

The speech language and communication needs descriptors consider four different factors

1. The number of aspects of communication presenting difficulties
There are four aspects to consider a) attention and listening, b) understanding c) expression d) speech sounds.
2. Degree and nature of difficulties
There are two main differences to consider a) delay (the child’s communication is following a typical pattern of development but slower than expected) b) disordered (the child’s communication is not following a typical pattern of development)
3. How these difficulties relate to the child’s overall development
Is this their only area of difficulty or is their communication in line with other areas of development?
4. Impact on the child’s functional communication
This is the impact any difficulty has on the child ability to express their needs and wants on a day to day basis. Are they only able to do this with familiar adults? Do they depend on the context to express their needs?

Aspects of communication presenting difficulties	Degree and nature of delay in communication development	Difficulties in relation to other areas of development	Impact on functional communication
No aspects of communication presenting difficulties	Communication following typical developmental pattern in relation to chronological age	Communication developing in line with other skills	Able to effectively and consistently communicate with range of people and in a range of situations
One aspect of communication presenting difficulties	Communication following typical developmental pattern but is delayed by 6-12 months	Communication developing in line with other skills but impacting on literacy and ability to access the curriculum	Able to effectively communicate with range of people (Familiar and unfamiliar) and in a range of situations – 75% of the time
Two aspects of communication presenting difficulties	Communication following typical developmental pattern but is delayed by 12-24 months, or is not following a typical pattern of development in one aspect	Communication developing more slowly than other skills, with a gap of 6-12 months	Able to effectively communicate with range of people (Familiar and unfamiliar) and in familiar situations – 75% of the time

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Three aspects of communication presenting difficulties	Communication following typical developmental pattern but is delayed by 24-36 months, or is not following a typical pattern of development in two or more aspects	Communication developing more slowly than other skills, with a gap of 12-24 months	Able to effectively communicate with familiar people and in a range of situations – 75% of the time
Four aspects of communication presenting difficulties	Communication following typical developmental pattern but is delayed by 3-4 years, or is not following a typical pattern of development in three or more aspects	Communication developing more slowly than other skills, with a gap of 24-36 months	Able to effectively communicate with familiar people and in familiar situations – 75% of the time
	Communication following typical developmental pattern but is delayed by more than 4 years, or is not following a typical pattern of development in all aspects	Communication developing more slowly than other skills, with a gap of more than 3 years	Able to effectively communicate with familiar people in familiar situations less than 75% of the time

It is a combination of these factors that helps identify a child's level of need in relation to their speech language and communication. The complete range of descriptions for each of these factors is below. The needs descriptors profile a range of different combinations of these factors to identify the overall need in relation to a child's speech language and communication development. If a descriptor is not an exact fit, go for the best fit.

Useful resources for understanding typical communication development and age expectations can be found on the [Communication Trust: Universally Speaking resources](#) web page.

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