

Working with adults, children and young people with additional needs: An Introduction to Global Developmental Delay

We hope that you will find this 'introduction' leaflet helpful. It is not intended to replace conversations that you will need to have with children, young people, their families, and the professionals who know them. Those conversations are essential to understand the uniqueness of each family member you work with to ensure that you can engage with them in the most meaningful and supportive way. Links to relevant charities, information services and research are embedded at the end of this leaflet.



The term 'developmental delay' or 'global developmental delay' is often used when a pre-school child is significantly delayed in two or more of their developmental domains, meaning they are continually delayed in meeting their developmental milestones at an expected age. These milestones might include learning to walk, learning to talk, and interacting with others socially and emotionally.

There are many different causes of global developmental delay. These can include trauma or brain injury. For some children, the delay in their development will be short term and additional support will help them overcome it, for example speech and language therapy. For other children, the delay may be more significant and lead to them being

diagnosed with a learning disability. Global developmental delay may also be diagnosed alongside another condition, for example Down's syndrome.

For some children developmental delay will be a symptom of a wider, as yet undiagnosed condition, or might be part of a rare genetic syndrome that has no known name. These families are often dealing with lots of uncertainty and may be going through several assessments and diagnostic tests at any given time. Consider signposting them to agencies such as SWAN UK (syndromes without a name) or Rare Disease UK.

You may see GDD used as an abbreviation of global developmental delay. However, in line with our commitments to children and families to write in clear accessible language, we always write acronyms out in full.

Planning for meetings, interviews and direct work

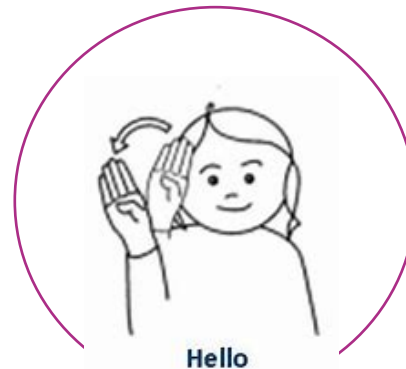


A child with global developmental delay may need you to adjust how you would usually undertake direct work or observations of time spent with their family. It is important that you establish what they need from you to make this an effective piece of work. Speaking with the adults, family members and professionals who know them will guide your planning. **These are some general tips to think about:**

- ✓ Make sure you understand how the child communicates and what their physical, emotional and social skill level is. There is a wide range of 'normal' within children's development and it is essential that you understand how this child is individually impacted by their global developmental delay.
- ✓ When deciding whether in person or remote working is more appropriate, you need to be sure whichever you choose will allow you opportunity to understand the child's needs, the care-giving environment and enable them to engage meaningfully. It is important to ask if they have a preference.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to be creative.
- ✓ Think about using different communication practice aides (more on these below).
- ✓ Let the child take the lead to set the pace-listen.
- ✓ Give enough time for the direct work or observation of contact.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to be creative.

Alternative Methods of Communication

Makaton and Signalong are Sign Supported English Systems. Many people with a learning disability use or recognise signs, either alongside or instead of spoken language. Basic signs (greetings and introductions) can be used to establish a rapport. Links to websites where this information can be found are at the end of this document.



Widgets and other picture exchange systems are symbols and images that can help with communication. These can be customised for an individual and can include words as well as pictures. They can be used creatively to ask questions about likes, dislikes and wishes, as well as used to communicate wants and needs. Links to websites with information on these communication systems can be found at the end of this document.

Introducing Yourself to Children & Families

The templates for the introductory letters are editable. These letters can be sent to a child to introduce yourself and share details about the purpose of your interview/visit. Use of pictures and images is appropriate in these letters, particularly when working with very young children. All information should be provided in accessible formats.

If a letter is not appropriate, think about how you can introduce yourself in advance of the interview. Would a call or video call be useful?

After the direct work/interview has finished it is important to know how your recommendations to the court and the outcome of any hearing will be shared with the child. Would they like you to write to them again or use other ways of communicating? Is this best communicated via solicitors, family members or professionals, and if so, why? 'Easy read' letters and judgements are becoming more widespread within the family court and you can advocate for these from the judges and magistrates. These outcome letters can form a valuable part of a child's life story work. Even if the child cannot understand the letter at their current age or developmental stage it is something they may be able to understand as they get older.



Safeguarding:

Children, young people and adults with additional needs are at greater risk of abuse due to communication barriers, the signs of abuse being misunderstood or minimised, increased isolation and greater dependence on others for their care, a lack of education to help them to stay safe, and inadequate support. It is important to work proactively to protect vulnerable children and adults, be professionally curious and respectfully challenge others if we have concerns.

How can you be sure you're making the right adjustments?

The short answer is you can't. However, if you're flexible and willing to try different approaches, you're far more likely to succeed.

Using Cafcass Direct Work Practice Aides



Cafcass direct work practice aides are designed to be used with all children, young people and adults. Here are some tips and ideas to help you use them:

- Limit the number of 'pages' or screens you are using from the practice aides. This allows for clear questioning with visual support. Don't try to complete the entire practice aide unless this is something the child or young person wants to do and can manage.
- Share the sections of the practice aide you intend to use with the adults who care for the child or young person in advance of the session. This could include educators or support staff. They may be able to offer guidance to you about how best to engage with the child or young person.
- Include pictures or images in letters to the judge. These may convey the message the child or young person wants to communicate effectively and will allow the court to hear their voice.
- The 'Dictate' software can be used to allow the child to interact directly and see their own words on the page.
- Don't feel you need to do all the direct work yourself. Adults that the child or young person are familiar with may be key to helping you understand how best to communicate. Working alongside educators, carers and support staff may provide opportunities to amplify a child's voice in a way that you could not do alone.
- [Cafcass resources for professionals](#)

Remember, connection before content.

The importance of planning and relationship building cannot be underestimated.

Links

Mencap- [What Is Global Development Delay? Find Out More | Mencap](#)

Signalong- [Signalong - The Communication Charity](#)

Makaton- [Home \(makaton.org\)](#)

Widget- [Widget Software | Widget Symbols Help Communication](#) and [Widget SymbolWorld: Categories : index](#)

PECS- [My PECS - Free PECS Cards and Images](#)