

Communicating with children with additional needs

Article 12

United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

The voice of children should be at the centre of all safeguarding, and none less so for children with additional needs, including complex needs and disabilities. In all instances, children and young people should be given the opportunity to communicate their opinions, feelings and wishes and to be involved in decision making regarding their care.

A child's additional needs should not be a barrier to capturing their voice. Children, including infants, can display their emotions and well-being through a range of communication methods, including their demeanour and behaviour.

It is important not to underestimate the child's ability to communicate or make assumptions that they will be unable to do so.



CONNECTION MATTERS

Communication and connection are vital for positive wellbeing. All people want to feel seen, supported, accepted, and acknowledged. This includes children with additional needs, including complex needs and disabilities. When children have communication needs, they deserve those around to ensure they are supported to share their views, wishes and feelings.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

Some children will be nonverbal – and that's okay. Continue to support and value their nonverbal communication skills and try your best to cater to their specific needs. Just because a child is nonverbal doesn't mean that they always can't understand you, so be mindful of their different abilities.



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DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Some disabilities are physically apparent, while others are not. Every child is developmentally different, and it's essential not to make assumptions about their ability to communicate. To get the most out of your interaction, ask questions! By doing this, you will receive the needed information. After all, the more questions you ask, the better your communication skills with special needs children will get.

BE HONEST

Similarly to not making assumptions, it's essential to be honest and open when you can't understand a child. Instead of potentially further contributing to their frustration with their ability to communicate, find other ways to help them explain what they're trying to say. Taking the time to understand a child will communicate that you care and, in turn, will make the child feel valued.

BE PATIENT

Above all, remember all children are children. And all children have likes, dislikes, feelings, beliefs, and dreams, and these should never be overlooked due to the child's needs or disability. Remaining patient while they learn to communicate is essential to being supportive.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- ➔ [Communication support & practical ideas for engaging with children](#)
- ➔ [Preparing for meeting with a child and their family](#)
- ➔ ['Day in my life tool' children with disabilities \(for practitioners\) and picture supported version \(for children\)](#)
- ➔ [Communication Approach for Children and Young People with Additional Needs](#)
- ➔ The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists: [Safeguarding Children with Communication Needs](#)
- ➔ [Speech and Language UK](#) free resources to support practitioners when working with children with speech and language and communication needs, including guidance on ages and stages of speech and language development.
- ➔ [Was not heard](#)