

DYSGRAPHIA

PART 1

“It’s like my hand just won’t do what my brain is telling it to. Like it’s lost a connection.”

Amy. Age 12.

What it is

The recognition and diagnosis of dysgraphia is rather contentious issue. Use of the term is increasingly common, with some suggestion that dysgraphia belongs to the same family of developmental disorders as dyspraxia and dyslexia, although it is not listed as a specific learning difficulty in the SEND Code of Practice. Some people consider that dysgraphia goes hand in hand with dyspraxia; however, because at the current time there is not a recognised list of agreed core symptoms/indicators, the Dyspraxia Foundation prefers to use the term 'handwriting difficulties'.



What it means

Handwriting difficulties are more than simply 'untidy' writing; they can affect the ability to write legibly, fluently, comfortably and effortlessly. They can limit people's ability to reach their potential as they may struggle to express their thoughts on paper or may avoid writing altogether.

According to Angela Webb, the Chair of the National Handwriting Association:
"In terms of a diagnosis and use of a term to label a certain condition, we go by

the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – 5th edition (DSM V). In order for a diagnosis to be given, there has first to be a standardised way of measuring the performance with set and agreed cut-off points. At present, there is no consensus here.

Although the term 'dysgraphia' appeared in DSM IV, it was described as "a generalised difficulty with written expression" and did not specify the three main types of possible handwriting deficiency: orthographic, motor, or perceptual. Not surprisingly, given the range of components which might cause a problem, the term dysgraphia does not appear in DSM V, despite its frequent use in the US literature.'



It is sometimes believed that all children with dyspraxia/DCD have dysgraphia, but this is not the case. Although a common feature of dyspraxia/DCD is difficulty with handwriting, some diagnosed children can produce tidy and legible handwriting (although this is usually at the expense of quantity) and others may produce writing which is fast, though poorly controlled. Conversely, poor handwriting can exist independent of dyspraxia/DCD, particularly if the difficulties are not motor in origin, or if poor motor control results from a different aetiology, such as impulsivity. Poor handwriting is also frequently reported in children who meet the criteria for other developmental disorders, such as ADHD, Dyslexia and mild spectrum Autism.

To be continued...

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