

An Early Identification Framework for Speech, Language and Communication Needs: A 3-Step Approach

STEP 1: BE ALERT

For every child in your setting, be alert to potential speech, language and communication difficulties. As well as specifically looking out for speech and language skills, consider how children are doing with:

Playing - both on their own and with others

Interacting - with other children and adults

Responding to attempts at communication from adults and children

Understanding and following routines and instructions

Listening to adults and other children

General behaviour – this might be affected by difficulties with understanding or using language

Concerned?

YES

NO

Continue to be alert to any emerging difficulties with speech, language and communication, and to check out any of your concerns

STEP 2: CHECK IT OUT

If you have concerns, look at the child's speech, language and communication development in more detail. Check it out using resources that outline typical developmental ages and stages.

Use the 'An Early Identification Framework Explained' materials to find the resources that can help you here, and how to use them.

STEP 3: EARLY ACTION

Share your concerns and gather information from the child's parents, your SENCo and external professionals if necessary to begin to gain a picture of the child's strengths and needs.

Begin your assess-plan-do-review approach to support. Use the 'An Early Identification Framework Explained' materials to help you out with this.

Still Concerned?

YES

NO

Continue to be alert to any emerging difficulties with speech, language and communication



AN EARLY IDENTIFICATION FRAMEWORK FOR SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS

Explained!

Step 1

Some more information about what to look out for in all children

Step 2

How to check it out – some materials and information to help you to check out a child’s speech, language and communication development

Step 3

Early action – what to do once you’ve identified a child who’s struggling



“The benefits of early identification are widely recognised – identifying need at the earliest point, and then making effective provision, improves long-term outcomes for children...all early years providers are required to have arrangements in place to identify and support children with SEN or disabilities” (SEND Code of Practice 2014)

This resource provides more detail about the information in the framework. It looks at extra materials that you can use to help you identify children who are struggling as early as possible, and how to use these materials in your everyday practice.



Step 1

Some more information about what to consider in all children



For all children, consider speech, language and communication as part of your everyday observations.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are common in young children, but are often missed. In some settings as many as half of the children who attend may have delayed language development.

By considering speech, language and communication skills during your observations, you'll be able to identify and support any child who's struggling at the earliest possible time, which means better outcomes.

Playing - both on their own and with others

Are babies using play time to explore new things and to have fun with interaction? Are older children enjoying pretend games, playing with a range of activities and beginning to enjoy games and play with other children?

Interacting - with other children and adults

Are babies enjoying adult interaction, watching your face and smiling and laughing with you? Are older children enjoying the company of other children and adults? Are they talking and playing with others?

Responding to attempts at communication from adult and children

Are babies making noises in response to interaction and smiling and laughing in response to your communication? Are older children initiating talk, responding to your questions and comments and responding when other children talk and play with them?

Understanding and following routines and instructions

Are babies starting to understand familiar words like 'bye-bye' and some everyday objects? Are older children understanding simple questions and instructions, following familiar routines without having to watch other children and, when even older, understanding questions about a story they've heard?

Listening to adults and other children

Do babies look at you when you speak and watch your face, as if they're listening to you? Do older children follow instructions and understand without being shown what to do? Can they maintain their attention and listen to others in a small group?

General behaviour: this might be affected by difficulties with understanding or using language

It's important to be aware that behaviour can be a sign of underlying speech, language and communication difficulties, for example children may be withdrawn or show challenging behaviours. Older children may get frustrated if they can't make themselves understood, or display behaviour difficulties if they're not understanding language or particular social rules and routines.

Step 2

How to **check it out** – some materials and information to help you to check out a child's speech, language and communication development

Of course, babies, toddlers and young children all communicate differently, so it helps to be aware of what to expect at different ages. Use your experience and knowledge of developmental milestones and goals to help you with knowing what to expect and when for the children that you work with. You might have some ages and stages materials that you already use in your setting, or some locally developed tools that you use, to help you check out how children are doing with their development.

Some other useful resources available to help out with checking a child's development :

'What to expect, when?', **Development Matters** and **EYFS learning goals** are all useful materials and can all be found at: www.foundationyears.org.uk

Early years outcomes
www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-outcomes

Talking Point
www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Universally Speaking
www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking

You can choose how you might best use use ages and stages resources in your practice...

You could start by familiarising yourself with the expected speech, language and communication development of the ages of the children that you work with. Then, during your observations, match up what you know about typical development to what you observe.

Or, you might prefer to observe the child first and then match up your observations with the information in the ages and stages resources. Either way, it's always useful to refer back to your ages and stages resources and check out how a child is doing based on expectations for their age.

When you're checking out how a child is progressing, remember to look at ALL the parts of speech, language and communication, so look out for:

Social communication and interaction, for example, non-verbal communication skills, making friends and playing games with others

Understanding of language, for example being able to understand questions, instructions and stories

Expressive language, for example using words, sentences and telling stories

Speech, for example the pronunciation of sounds and fluency



A NOTE ON CHILDREN LEARNING ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE:

Children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL) won't necessarily be learning English in line with developmental norms for their age. The best way to check out how EAL children are doing is to check out with parents how they're progressing in their home language.

Step 3

Early action – what to do once you've identified a child who's struggling

Early action is needed for children once they've been identified as struggling with any aspect of their development. Even if it's a small delay, action at this time can prevent future difficulties. At this stage it's really important to:

- Share your concerns and gather information from the child's parents, your SENCo and external professionals if necessary to assess the child's strengths and difficulties
- Begin conversations about support. The sooner you put support in place, the better the outcomes for the child. Use the assess-plan-do-review cycle, or 'graduated approach' as it's called in the SEND Code of Practice:

More information about this approach, including questions to ask at each stage can be found in our Cracking the Code resources at www.thecommunicationtrust/early-years

ASSESS

USE YOUR OBSERVATIONS TO:

- Identify what the child is struggling with but also make a note of their strengths and interests.
- Begin or continue conversations with others, such as parents or other professionals, about what you can do to help.



REVIEW

HOW HAVE THINGS GONE?

Discuss with others involved about how effective your support has been. Check back against your observations and planned outcomes.

At this stage think about any further colleagues or specialists who might be able to help before you begin the process again.

Always
**keep the child
and their family at
the centre of your
planning and
support**

PLAN

HAVE A DISCUSSION OR MEETING TO:

Speak with parents, colleagues or any specialists who are involved to plan for what support will be put in place

Make your plan outcome focused – what do you want to improve for the child?

DO

PUT YOUR SUPPORT IN PLACE:

Implement support as planned and continue with your observations so you can see how the child is responding to your support

