



Guidelines for Quality Child Care Niagara (QCCN) Referrals using the Niagara Children’s Centre Birth to “School Start” Speech-Language Pathology Referral Checklist

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Overview

The intended purpose of the *Birth to “School Start” Speech-Language Pathology Referral Checklist* (“the Checklist”) is to help child care professionals identify children who may benefit from an assessment of their communication development by a Speech-Language Pathologist. The Checklist allows the professional to identify whether or not communication skills seem to be developing as expected, if behaviours are present that sometimes occur when a child is not developing communication as expected, and if there are concerns with stuttering, resonance, or quality of voice.

This Checklist is **not** a diagnostic test. Specific results cannot confirm the presence or absence of communication delays or disorders. This Checklist is also **not** a “milestone” checklist that lists average ages that skills are developed. Although the tool is divided into age categories, some skills within each age category should have developed many months before the corresponding age and some may have only recently developed.

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Referral Eligibility

- **Please note:** if you choose to use the online referral portal, the portal will stop you at any time if one of these Eligibility Criteria are not met.
- Children must live within the Niagara Region regardless of where they attend Child Care. Children in neighbouring cities are serviced by:
 - Hamilton Preschool Speech and Language Program ("Early Words"): 905-381-2828 ext. 233
 - Brant Haldimand-Norfolk Preschool Speech & Language Program: 1-800-454-7186
- Children cannot be referred without completion of the **Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech-Language Pathology Referral Checklist** that includes a result indicating a referral is warranted.
 - Note: there is no checklist for infants under the age of 6 months. Children under 6 months can be referred without completing a Checklist if there are concerns with the child's interaction/early communication skills.
- ALL children must be referred by August 31st of the year they are eligible to start Year One Kindergarten. Children referred the calendar year of school entry may receive limited services.
- All French speaking families who meet French eligibility criteria will receive services in French, if requested.
- Do **not** refer children who are in school or are age-eligible for school.
 - For children already attending Year One Kindergarten (virtually or in-person), it is the responsibility of the school to refer to the appropriate Speech-Language Pathologist (School Board or Niagara Children's Centre School Based Rehabilitation Services).
 - Children who are age-eligible for Year One Kindergarten but who are officially home-schooled or who attend a private school registered with the Ministry of Education may be eligible for Speech-Language Pathology services through Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS). Please inquire about eligibility and referral processes directly: 1-800-810-0000.
 - Children who are age-eligible for Year One Kindergarten who are not attending publically funded schools, private schools registered with the Ministry of Education, or are not officially homeschooled do not have access to publically funded speech-language pathology services unless there is a new onset/acquired condition significantly affecting communication (if so, refer to Niagara Children's Centre).

Children already involved with Speech-Language services at Niagara Children's Centre

- Do **not** refer children who are already involved with a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) at Niagara Children's Centre (or who are waiting for active service).
 - Encourage parents/guardians to notify their child's SLP that the child is in child care and provide consent for the SLP to speak to the child care. The Centre must have documented consent on file from a parent/guardian to share information with child care staff.
 - As long as a parent/guardian has provided consent to the SLP, you are welcome to contact the child's SLP to consult regarding strategies to implement in the child care.
 - Reports and consultation notes will not be sent directly to the child care. Ask the parent(s)/guardian(s) to share these with you if you are not in direct contact with the child's SLP.

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Referral Options for Children attending Child Care

Remember: 'Early Identification, Early Referral'... do not wait for completion of the Developmental Preschool Screen (DPS) or Diagnostic Inventory of Screening Children (DISC) before investigating speech and language concerns!

There are 3 different ways that referrals make their way to Niagara Children's Centre, depending on when the Referral Checklist is completed and who initiates the referral. **It is preferred that referrals for children attending child care come from the child care itself (Option 1 and 2), rather than the parent/guardian (Option 3).**

Option 1: Referral Checklist completed by Educator on Prescribed QCCN Schedule

1. The Educator completes the **Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech -Language Pathology Referral Checklist** within 6-8 weeks of starting at a child care site (flexible timeline based on number of days/week attending, illness, bilingual, etc.) and annually thereafter (at the anniversary of the first Checklist completion).
 - It is preferred (but not mandatory) that the Educator completing the Checklist consult with the parent/guardian when completing the Checklist.
2. The Educator discusses results with the parent/guardian and obtains consent for referral (if it was indicated)
 - The Centre values receiving the Checklist with both educator and parent/guardian input to assist with assessment.
 - If the parent/guardian is not concerned and/or does not consent to a referral (when the results indicate a referral should be made), do not refer. You may suggest to parent/guardian that you can complete the Checklist again in a few months time and continue to provide language-rich experiences until then.
 - If the parent/guardian consents to the referral, please ensure they understand that they must bring their child into one of the Niagara Children's Centre sites for the assessment.
 - Communicate to the parent/guardian that they should ***not*** call the Centre themselves to make a referral. **Please stress this.** The preferred process is to have the child care submit the referral.
 - Note: If the parent/guardian does refer themselves before the referral is submitted/received, the child care should still submit the Referral Checklist to the Centre's Intake Coordinators.
3. The child care's referral will be submitted (online or fax/mail) within one week of the parent/guardian signing the referral form (i.e. it will be timely)

Option 2: Referral Checklist completed by Educator outside of Prescribed QCCN Schedule

If the parent/guardian expresses/identifies concerns to the Educator **or** the Educator identifies concerns *outside* prescribed QCCN completion schedule (e.g. evident concerns at orientation to child care; the child is not "due" for completion of the Referral Checklist), complete the Referral Checklist at the time the concern is identified. You **do not** need to wait for completion of the DPS. If a referral is indicated, follow steps 2 and 3 from Option 1.

