

# DCD Diagnosis Advocacy Information Sheet



## Advocacy Toolkit

### What is Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)?

DCD is a chronic motor skill disorder seen in children and youth, which significantly affects activities of daily living, school performance, and leisure activities.<sup>1,2</sup> In order to meet DCD diagnostic criteria, the motor deficits must not be the result of any other known medical or neurological condition (such as cerebral palsy or a neurodegenerative disorder).<sup>1</sup>

### What is the occupational therapist's role in advocating for a DCD diagnosis?

One of the key roles and competencies of occupational therapists is advocating for the occupational potential, occupational performance, and occupational engagement of clients.<sup>3</sup> Establishing a DCD diagnosis is an important first step to help a child and family receive appropriate treatment and care. If you suspect a child/client has motor coordination difficulties, having them seen by a family doctor or pediatrician is critical to ensure that the movement problems are not due to any other physical, neurological, or behavioural disorders, and to determine whether more than one disorder may be present.<sup>4</sup> Although only a doctor or pediatrician (and psychologists in some jurisdictions) can make a DCD diagnosis, the occupational therapist can play a pivotal role in advocating for a diagnosis of DCD in a client.

### What can the occupational therapist do to advocate for a DCD diagnosis?

The following framework (adapted from<sup>5,6,7</sup>) can guide your actions:



## 1. Identify the issue

- ✓ Child/client with motor coordination difficulties
- ✓ Speak with parents
- ✓ Speak with daycare/preschool or classroom teacher

## 2. Gather the facts

### OT assessment

- ✓ Complete assessment to confirm presence of motor coordination difficulties
- ✓ Determine severity of the difficulties and the impact of the motor coordination difficulties on the child's daily functioning

## 3. What's the message?

- ✓ Document key findings of occupational therapy assessment and observations, including how assessment findings support diagnostic criteria A and B
- ✓ Include key information from parents and teachers
- ✓ Be clear and concise

## 4. Build support

- ✓ Engage family to speak to family doctor or pediatrician
- ✓ Engage teacher to write letter(s) to family and doctor

## 5. Communicate the message

- ✓ Engage the family to speak to family doctor or pediatrician
- ✓ Ensure occupational therapy assessment results get into the hands of the doctor or pediatrician (e.g., send report with a cover letter [see template here: <http://bit.ly/2D8IDEY>] about the importance of diagnosis and/or meet in person to discuss)

## 6. Monitor, assess and adjust

- ✓ Follow-up with the doctor to ensure occupational therapy information was received
- ✓ Offer opportunity for discussion
- ✓ Address any requests from the physician or pediatrician

*This document was prepared in March 2018 and will be updated as new evidence emerges.*

## References

1. Blank R, Smits-Engelsman B, Polatajko H, Wilson P. European Academy for Childhood Disability (EACD): Recommendations on the definition, diagnosis, and intervention of developmental coordination disorder (long version). *Dev Med Child Neurol.* 2012;54:54-93.
2. Chung A, Callanen A. Clinical Review: Developmental Coordination Disorder (Occupational Therapy). CINAHL Information Systems, Rehabilitation Reference Center, 2016.
3. College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC). Essential Competencies of Practice for Occupational Therapists in Canada, 2011. Retrieved from <https://cotbc.org/library/cotbc-standards/essential-competencies/>
4. Harris SR, Mickelson ECR, Zwicker JG. Diagnosis and management of developmental coordination disorder. *Can Med Assoc J.* 2015;187:659-665.
5. Patton MQ. *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use.* New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2011.
6. Patton MQ. *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2012.
7. Vancouver Coastal Health. Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health: Advocacy Guideline and Resources, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.vch.ca/Documents/Population-Health-Advocacy-Guideline-and-Resources.pdf>

[Access the full Toolkit here](#)



*This document was developed by Giovanna Boniface, Stephanie Glegg, Ivonne Montgomery, and Dr. Jill Zwicker with funding support from a Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) REACH Award and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children. Stephanie Glegg is supported by a CIHR Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship, the Canadian Child Health Clinician Scientist Program, a UBC Public Scholars Award and Four-Year Fellowship, and the Sunny Hill Foundation. Dr. Zwicker is a MSFHR Scholar and is funded by the Canadian Child Health Clinician Scientist Program, BC Children's Hospital Research Institute, Sunny Hill Foundation, and Canadian Institutes of Health Research.*