

Children With Disabilities Assessment and Communication Tools

Assessment Tools for working with children / young people with SEND and their families.

- Ecomaps / Circles of support (as per EHC plans) / Genograms
- Chronologies
- Signs of Safety
- Notes for my Conference/ LAC documentation
- Daily hassles Assessment Questionnaires
- Risk and Resilience Matrix
- Capacity to Change Tool
- Dash RIC / Domestic abuse Safety Planning Tools
- 3 Houses / Magic Carpet / Ladders
- Family History Snake
- Motivational Assessment Scale (Behaviour Tool)
- Carers Assessments

Disability Specific Communication Tools

Social workers from the Children's Disability Services communicate with children in various ways. Communication is not straightforward and time needs to be taken to consider the best way(s) in which to communicate with children to gather their views and wishes. There is no one way to communicate with Disabled children, different methods / tools will be required for different kinds of disabilities and all children are unique. There is no "One tool fits all". Even though a child may use one communication method, they may still have their own unique idiosyncrasies within the way they communicate.

The following are the kinds of communication methods used by disabled children (although this not a fully inclusive list of all communication methods):-

- Makaton (use of signs and symbols)
- Widget (converts written language into symbols)
- Pecs (Picture Exchange Communication)

- British Sign Language (There are many different dialects)
- Sign supported English (Sign Language alongside English)
- Eye Gaze Technology – (For cognitively able yet severely physically disabled children and young people).
- Chailey Communication System – This is a system unique to Chailey.
- Visual Communication Books
- Visual Strips / Teach Strips / Visual Timetables
- Braille
- Talking Mats
- Photographs (Of recognisable people / places / objects)
- Objects of reference (For example using a key to demonstrate a car ride).
- Hands on Communication (For Multiply Impaired Children).
- Sometimes the only way to establish a child's communication is to observe them in a range of settings.

These are in addition to the kinds of communication that all children use, such as verbal communication, written communication, drawings and communication by behaviour and presentation. Children and young people may also use more than one kind of communication methods or a combination of communication methods. Therefore a child may use a range of communication methods to get across a message / story / account.

Social Worker skills required:-

- Social Workers working with SEND Children require the same skills as any other social worker and more.
- Social Workers have to think about the usual ways of engaging and communicating with children and their families and consider whether traditional methods may help and whether other alternative, (somewhat controversial) ways may also work. For example, a disabled child may prefer not to look at you but may initiate physical contact.
- Social Workers may have to use trial and error and spend a great deal of time trying to plan and understand how to best communicate with individual children.

- Social Workers may need to prepare in advance by speaking with people who know the child well, the social worker should also seek advice from the speech and language therapist, they may have to meet the child a number of times so as to familiarise the child and themselves with the child (and setting) so that they feel comfortable and able to engage. For example preparing a SEND child / young person for ABE may require multiple visits to the setting.
- Social Workers may have to use more closed / direct questions for severely disabled children.
- Social Workers may need to use much shorter single sentences.
- Social Workers will need to consider removing any distractions in the room, or adding a focus point for the child to keep them calm so they are able to self soothe if they become anxious / upset during the meeting.
- Social workers cannot and should not rely on parents / professionals interpretation of the child's words, communication or behaviours alone. The social worker will need to analyse all available information in order to formulate evidence based conclusions.
- Social workers may need to meet with the child / young person on a number of separate occasions due to the child's attention capacity.
- Skills of direct observation – these skills will be required and used much more for severely disabled children.
- Social worker's need to explore all possible reasons for behaviour, as opposed to assuming that the behaviour is associated to the disability alone.

Glossary:-

ISEND - Inclusion Special Educational needs and Disability.

SEND - Special Educational needs and Disability.

CWD – Children With Disabilities