
RED FLAGS ARE WAVING

What, When & Who To Refer To
When Children Are Struggling



By Julia Egges, OTR & Dr Lisa Hudson, PhD SLP

Red Flags Are Waving- What Do We Do?

When working and playing with children you may sometimes notice that some children appear to be experiencing difficulties that either don't resolve or are causing them significant frustration or distress. These difficulties are "red flags" (much like indicator lights in the car) that let us know when a child needs some extra help.

One of the most frequent questions we are asked is how to know when a problem needs referral or is something that children just "grow out of". The general rule of thumb is if you're concerned, investigate further.

It is always best to intervene early when difficulties are suspected. Although it can be a worrying thing for a parent to be told that their child may need some professional assistance, the less time a child struggles with any particular developmental or learning problem the better it is for their confidence and overall performance.

Parents may wish to see their general practitioner when considering referral. The list that follows isn't exhaustive but outlines many common reasons for referral and the professionals who can best help.

Core element	Red Flags	Best referred to:
Touch	Constantly touching things to the point of irritating others/interfering with daily activities Avoidance of &/or marked distress with normal touch experiences	Occupational Therapist
Joint Movement Awareness	Heavy handed, constantly dropping things - very avoidant of fine motor activities	Occupational Therapist
Eye Movements	Inability of eyes to move together - either one eye turning in/out when tracking; marked jerkiness; blinking and backing away from an approaching ball Bouncing or jerking of eyes vertically or locked stare with no response for a few seconds at a time Avoidance of eye contact	Doctor Optometrist Refer immediately to doctor for neurological assessment
Visual Perception	Walks into walls or doors. Missteps on change of surfaces, nervous with stairs or climbing. Avoids ball games peers enjoy. Dislikes drawing/puzzles.	Doctor Optometrist Occupational Therapist
Hearing & Listening	No reaction to speech or environmental sounds Over-reaction to environmental sounds, fearful response, covering of ears	Audiologist & Doctor Occupational therapist or other clinician experienced in dealing with auditory sensory defensiveness
Whole Body Movement Awareness	Fearful of heights/fast movement Becomes very distressed when feet leave the ground	Doctor Occupational Therapy Physiotherapy
Bilateral Motor Integration	Constant swapping of hands for one handed activities after, avoidance	Occupational Therapist

Visual Motor Integration	Marked avoidance of eye-hand-foot co-ordination games & activities	Occupational Therapist Physiotherapist
Balance	Frequent falls – sudden onset Frequent falls associated with long term difficulties with gross motor development	Doctor Physiotherapist
Strength & Endurance	Sudden very apparent decrease in strength, endurance and energy levels Habitually leaning Delayed motor milestones	Doctor Physiotherapist Occupational Therapist
Memory	Distractibility, difficulty following directions, slow to start and slow to finish things – appears to watch others for cues.	Psychologist Guidance Officer Doctor
Problem Solving	Can be rigid – need to do things their way; gets frustrated easily; avoids social play, likes to play with younger or older children or is more dependent than expected for their age.	Psychologist Guidance Officer
Understanding Others	Sudden change Difficulty with understanding directions or answering questions peers can manage with ease. Avoids story time or is disruptive at this time.	Doctor Audiologist Speech Pathologist
Expressive Communication	Difficulty with making themselves understood. Frustration with communication attempts.	Speech Pathologist
Playing With Language	Difficulty with recognising rhymes and playing with them – doesn't recognise that words can be pulled apart and put together again. Avoids reading time.	Speech Pathologist

If you have concerns that aren't addressed here feel free to contact us for further information at support@lifespanfundamentals.com .

Julia & Lisa

Julia Egges, Occupational Therapist
& Lisa Hudson, Speech Language Pathologist