

## Introduction

For many years the Royal College of Nursing has recognised the impact of dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia on its members.

In 2010 the RCN published a toolkit for nursing staff and detailed guide for managers and practitioners designed to raise awareness and provide advice and support to help those affected to reach their potential in whatever role or setting they work.

This pocket guide provides a brief overview of the three conditions and provides **top tips** for dealing with some of the most commonly encountered areas of difficulty.

Each individual affected by one of these conditions will have a very unique personal profile. No one individual is likely to experience difficulties in all of the potential areas and support for them must be individualised.

## Disability legislation

A range of legislation has been passed addressing the needs of individuals with a recognised disability. The most recent Equality Act (HMSO, 2010) brings together previous equality and diversity related legislation.

Specific learning differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia are all classified as a **disability** under the terms of this Act. It is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the basis of their disability. Individuals are entitled to receive **reasonable adjustments** to help them overcome their difficulties.

Once adjustments have been put in place, the individual is expected to demonstrate they are **fit for practice**. This means they **must** meet all the competencies and skills that are required for the role.

## Dyslexia

Dyslexia is probably the best known of the three conditions and the most prevalent, affecting 10 per cent of the population.

Initially dyslexia was seen as a problem with literacy as it is known to have an effect on reading, spelling and writing. However as our knowledge and understanding of it has developed we have found that it affects processing of information. This may cause difficulties with speed of processing information, memory, organisation and sequencing of tasks.

Adults in particular are known to develop very successful coping strategies to overcome any difficulties caused by their dyslexia. The key to success is to identify areas of difficulty and develop appropriate strategies.

## Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) which occurs when parts of the brain fail to mature properly as they develop. It leads to motor co-ordination difficulties which may affect both gross and/or fine motor movements. These may lead to problems with balance, causing the person to appear clumsy (gross movement), or result in poor manual dexterity causing them to frequently drop things or struggle to manipulate instruments (fine movement).

In addition, the individual may experience difficulties with organisation. In adults it is often these weak organisational skills, either related to the formulation of ideas or general planning that create the most significant difficulties.

## Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is probably the most controversial of the three conditions. There is widespread debate surrounding its true nature, which makes it difficult to both diagnose and to estimate its incidence.

Dyscalculia is much more than being bad at maths and is linked to a total inability to conceptualise numbers. It is therefore imperative that individuals are properly diagnosed and not incorrectly 'labelled' as having dyscalculia when they have weak maths skills.

## Disclosure

The choice of whether or not to disclose a specific learning difference is a personal one and is something that needs to be considered carefully.

From a personal perspective staff need to remember that unless they disclose their disability, they will not be able to receive the 'reasonable adjustments' that they require and are therefore putting themselves at a disadvantage.

**To enable individuals to feel comfortable to disclose it is therefore important that we create a culture of inclusivity. This will help individuals to feel able to discuss their specific needs without fear of discrimination or negative attitudes.**

## Sources of help

**The British Dyslexia Association**  
[www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)

**Dyslexia Action** [www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk](http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk)

**The Dyspraxia Foundation**  
[www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

**The Dyscalculia Centre** [www.dyscalculia.me.uk](http://www.dyscalculia.me.uk)

**Royal College of Nursing: Diversity and Equality**  
[www.rcn.org/support/diversity](http://www.rcn.org/support/diversity)

## Further information

Her Majesty's Stationery Office (2010) *Equality Act*, HMSO: London

*RCN Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia: a toolkit for nursing staff* [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications)

*Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia; a guide for managers and practitioners*  
[www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications)

## Reading – top tips

- Give yourself enough time to read things and re-read them if necessary.
- Use a notebook to record difficult words and remind you of their meaning.
- Carry a list of common abbreviations and their meaning.
- Use a coloured overlay, if appropriate.
- Print things on cream or off-white paper.
- Set up your computer screen to use a coloured background.
- Use highlighters to emphasise key points.
- Ask colleagues to create documents which are in a **dyslexia friendly** format.

## Writing – top tips

- Give yourself enough time to write up notes and other paperwork.
- Try and find somewhere quiet where you are less likely to be interrupted.
- Divide your ideas into sections and tackle one section at a time.
- Devise **templates** or checklists for different types of documentation.
- Develop effective checking procedures and proofreading skills.
- Use a computer to write notes on if one is available.

## Spelling – top tips

- Keep a notebook containing the correct spelling of words that you need to use regularly. This could be divided into sections on drugs or medical terms etc.
- When you need to spell an unfamiliar word – check with a colleague or in a dictionary then add it to your list.
- Devise mnemonics (a rhyme or saying) to help you remember difficult words.
- Write words that you are trying to learn on post it notes or small cards and look at them when you get a chance – the more you look at them the quicker you will learn them.
- Use an electronic dictionary if possible.

## Memory – top tips

- Invent and use mnemonics, eg the basic life support (BLS) reminder DR ABC for **d**anger, **r**esponse, **a**irway, **b**reathing, **c**irculation.
- Always carry a pen and paper so you can write things down.
- Use visual methods such as diagrams and mind maps to help you remember.
- Set realistic targets for example to learn one new fact every two days.
- Record information on a digital voice recorder or mobile phone and listen to it when you can.
- Use repetition, the more you repeat something the quicker you remember it.

## Organisation – top tips

- Use to-do lists.
- Use timers or alarms to remind you of set time deadlines.
- Use coloured pens and highlighters to help you organise and prioritise.
- Devise prompt sheets for frequently encountered activities.
- Be honest with colleagues, tell them if you find interruptions difficult and ask them to avoid distracting you if possible.
- Think about where you choose to work – some areas will be more prone to interruptions or sudden changes in routine and might not be best for you.



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**The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.**

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