

A Parents' Guide To The Assessment of Need For Your Child



Assessing your child's needs:

The new or previously unknown 'systems' that a family of a deaf child may find themselves a part of are the medical system, the educational system and the social system. In other words there will be links with hospitals, schools and other possible services. This can be a daunting time for you as parents and the aim of this brief is to give a full and clear picture of what an initial assessment of need involves.

Many parents report to feeling overwhelmed when dealing with professionals from these different areas. However, the more knowledge you have of these areas, the more confident you will feel in general. This confidence will allow you and your child to select and benefit from these services in the way that best suits you.

Entitlements under the Disability Act 2005

The first step is knowing your entitlements when it comes to getting your child assessed.

On June 1 2007, Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 became law for children under 5 years of age. Under Part 2 of this Act, children with disabilities have a right to:

- ❖ an independent assessment of their health and educational needs arising from their disability
- ❖ an assessment report
- ❖ a statement of the services they will receive
- ❖ make a complaint if they are not happy with any part of the process

Further details of this can be found at the HSE website:

<http://www.hse.ie/en/FindaService/HealthServices/Category/InformationontheDisabilityAct2005/>

The initial assessment



The next step is the assessment process itself. Deafness and hearing impairments are discovered in a variety of ways; but usually the GP is the first port of call. Your GP will make an initial assessment and then refer you to an ENT surgeon (ear nose throat and mouth), generally based at a local hospital.

It is at the hospital where further hearing tests will be carried out in the Audiology clinic. The audiology clinic is responsible for the ongoing assessment of hearing loss, the fitting of hearing aids and attending to your child's physical needs.

After the initial diagnosis it is important to look at the bigger picture relating to your child's individual needs. These include their physical, communication, educational and social needs. Your first port of call will be your local health office, who will put you in touch with a local assessment officer. The assessment officer will assist you with your child's application and help and support you through the process. They are also responsible for issuing your child's final assessment report.

It may take up to three months to have the assessment carried out so it is important to apply as early as possible.

Further details about the assessment and application are on the HSE website:
<http://www.hse.ie/en/FindaService/HealthServices/Category/InformationontheDisabilityAct2005/>

What are the next steps?

The result of an assessment should give the child's parents, professionals and teachers information from a variety of sources. The information from an assessment of need report should serve as the basis for planning for your child's future.

The following is a list of some of the **core decisions** which need to be addressed concerning the needs of your child after their assessment.

1. Language and communication needs:

You will need to look at what types are the best / most suitable for your child; what resources are available to you and how you can go about the process.

2. Educational needs:

This will involve looking at the possible educational placements that are best for your child – for example, looking at a mainstream or a special school, and use of the visiting teacher service. The assessment of need report will be useful in helping you choose the schools that best suit your child's individual needs.

In Ireland the Department of Education and Science operates a visiting teacher service for deaf or hard of hearing children and children with visual impairments. The visiting teachers aim to support to both the parents / guardian and the child; and they will provide more information on the educational options available to you. The support service can begin shortly after the birth of the child and continue to third-level education where applicable. In addition, the teachers provide a teaching service for the pre-school child in the home if this is believed necessary. This service is free of charge.

Further details can be found on the Department of Education website at:
http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/visiting_teacher_service_info_leaflet.pdf?language=EN

3. Social and emotional:

These needs are essential to the growth of your child. By nurturing them you can enable your child to reach their full functional and social independence. Each of the professionals you will meet can provide support for you in addressing these needs. It is very important that you ask them for any advice that they have. This may involve arranging for your child to meet a deaf adult; or perhaps gaining peer support for you and your child by meeting other parents of other deaf children.

Final thoughts

The assessment process outlined is the initial step in providing for the needs of your child. These needs should be continually assessed over time as your child develops with flexible support and resources in order to meet their changing needs.

You will be encouraged to take part in your child's assessment and **do not be afraid to ask questions**, no matter how simple you may think them to be. The core decisions outlined above are just examples of what kind of needs that you need to be thinking about. These will vary for each individual child so it's important to seek the advice of the professionals that you will come in contact with.

Remember that each professional you meet wants to help you fulfil the needs of your child, so be confident and avail of any support offered. This is your opportunity as a parent to gather as much information as possible; which will allow you to work as part of the team of professionals rather than be daunted by them.