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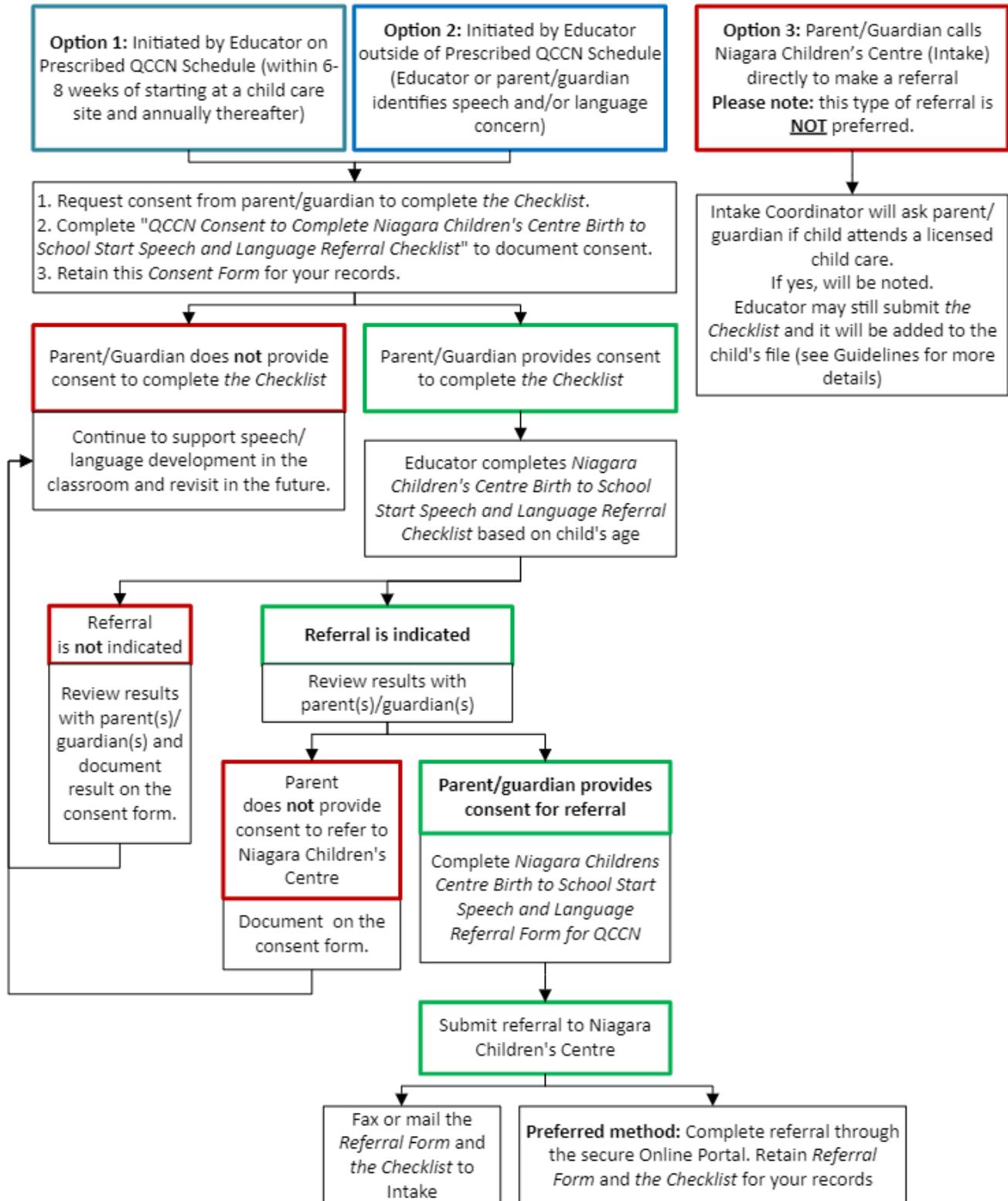
Option 3: Parent/Guardian calls Niagara Children's Centre (Intake) directly to make a referral

Please note: this type of referral is **NOT** preferred.

