

Dyspraxia—Hints and Tips for Teenagers!



The information included in this advice sheet was gathered from teenagers with dyspraxia, their parents and some of the professionals who work with them. As each person with dyspraxia has a unique profile of strengths and difficulties, the strategies that work will vary from individual to individual. We hope you find some new ideas here!

Getting dressed

- ◆ Spills are less noticeable on patterned fabrics. Camouflage patterns are particularly good.
- ◆ Avoid clothes with tight neck-holes as these are difficult to get on and off.
- ◆ Choose trousers with deep, zipped pockets. Always keep the same things in the same pockets so you can check easily if you have everything you need.
- ◆ Use a carabiner to attach important items (such as your keys) to your belt loops.
- ◆ When tying shoe laces, use a 'double wrap' for the first knot. This is less likely to slip so that tying a bow is easier. There are lots of YouTube videos demonstrating different ways to tie laces – find the one that suits you best.

Brushing teeth and 'grooming'

- ◆ A pump-action toothpaste dispenser may be easier to handle than a standard tube of toothpaste.
- ◆ If you are fussy about the taste of toothpaste you may prefer a non-foaming non-flavoured variety, such as OraNurse.
- ◆ If your balance isn't great you may find it easier to sit down whilst brushing your teeth and hair.
- ◆ An electric toothbrush may be useful. Just hold it on each tooth and work around your mouth for a great clean. Use a disclosing tablet once a week just to make sure you are cleaning them well.
- ◆ Using a de-tangler hair conditioner or spray should make it easier to brush your hair after washing.
- ◆ For lads, having some stubble is quite acceptable. Beard trimmers can be easier to use than a razor. For young ladies, an electric 'lady shaver' is good for legs and under arms.

Washing/bathing

- ◆ Use an 'all in one' shampoo/body wash to save getting confused by all the different bottles in the bathroom.
- ◆ If you have a tendency to 'daydream' in the shower or bath, set a noisy timer to remind you to get out (or to move on to the next part of the task, such as rinsing your hair)
- ◆ Putting on a towelling dressing robe when you get out of the bath/shower will help to dry parts of your body that are more difficult to reach. Sit down to finish off the other bits with a smaller towel as large bath-sheets are more difficult to handle.

Organisation for school/college/work

- ◆ Get into the habit of making your lunch, organising your bag and checking your timetable the night before.
- ◆ If you have to take something special with you to school/college/work, attach a brightly coloured sticky-note to the front door the night before to remind you.
- ◆ Laminate and colour-code a small timetable and keep this to hand in your bag or jacket so that you can check it often. Matching the colours on your timetable to the colour of the exercise books used for that lesson will also help with your organisation.
- ◆ Choose a bag that has external pockets. Always keep the same things in these pockets so that you can quickly check that you have the important things that you need, for example your planner and pens.
- ◆ 'Rucksack' style bags that go over both shoulders are better for your posture and easier to manage than those that go over one shoulder and across your body. If you choose a bag with a quick-release strap, you could keep one shoulder strap done up and secure the second strap once the bag is on your back.

Organisation at home

- ◆ Identify a place to 'off load' all of your stuff as soon as you come in from school/college/work, for example keep a plastic box kept next to the front door.
- ◆ Organise items such as stationery & toiletries into coloured boxes. Put a label or picture on the outside to help you find things quickly.
- ◆ Have a 'dirty laundry' basket in your room and use it!
- ◆ Keep a white board in your bedroom for writing notes to yourself about things you need to remember. Check it often and wipe off things as you deal with them.
- ◆ Create a mnemonic to help you check that you have the important things with you each time you leave the house e.g. 'MPK' for 'money, phone, keys'. You can also tap the pocket in which you usually keep these items as you say them for an extra prompt.
- ◆ Develop routines for specific times of the day, such as a morning or evening routine. When you want to introduce something new into an established routine you will have to think about doing so consciously for several weeks before it becomes 'automatic'. Use sticky notes and pictures to remind you in the meantime.
- ◆ There are various Apps that you can use to help with organisation, or just use an alarm or reminder calendar on your phone to help you remember important dates or meetings.

