FCCS

Functional Communication Classification System

General Information:

The purpose of the FCCS is to classify how children aged 4-5 years (between their fourth and sixth birthdays), communicate in their daily lives. This classification may be used to help:

- To share accurate information between parents and service providers

- To identify type and amount of communication resources, training and support services

- To plan effective and specific training for teachers carers and other support staff

- To evaluate and track outcomes of interventions, care plans, and educational programs for different groups of children

The FCCS focuses on what the child **does do** rather than what the child can do.

A variety of issues may affect how a child communicates including muscle control and strength, hearing, vision, and other senses, language skills (comprehension and expression), cognitive skills, social skills, and motivation. A child who, for example, is unmotivated may require prompting in order to participate. Another child may only be able to participate if they interact with someone who understands their hand signs. These children may have better skills in some areas but do not use them routinely.

Similarly, some children are effective communicators when using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) strategies. AAC strategies include pictures, communication devices and/or signing systems. Between their fourth and sixth birthdays, it is not expected that a child will independently set up, programme or tell others how to use their system. Some children will be in the beginning stages of learning a system. They may be able to use it with some very familiar people but need more experience to use it with other people. The classification should reflect what the child usually does, even if the child can perform at a higher level with certain people or in certain situations. See the accompanying prompt sheet for further help deciding between the levels. [Note the type of AAC system on the cover page.]

Communication involves at least two people. So the support a child requires from the person they interact with is important. The other person may be a parent, teacher, friend, peer, or carer, among others. Although they may require no special skills, some children will need support from people who are familiar with them and their routines or who have more specialised training. The levels reflect these types of support, from no support required at level 1 to total support at level 5.

The FCCS does not classify reading or writing ability, but focuses on communication between the child and those around them in daily activities.

There are five levels. Children who are classified at Level I will have minimal or no difficulties when compared to typically developing children.

The scale is ordinal. There is no expectation that the differences between the levels are evenly spaced, or that children will be spread evenly across the levels.

FCCS

Functional Communication Classification System

The FCCS is a system to classify children's communication in everyday activities.

Look at and think about the child's *usual* communication, rather than the child's best possible communication.

Communication involves at least two people. People who know the child will be able to provide information about how the child usually communicates, and who they communicate with.

Pick the classification level that *best* describes the child's communication during their daily activities.

The FCCS is designed for children between their fourth and sixth birthdays.

If the child uses Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ACC), note down the type/s:

❑ Communication device

❑ Sign language

❑ Communication book/pictures

❑ Hand signs/gestures

❑ Communication diary

❑ Body movement

❑ Personal communication dictionary/inventory

❑ Body/tactile signs

Other:

FCCS
Functional Communication Classification System (FCCS)

I.   An effective communicator in most situations.
- Can **independently** communicate a wide variety of messages/topics to familiar and unfamiliar people in most environments.

II.   An effective communicator in most situations, but does need some help.
- Can communicate a variety of messages/topics to familiar people but may experience some difficulties with unfamiliar people/topics and environments.
- Needs some help/support with some activities, or situations, where success may depend on environmental factors/context and with unfamiliar communication partners such as:
    - prompt questions to initiate with unfamiliar listeners or situations
    - repetitions (to make themselves understood)
    - speech loudness
    - short phrasing for breath control or oral motor control
    - extra time
- An AAC user who requires assistance with set up, and/or programming; and whose listener needs some assistance with orientation/interpretation of AAC strategies. [Note the type of AAC system on the cover page.]

III.   An effective communicator in some situations. Can communicate a small range of messages/topics to most familiar people.
- Effective communicator with familiar people and activities and in familiar settings about their needs and wants, and things that are happening.
- Requires assistance with unfamiliar people/topics and environments.
- May use "conventional gestures" such as pointing, movements (e.g. waving), eye contact vocalisations (e.g. ah, ehya), to gain attention or start the interaction.
- Relies on a familiar communication partner to interpret AAC or speech attempts, and to prepare, set up and support communication.

IV.   Assistance is required in most situations, especially with unfamiliar people and Communicates daily/routine needs and wants with familiar people.
- Can initiate and attract attention but needs a familiar person who is familiar with their routine, recent/significant experiences and likes and dislikes, and to interpret her communication
- Responds to familiar voices, sounds, and routines using body movement, facial expression, vocalisation.
- Can anticipate familiar activities and routines.
- Accepts, rejects/refuses and/or protests – from offered choices. This may be by using movements or vocalisations.

