

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION NEEDS

Every child has a unique set of strengths and challenges. Inclusive education means all young people can have educational opportunities and choices.

Everyone needs to be able to communicate. Some young people live with speech, language and communication needs. This may affect how they:

- speak
- listen and understand
- interact with other people
- learn new things
- read and write
- use their voice.

Speech, language and communication needs can range from mild to severe. Your child may have communication needs for a short time, or throughout their education.

Sometimes a communication need may not be obvious. It may seem like your child is not listening or paying attention.

If you're concerned about your child's speech, language or communication you can talk to:

- their teacher
- your family doctor
- a speech pathologist.

Help for your child

If your child has communication needs they can still learn, achieve and join in at school. They can get extra support to reach their full potential.

All children can communicate. Children who have little or no speech can be supported to communicate in other ways. This can include using augmentative and alternative communication such as picture boards, picture books or technology.

Help can also come from family, friends, the community and NDIS services. It can be delivered in different settings. It's important to remember that the support needed for each child is unique to them.

Speech pathologists

Speech pathologists are allied health professionals trained to assess and give advice and therapy. They can work with you and your child's teacher to understand your child's communication needs and what support might be most helpful.

If your child attends a Victorian government school, they may get support from a speech pathologist through the Department's student support services.

Learning support

Teachers regularly assess your child's learning needs. They can work with you to put in place extra support and adjustments to support their learning.

These adjustments will be specific to your child's strengths and needs. They may include:

- working with a speech pathologist
- modifying or tailoring lessons for the student
- providing extra time or using different ways to assess the student's learning
- using special equipment or technology
- access to specialist staff.

The principal can also set up a student support group. In this group you can discuss your child's needs, adjustments to help them learn, and keep track of how your child is progressing.

Find support and advice about communication

You can talk to your doctor or speech pathologist about speech, language and communication needs. There are also support organisations and services to help you and your family:

- Speech Pathology Australia (www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) – help to find a speech pathologist in your area, and for information about communication.
- Association for Children with a Disability (www.acd.org.au) – helps families find support services.
- Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) – health and medical information in Victoria.
- Raising Children Network (raisingchildren.net.au) – information and advice for parents in Australia.
- Carers Victoria (www.carersvictoria.org.au) – information and support for carers of people with disability.
- All Play Learn (allplaylearn.org.au) – information and resources for parents, students, teachers and schools.

Reference: Victorian Department of Education: www.vic.gov.au/understanding-communication-needs