. A "do not disturb" sign will help others to understand when you need to concentrate. It may not be possible to make use of this all day so you may need to agree with your employer that this would be helpful for certain periods of the day.

**Attitude:** Try to be as calm and positive as possible. You might want to think about using basic mind and body relaxation exercises to help you to reduce your stress levels and thus improve your overall performance. Assertiveness training may help you to communicate more effectively at work. It is important to show your employer that you have many strengths; and that you want to do a good job and can achieve this, with the right support.

## Further Reading

*Living with Dyspraxia* by Mary Colley published Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2006

*Transition Employability & Job Retention for Young People with Developmental Co-ordination Disorder/Dyspraxia and Related Difficulties*. Pub: The Dyscovery Centre 2001

*Working with Dyspraxia - Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers* by Key 4 Learning from the Dyspraxia Foundation, 2012

*Dyslexia in the Workplace* by Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody. Published by Whurr Publications, 2000

## Further Information

**Equality and Human Rights Commission**, Freepost RRLG-GHUX-CTR Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester, M4 3EQ Tel 0845 604 6610

**Equality Advisory Support Service** is a government funded helpline that has replaced the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Helpline. It provides information advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues. May be able to help in cases of unfair dismissal. Tel: 0800 444 205 [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

**Jobcentre Plus. Access to Work** – A service for those already in work or self employed. For further details, <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview> or ring 020 8426 3110.

Ask to see the Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) at your local major job centre. They will also be able to advise you on training, supported employment, *Access to Work* and *Work Choice* and other schemes for disabled people etc. <https://www.gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled>

**Disability Rights UK** 12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London, EC1V 8AF, Tel 0207250 3222 Publishes material on employment for disabled people

**Shaw Trust** Shaw Trust Enquiries, Fox Talbot House, Greenways Business Park, Bellinger Close, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN15 1BN Tel: 01255 716350 Training and employment for disabled people [www.shaw-trust.org.uk](http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk)

**Evenbreak Job Agency** [www.evenbreak.co.uk](http://www.evenbreak.co.uk) Tel: 0845 658 5717

Further information available from:

Dyspraxia Foundation, 8 West Alley Hitchin Herts SG5 1EG

Helpline Tel: 01462 454986

Admin Tel: 01462 455016

Fax: 01462 455052

Web: [www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

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