V.   Communicates unintentionally with others, using movement and behaviour.
- Daily/routine needs and wants are interpreted by familiar people from observation of individual's emotional state, body movement and behaviour.
- Needs full assistance from a familiar person to observe, interpret movements and behaviours, anticipate, and problem solve based on their experience, training and observation.

Distinction between levels I and II: Children in level I will independently tell a range of people (including family, friends and other people) what they want to about things that are happening, have happened, or might happen. They can tell tales, talk about pretend/imagined events and use their communication skills to work out a problem. They will repeat or persist if not understood.

Children in level II will have difficulty communicating with some unfamiliar people and, although they may tell tales, talk about pretend/imagined events and use their communication skills to work out a problem, they do need some help/support with ensuring they are understood.

Distinction between levels II and III: Children in Level II do not need listeners who have special training in order to understand their message. AAC users in Level II may need "set up" help but can communicate about events in the near future or past.

Children in Level III can communicate without support about events in the "here and now" and about their wants and needs. They do need support from a familiar person to communicate about things that have happened or are going to happen.

Their "listeners" need to know or be trained to interpret use of gesture, pointing or "signing" or how to set up or help with other AAC strategies. They may need prompts or leading questions to be successfully understood, and "listeners" may need to check that they have understood using "yes/no" questions.

Distinction between levels III and IV: Children in level III can communicate with family, friends and other familiar people in familiar situations and activities, about things that are happening, their wants and needs.

Children in level IV need support from a familiar person who can understand their calls for attention and how they express choices. They need their listener to know their routines and the significant things that have happened recently and are happening in their life. Their "listener" needs to know or be trained to interpret their use of body language, facial expression, vocalisation, reaching or pushing away, and how to set up or help with other AAC strategies to help them to be understood and make choices.

Distinction between levels IV and V: Children in level IV communicate with family, friends and other familiar people in everyday situations and routine activities, about things that are happening to them, or their wants or needs. People who are unfamiliar with them will need help/support to ensure they are understood. They can make choices that are offered or can be anticipated during routine daily activities.

Children in level V do not initiate contact or communicate intentionally with others. Their communication is successful with familiar people who are able to observe and interpret their body language, movement patterns, facial expression, and vocalisations to understand their happiness, comfort, unhappiness, discomfort or pain, and readiness/need for familiar daily activities such as eating, drinking, bathing, and sleep. Communication partners need prior knowledge, experience and/or informed observation to anticipate and problem solve to help meet these children's need

FCCS

Functional Communication Classification System

Prompt Questions - to help discriminate between levels

- Do others **easily understand** the child?
  The child may stutter or have some speech errors but others can understand them without extra help.   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child **begin a conversation** with a peer/friend or adult without help or prompting?
  The other person may either be familiar or unfamiliar with the child. Familiar people include friends and family. Unfamiliar people include people in the community such as doctors, nurses, and receptionists who don't know or see the child often. *For example: The child without prompting starts a conversation with a kindy teacher or another child to tell about their birthday.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child get their message across **without** extra help?
  It is okay if they are successful even if they stutter or say one or two sounds wrong but are still understood; it is not okay if these minor difficulties mean the listener loses interest, for example if it takes too long, or needs help to understand.   Y ☐   N ☐

- Is the child **aware** of the listener's understanding and do they repeat themselves and try again when not understood? *For example: The child repeats, talks louder, gives extra information and/or persists enough to get the message across.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child communicate independently about things or events that are not present?
  *For example: The child communicates about things or events **other than** what is happening **immediately** around them. This includes topics such as their favourite TV show or DVD, friends/family/pets, as well as places they have recently been or are going to such as child care, birthday parties.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child communicate a **variety of meanings**?
  For example: The child makes comments, describes things, asks question, gives directions and uses speech in pretend play.   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'no' for any, please go to Level II →

- Does an **unfamiliar person** need to ask prompting questions to understand the child's meaning?
  For example: The listener looks to a parent or friend to confirm or clarify what the child is saying, or check a topic.   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'yes' go to Level II ➡

- Does the child use a **means of communication*** that others **easily understand** mostly **independently**?
  The child may need some help to set up the device. This help could be to put the device/book/switch in front of the child for a conversation, or to programme an electronic device, add pictures or words to a communication book. The child may be a competent signer but require assistance to interact with an unfamiliar person.   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child communicate about things **that have happened or will happen** (not present) with some support?
  For *example: The child uses gesture/picture board/device to refer to a person who is not present; The child tells the teacher, after prompting from their parent, about the party on the weekend; The teacher asks the child "leading" questions to get the child started.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child **have another try when they are not understood**?
  For *example: The child may repeat or persist to get the message across. They may need questions or prompts by the listener.*   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'no' to any, please go to Level III ➡

