Advocating for children with disability

November 2025

A youth-responsive NDIS support needs assessment

Adolescence is a developmental stage of life where young people with and without disability explore independence and life separate to their families.

The adolescent brain is still developing, especially the parts involved in planning, decision-making and understanding consequences.

This can mean that young people can under-estimate or just not be aware of how much support their families or current NDIS supports are currently providing and what they might need in the future.

Additionally, finishing school is often a time when NDIS plans need to change significantly. This requires young people and their families to predict what their supports needs will be once school is over, this will be very difficult for some young people to do. The assessment needs to assume that when young people are no longer at school 30-40 hours a week different supports will be needed.

Suggestions from families:

1. Support young people to understand the process

- Take a supported-decision-making approach by giving young people information ahead of time in so they understand what the assessment is deciding.
- Provide helpful preparation tools such as visual supports, video, Easy Read, plain English, social story formats and translations well before the assessment.
- Share the assessment questions beforehand so young people know what to expect and can prepare in a calm and confident way.

2. Support accurate understanding of needs

- Recognise that young people may not always realise, or may underestimate, how much support they currently receive.
- Allow questions to be clarified or reworded so the young person and their family can give accurate responses.
- Ask *how* do you do this….rather than *can* you do this?
- Avoid ambiguous or overly complex questions that may confuse young people.
- Create opportunities to discuss sensitive topics privately where appropriate.
- Ensure the tool explores practical daily living tasks in detail, rather than relying only on broad or headline questions.
- Include prompts about what support will be needed as the young person approaches life after school.
- Make sure the tool can account for fluctuating capacity, including the impact of fatigue, sensory needs, anxiety and environmental factors.

3. Value the insights of families, carers and support teams

- Actively invite parents, carers and support workers to contribute context and help clarify what support is really needed day-to-day.
- Offer opportunities for families to speak privately about the support they need to keep caring safely and sustainably.
- Allow allied health professionals to provide letters, reports or other supplementary information that helps build a complete picture.

4. Make the assessment accessible, flexible and low-stress

- Offer shorter appointments or the option to break the assessment into multiple sessions — three hours will be too long for many young people.
- Make it easy to pause, reschedule or continue the assessment at another time if a young person becomes overwhelmed or needs a break.
- Provide choices for in-person, home-based, online or phone assessments so families can select what works best.
- Ensure communication supports are readily available, including AAC, plain language, interpreters and accessible formats.
- Allow families and young people to add extra information afterwards if they realise they missed something important.

5. Use assessors with the right skills, knowledge and approach

- Ensure assessors have training in disability, neurodiversity, communication access, trauma-informed practice and youth-responsive approaches.
- Provide assessors with access to clear information about a wide range of disabilities and health conditions before meeting the young person.

6. Provide clear processes and genuine flexibility

- Offer a clear and fair pathway for review or appeal if families feel something hasn't been captured accurately.
- Where a young person's current plan is working well, allow families to request an extension rather than needing to undertake the full process.