**The four broad areas of need**

**Some questions/ideas to think about:**

* What are the four broad areas of need?
* Why is it important not to use these as labels to describe children?
* Do you work with children with needs in one or more of these areas? Which ones? How do you support them?
* Choose one of the broad areas and find out more about it by going to one of the websites listed.

In the early years, it is particularly important to understand that individual children’s needs may fall into a number of these areas and that this must be reflected in the on-going process of early identification and appropriate intervention. There is also a growing number of children whose needs are being identified as ‘Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities’ (CLDD), where children have a number of overlapping and interrelated needs.

The first area of need is communication and interaction. This area encompasses many aspects of development that are interrelated. Some children who have difficulties in this area are referred to as having ‘Speech, Language and Communication Needs’ (or SLCN). This may indicate that they have difficulty with speech production, i.e. being able to make accurate speech sounds, or it may be that they have difficulty with understanding what is said to them. It may also include difficulties in the social use of language and communication, which can mean not knowing how to interact and play with others following the usual social rules.

Children with a diagnosis of autism or an autistic spectrum disorder (sometimes called autistic spectrum condition or ASC) have needs in this area, usually including difficulties with language, communication and imagination.

This area of need is often cited as one of the most common in the early years, and there is much research into the reasons why this may be the case. There are many universal and targeted approaches that can be used to address this area of need; you will find some useful organisations at the end of this webcast.

The second area is ‘cognition and learning’. This area of need is also very broad, in terms of the impact that difficulties with cognition and learning have upon each individual child. Learning difficulties may be identified when a child continues to learn at a slower pace than their peers, even though they have had additional help and support. For a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage, this may be indicated by a lack of progress in the prime areas of development in spite of appropriate, effective and timely adaptations and interventions being made.

There are different degrees of learning difficulties: they can be described as Moderate (MLD), Severe (SLD), Profound & Multiple (PMLD) and also Specific (SpLD). These diagnoses can only be made by a suitably qualified professional. Children may be affected very differently by the level of learning difficulty that they experience, even if they share a diagnosis with other children. The extent of the learning difficulty experienced is unique to every child.

MLD, SLD and PMLD affect all areas of children’s learning, whereas SpLD are specific to a particular aspect of learning. SpLDs includes dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. Many of these areas of difficulty may be present from the early years, but are often difficult to identify clearly.

The third area is that of social, emotional and mental health. This area of need is one that has changed in the most recent SEND Code of Practice. Previously, the child’s behaviour was identified as an issue in itself; the new code indicates an improved understanding of the impact of the possible causes of any challenging behaviours. For each child, the reasons for their outward behaviour can be very varied, and therefore, the emphasis is on understanding the underlying causes of the behaviour, in order to inform the best way to support the child. For young children who have had difficult or dysfunctional early relationships, these may include changes to the development of emotional regulation, impulse control and the control of inhibitions. Children with these difficulties may be said to have ‘disordered attachment’. There may be other aspects of the environment and experiences that may influence a child’s response and behaviour in specific situations.

Some children may have a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which will have a significant impact upon how to support them effectively.

The fourth and final area is that of physical and sensory impairment. This area of need includes children with a hearing or visual impairment, children with multi-sensory impairments and children with physical impairments. Sometimes, children’s sensory and physical needs are identified very early on, in which case there is often a specific support service involved. This could include physiotherapists, occupational therapists, teachers of the deaf and teachers of the blind. For other children, these needs emerge over time and it may take some time to secure the support of specific sensory impairment services. When children have multiple sensory and physical needs which are identified prior to compulsory school age, services such as Portage may be involved in offering the pre-school child and their family support in the homes.

Children with sensory or physical impairments do not necessarily have learning difficulties; in fact, they may have cognitive abilities at any level, but will probably require reasonable adjustments and auxiliary aids, in order to support their access to learning and development opportunities. Some children with identified needs in this area will have associated learning difficulties, and may require targeted and specialist support in order to achieve their outcomes.

The SEND code of practice (2015) clearly states that ‘the purpose of identification is the work out what action the school [or setting] needs to take, not to fit a child into a category.’

As we said at the start, lots of children will have needs that go across more than one of these areas; usually the child’s ‘primary need’ is identified where possible, but it is important that the setting aims to identify and meet the full range of needs across all four broad areas, possible with support from professionals external to the setting. Also, don’t forget that every child will also have strengths and possibly areas of exceptional skill, so look out for these too, so that you have a balanced and rounded picture of the child.

There are many organisations that offer support for specific identified SEND. Some of these are:

 I Can (SLCN): [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

The Communication Trust (SLCN): [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

Autism Education Trust: <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

National Autistic Society (ASD): <http://www.autism.org.uk>

NatSip (National Sensory Impairment Partnership): [www.natsip.org.uk](http://www.natsip.org.uk)

National Deaf Children’s Society: <http://www.ndcs.org.uk/>

Royal Society for Blind Children: <http://www.rsbc.org.uk/>

Inclusion Development Programme (offers CPD in many areas): <http://www.idponline.org.uk/>

MIND (SEMH): [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (SEMH): <http://www.annafreud.org/>

Down’s Syndrome Association: [www.downs-syndrome.org.uk](http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk)

Mencap (cognition and learning): [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

**Reflection questions and activities:**

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| **Question/activity** | **Response** |
| What are the four broad areas of need? |  |
| Why is it important not to use these as labels to describe children? |  |
| Do you work with children with needs in one or more of these areas? Which ones? How do you support them? |  |
| Choose one of the broad areas and find out more about it by going to one of the websites listed |  |