

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a specific learning difficulty which fundamentally impacts a person's ability to understand and process numbers. It is the most severe form of maths learning difficulty.

Around 1 in 4 people in the UK experience difficulties with learning maths, which can be due to a variety of reasons including those with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, or those who have poor working memory.

Only around 6% of the population have dyscalculia.

People with dyscalculia struggle to see relationships between numbers and appreciate their values and magnitudes. This can make everyday tasks very tricky.

Signs of Dyscalculia in children

The following may be signs of a child with dyscalculia:

- They took a long time to learn to count objects, especially if the objects are different and not in a row.
- They have difficulty matching a number to a quantity and have to count each object to know how many there are.
- They use their fingers for counting, and struggle to remember how to do calculations.
- They always start counting from one, they cannot count forwards from another number or count backwards.
- They don't remember number facts and times tables, and struggle with maths concepts.
- Numbers and maths upsets them.
- They don't have a good reference to numbers. For example, they would struggle to answer this question: "If a bag of 4 apples costs £3.00 what might a bag of 4 oranges cost? - £4.00, £20.00 or £100.00?"
- They have always struggled with maths but may not have problems with literacy or other subjects.
- They have difficulty with telling the time and understanding money.

Identification

Some schools use computer programmes to screen for dyscalculia, but screeners cannot diagnose dyscalculia, they can only suggest that a child is showing characteristics similar to dyscalculia.

A formal diagnosis should be carried out by a Specialist Teacher Assessor with a level 7 qualification in the assessment of dyscalculia or equivalent AMBDA dyscalculia award.

School support

A child does not need a diagnosis of dyscalculia to receive support in school. The school has a duty to make adjustments to improve their access to learning. The school should make the following simple adjustments to support those who have difficulty learning maths:

- Use of a calculator
- Use of some concrete manipulatives such as a number line or times table square
- Paper with larger squares to help recording of information.
- Extra time
- Working with a buddy
- Time with a teaching assistant to go over the work, perhaps in a small group
- Access to computer programmes to help consolidate learning.

Some children may need support from a Specialist Teacher with a qualification in Dyscalculia and Maths Learning Difficulties.

Dyscalculia in Adults

Dyscalculia is lifelong. Adults with dyscalculia will have a history of difficulty with maths and numbers but may not have struggled with other subjects.

- They have learnt how to follow a process for a calculation. But can't explain what they are doing or apply the same calculation in a different context.
- Struggle to use an analogue clock and understand terms such as "5 past" when the hand is pointing to the number 1.
- Struggle to make sense of big numbers. Matching money to an item does not come automatically.
- Struggle to manage a budget, understand a restaurant bill, or check a till receipt is correct.
- Can't remember pin numbers or telephone numbers.
- Can't work out travel times or distances. Or read timetables.

Dyscalculia can be a disability under the Equality Act 2010. Employers can offer the following simple adjustments to help in the workplace

- Use of a calculator and digital clock
- Extra time for numerical tasks
- Support from a colleague for certain tasks
- Assistive technology (limited options are available)