Dignus Group

Understanding **Complex Needs**

Brave Decisions. Better Lives.

What Do We Mean by “Complex Needs”?

The term complex needs is often used when a person requires support in several areas of their life, rather than just one specific need or condition.

Complex needs can affect how a person communicates, manages daily activities, maintains their health, builds relationships, or accesses their community. Every individual is different, and having complex needs does not define who a person is. Instead, it helps professionals understand the level and type of support that may be required.

The focus should always be on the individual, their strengths, and what matters most to them.

What Can Create Complex Needs?

Complex needs can arise from a range of circumstances and may involve one or more conditions working together.

Examples may include:

- Learning disabilities
- Sensory impairments
- Autism
- Neurological conditions
- Mental health needs
- Behaviours of concern
- Physical disabilities
- Long-term health conditions
- Acquired brain injuries

Some people may have a single condition that creates significant support needs, while others may experience a combination of needs that require specialist support.

Understanding the Person
Behind the Support Needs

When discussing complex needs, it's important to remember that every person is unique.

Two individuals with the same diagnosis may have very different experiences, strengths, preferences, and goals.

Good support focuses on understanding:

- **What is important to the person**
- **Their interests, hobbies, and aspirations**
- **How they communicate**
- **What helps them feel safe and comfortable**
- **Their routines and preferences**
- **The support they need to achieve their goals**

The aim is not simply to manage needs but to help people live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

What Does **Specialist Support** Look Like?

Support for people with complex needs is highly personalised and tailored to the individual.

Depending on the person's circumstances, support may include:

Personal Care

Assistance with daily living activities such as:

- **Washing and dressing**
- **Personal hygiene**
- **Eating and drinking**
- **Mobility support**
- **Medication management**

Communication Support

Some individuals may communicate differently. Support teams may use:

- **Makaton**
- **Visual aids**
- **Communication technology**
- **Easy Read information**
- **Personalised communication approaches**

Understanding how a person communicates is often key to providing effective support.

Health and Wellbeing Support

People with complex needs may require assistance with:

- **Attending healthcare appointments**
- **Managing medical conditions**
- **Medication support**
- **Physical wellbeing**
- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health**

Behavioural Support

Some individuals may experience behaviours that challenge services or place themselves or others at risk.

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) focuses on understanding why behaviours occur and identifying supportive, proactive approaches that improve quality of life and reduce distress.

Why is Consistency **So Important?**

For many people with complex needs, consistency and stability can make a significant difference.

Having a regular support team can help build:

- **Trust**
- **Positive relationships**
- **Confidence**
- **Communication**
- **Emotional security**

Consistent support also helps teams better understand individual needs, routines, and preferences.

Supporting **Independence**

A common misconception is that people with complex needs cannot be independent.

In reality, independence looks different for everyone.

Support should focus on enabling people to:

- **Make choices about their lives**
- **Develop skills**
- **Build confidence**
- **Access their community**
- **Form relationships**
- **Pursue hobbies and interests**
- **Achieve personal goals**

Even small steps towards greater independence can have a positive impact on wellbeing and self-confidence.

How Are **Families Involved?**

Families often play a vital role in supporting people with complex needs.

Their knowledge and experience can provide valuable insight into:

- **Communication styles**
- **Personal preferences**
- **Routines**
- **Life history**
- **What works best during times of anxiety or change**

Effective support providers work in partnership with families, ensuring they are involved appropriately while keeping the individual's wishes at the centre of decision-making.

Choosing the **Right Support**

When exploring services for someone with complex needs, it can be helpful to ask:

- What experience does the provider have supporting similar needs?
- How are support plans personalised?
- What specialist training do staff receive?
- How is communication supported?
- How are risks managed while promoting independence?
- How are families involved?
- How does the provider support individuals to achieve their goals?

The right provider should see the person first, not just their support needs.

Common Myths
About Complex Needs

Myth:

People with complex needs cannot live independently.

Reality:
With the right support, many people can live fulfilling lives with significant levels of choice, control, and independence.

Myth:

Complex needs are only about medical conditions.

Reality:
Complex needs often involve a combination of health, social, emotional, behavioural, and communication factors.

Myth:

Support is only about keeping people safe.

Reality:
Good support balances safety with opportunities for growth, independence, relationships, and personal achievement.

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We're Here to Help

Understanding complex needs can feel overwhelming, particularly when you're exploring support options for the first time. However, with the right information and the right support, individuals with complex needs can lead fulfilling, meaningful, and independent lives.

The most effective support starts by recognising each person's unique strengths, preferences, and ambitions, then building support around what matters most to them.

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Need advice? Our team is here to help you understand your options and find the right support for you or your loved one.