In the kitchen

- ◆ Developing 'kitchen skills' is important for your future independence, but takes practice.
- ◆ Identify (and agree with your parents if appropriate) a couple of skills that you want to focus on, for example peeling vegetables or grating cheese. Find videos on YouTube demonstrating techniques for completing these tasks and have a go. Don't give up – practice is definitely required!
- ◆ Tools such as knives and peelers may be easier to handle if they have a bit of weight to them and have a chunky handle. Try a few to see what suits your hands best.
- ◆ Look for ring-pull openers on cans to avoid having to use tin openers, which can be very tricky.
- ◆ Silicone cookware can be good as it doesn't slip or get hot.
- ◆ Try wearing rubber gloves or use a rubber gripper to open stiff jar lids.
- ◆ Use some non-slip matting (often available from high street discount stores) under chopping boards and other kitchen utensils to keep them stable.
- ◆ Use a timer (or app on your phone or tablet) so that you know start and finishing times.
- ◆ Build up your skills one at a time. Don't expect to be able to prepare a full roast dinner for your family straight away!

Hobbies & leisure activities

- ◆ Don't worry about what other teenagers are doing. Identify a hobby or leisure activity that interests you and investigate how you can do it locally. You will probably meet like-minded people who you will enjoy being with.
- ◆ It is important to keep active for your long term health and fitness. Identify a sport or physical activity that appeals to you – this doesn't have to be a 'mainstream' activity, but may be something like climbing, canoeing or cycling.

Writing or typing?

- ◆ Try different shaped pens/pencils to find one that suits you. You may prefer one that has a chunky barrel and a bit of weight so that you can 'feel' it in your hand more easily.
- ◆ Typing is an important life skill and it is worth putting in time to teach yourself properly. There are lots of free typing programmes on the internet – find one that appeals to you.
- ◆ You may find a touch screen easier to use, for example an iPad or tablet.
- ◆ Set up a system for filing and storing work on your computer so that you can find it again easily. Keeping to the system will prevent you from wasting time looking for things later on.

Social skills

- ◆ Remember you are a unique individual and you don't have to do things that make you uncomfortable just to fit in.
- ◆ Consider a social pastime, like drama that may help with communication, team work and body awareness.
- ◆ Volunteer with an organisation or activity that interests you, such as a drama group or at your local community centre. Great for learning new skills, making friends and for self-esteem.
- ◆ Join a club – photography, rambling, computing – something enjoyable where you can have success and be with people who have similar interests.
- ◆ Rehearse social situations where you might feel uncomfortable. Ask for advice about how to deal with situations from people you know and trust, like your brother, sister or cousins.
- ◆ People-watch with someone you can trust. Look at their body language and social cues. Discuss them together so that you can interpret situations yourself more easily in the future.
- ◆ If you feel uncomfortable about something someone says, especially if this is online, let someone that you trust know. This could be a sibling, parent or another adult. Unfortunately some people like to take advantage of others and it's not always easy to spot their intentions.
- ◆ Don't beat yourself up when things go wrong. We ALL make mistakes and experience disasters.

Useful links:

- ◆ Some useful information for teachers about how dyspraxia affects students at secondary school, including a link to some Dyspraxia Foundation Secondary School Guidelines, can be found here:
<http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/dyspraxia-children/secondary-school-age/>
- ◆ View a great film about dyspraxia, produced by a young lady called Abi Hocking who has dyspraxia here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssfbXEc3tKc>
- ◆ <http://www.dyspraxichteens.org.uk/forum/> is a safe discussion forum for teenagers with dyspraxia to 'meet' others who experience similar challenges and to share ideas about things that work.
- ◆ If you feel that someone is taking advantage of you online or is asking you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable you should talk to someone you trust, or contact CEOP
http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/help/
- ◆ If you need to talk to someone in confidence contact Childline on 0800 1111:
<http://www.childline.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>
- ◆ Written for teenagers in Ireland, there is some useful information in this booklet (free to download) for all young people with dyspraxia: http://www.sess.ie/sites/all/modules/wysiwyg/tinymce/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/Categories/ASD/18tips_teens.pdf

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