- Does an **unfamiliar person** need to **rely partially** on a **familiar person** to understand a child's meaning?   Y ☐   N ☐

- Do the child's friends/peers need help from a familiar person to interpret the child's meaning?   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'yes' to any, please go to Level III ➡

The "means of communication" could be speech or alternative and augmentative

Barty E, Caynes K and Johnston LM (2016). Development and reliability of the Functional Communication Classification System for children with cerebral palsy. *Dev Med & Child Neurol* 2016; DOI: 10.1111/dmcn.13124

LEVEL III

- Is the child **beginning to use a means of communication*** with **some ability** that is readily understood by others who know the system or can work it out? The listener may need to hold or set up the system. The listener may need to help by saying the child's message out loud. *For example: A child makes a rocking motion with her arms, which means different things depending on the situation. At preschool this may indicate a desire to play with a doll but at the health centre it may be to draw her mother's attention to a mother holding a baby.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child have a **means of communication*** that others can figure out from the environment or the situation? The child may use some speech sounds, words, or vocalising, facial expressions, body movements, and gestures, including pointing using hand or eye gaze, and/or some hand signs. *For example: The child raises a hand to gain attention. The child looks at the teacher and at the drink at lunch time to indicate that they want the drink first. The child raises their fist to their mouth to indicate that they are hungry or thirsty.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child use a reliable yes/no response?   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child indicate their **immediate needs, wants, likes/dislikes, for things/activities happening around them**? The child may communicate about things in the "here and now" such as that they are thirsty, hungry, finished, that they want more, or that someone is doing something funny or naughty. *For example: The child draws attention to something happening in the classroom by vocalising and pointing, but they do not retell the event later without support from another person who was also there.*   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'no' to any, please go to Level IV ➤

- Does an **unfamiliar person** need **to rely mostly on a familiar person** to interpret the child's meaning?   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'yes' go to Level IV ➤

LEVEL IV

- Does the child **attempt to initiate or respond** to conversation with another person? This may be a social greeting or about things happening around them. The child may use methods such as vocalisations, facial expression and/or body movements.   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child **focus their attention on the other person** when they are communicating?   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child give a **response** that can **mostly be understood** when given **choices** between objects or activities? The child's response may be an emerging way to indicate "yes or no", and be given in response to the person offering the choice. *For example: The child may use facial expression, body gesture or movement, happy versus upset vocalisation, or a smile versus turning away in **response to being offered** a drink.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child use body movement, facial expression, vocalisation and/or gesture to show they **understand conversation** relating to daily activities and settings, family members and news? (The conversation relates to familiar daily routines and in familiar settings such as home, child care and/or preschool)   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child show potential to use, a "means of communication" that can be understood by others which has not yet been established due to accessing difficulties? Or has the child started to learn but is successful mostly with very familiar people? (Familiar people will be a parent and/or those introducing the system such a therapist, or teacher who has knowledge of both the child and the developing system.)   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'no' to any, please go to Level V ➤

- Does an unfamiliar person need to rely totally on a familiar person to interpret the child's meaning? The listener needs specific knowledge of the child's communication, general skills and daily activities.   Y ☐   N ☐

If you answered 'yes' go to Level V ➤

LEVEL V

- Is the child an "unintentional Communicator"?   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the child show happiness and sadness/discomfort but rely totally on a familiar person to interpret more specific needs based on that person's knowledge of the child, the environment and the child's usual routine? The child may react to things that happen to them such as experiencing movement, pain or hunger, and sometimes things that happen around them. *For example: The child is restless, and vocalising, while looking generally around the room, at 11:30am so the teacher knows she is probably hungry, and at 3:00 in the afternoon so her carer knows to reassure that her drink is on the way.*   Y ☐   N ☐

- Does the "listener" need to know: Y ☐   N ☐
  - the child's usual daily activities, and/or changes to these to figure out the child's needs and/or behaviour?
  - the child's likes and dislikes to figure out the child's responses or behaviour?
  - what has recently occurred to help problem solve what the child may be communicating?
  - the child's physical status and movement patterns to interpret the child's responses or behaviour?

*The "means of communication" could be speech or alternative and augmentative

Barty E, Caynes K and Johnston LM (2016). Development and reliability of the Functional Communication Classification System for children with cerebral palsy. *Dev Med & Child Neurol* 2016; DOI: 10.1111/dmcn.13124