- The parent/guardian will be asked by the Intake Coordinator if their child attends a licenced childcare. If they say yes, Intake will proceed with the intake appointment and take note that a referral was not received by the child care (i.e. family will **not** be re-directed back to the child care for Referral Checklist completion).
- For quality monitoring purposes (to ensure QCCN processes are clear and being followed), the parent/guardian will also be asked:
 - If a Referral Checklist was completed by an Educator at the Child Care
 - If an Educator at the Child Care identified communication concerns and asked them to make a parent-referral
 - If they identified communication concerns to an Educator at the Child Care
- If you are aware that a parent/guardian referred a child at your childcare and *you did not* complete the referral procedure, do not count that as a referral made by your agency in your monthly data submission.
 - If you **did** complete a checklist but the parent/guardian self-referred before you could submit, you **can** count this as a referral as long as you submit the checklist/referral form. The Intake Coordinator will add your referral to the child's file.

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QCCN Referral Pathways



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Instructions for Completion of the Checklist

Who will complete the Checklist?

The Checklist will typically be completed by an Educator who is caring for the child. The Educator should make it clear to the parent/guardian that the Checklist will be completed by Child Care staff, **not** a Speech-Language Pathologist from the Niagara Children's Centre.

The Checklist asks about how the child is communicating with "you". It does not matter whether the child has demonstrated the skill with the Educator, parent/guardian, other adult or other children as long as the child has demonstrated the skill. If the parent/guardian reports skills that you have not observed, brainstorm ways together to help the child use the skills in the child care setting.

Note: Resource Consultants complete a different referral form/portal. See FAQ #12 for more information.

What is required to complete the Checklist?

1. Complete the ***QCCN Consent to Complete Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech- Language Pathology Referral Checklist*** ("the Consent Form")
 - Use this document to discuss the administration of the checklist with the parent/guardian and obtain consent. This document is for your records and does not need to be submitted with the referral (if a referral is indicated).
 - Note: In order to submit a referral, QCCN Educators must have consent of a parent with decision-making authority OR a legal guardian. If this consent is not available, contact our Intake Coordinators to discuss potential referral pathways (without sharing personal health information).
2. Complete the ***Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech- Language Pathology Referral Checklist*** ("the Checklist")
 - A series of checklists broken down by age. This Checklist will help you decide if a referral is indicated. It will be required to make the referral.

How to Score the Checklist

Each age category is divided into **TWO** sections.

Section 1 represents skills that are expected "by" or "before" the age listed.

- Answer each question with a "yes" or "no"
- Make a referral if there are any "no" responses in this section

Section 2 questions refer to atypical communication concerns and behaviours that sometimes occur when a child is not developing communication as expected.

- Most "yes" responses in this section indicate a referral is recommended. Pay particular attention to questions that are **bolded** in Section 2. There must be at least 1 other "referral" response in either section 1 or 2 combined with the "yes" to the **bolded** question(s) in order to qualify for a referral.

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Children Whose Primary Language is not the Language of the Child Care

Complete the Checklist considering the child's skills **in the language they know best**. In most cases, this involves consultation with the parent/guardian. If a child is exposed to/speaking a different language at home than at the child care and this is considered the child's "first" or "primary" language.

- Ask the parent/guardian if they have concerns with their child's communication in their primary language
- Ask for how long and how the child has been exposed to the language of the child care. For example, if the language of the childcare is English, consider how much time the child is exposed to English at home, on TV, at child care, etc.
- Do not refer if:
 - The parent/guardian has **no** concerns regarding the development of the child's first/primary language.
 - The child has minimal exposure to the language of the child care. Continue to monitor the child's communication development and provide rich language experiences. Suggest completing the Checklist again in a few months time.
- Proceed with a referral (with parent/guardian consent) if:
 - The child is exhibiting other possible developmental delays or atypical behaviours.
 - You cannot determine whether there are concerns in the first/primary language due to a language barrier with the parent/guardian that you cannot overcome AND it is unclear whether and how long the child has been exposed to the language of the child care.
- The Referral Form has a place to indicate:
 - Whether an interpreter will be required for the assessment (and what language), including whether an interpreter will be needed to complete the intake phone call/book the appointment.
 - Whether it was possible to confirm that there ARE concerns in the child's first/primary language.

How do you submit a referral?

All of the same information is gathered regardless of your chosen method of submission, however you may choose to do some on paper and some online depending on your choice. Some will need to be sent to Niagara Children's Centre, while others are for your records. See the sections regarding [How to Score the Checklist](#) and what to do for [Children Whose Primary Language is not the Language of the Child Care](#) for additional instructions.

Submission Option 1: Via the Secure Online Referral Portal

This is the **preferred method** to submit your referral. *Niagara Children's Centre's Birth to "School Start" Speech-Language Pathology Referral Checklist Portal* can be found here:

<https://assessment.caredove.com/form/niagarachildrencentre/preschool-speech-language>

- When completing an online referral, you will begin by selecting that you are an "Educator – using Quality Child Care Niagara Protocols".

*What is your relationship to the child?
Educator - using "Quality Child Care Niagara" protocols
- You are asked to confirm on the portal that *the Consent Form* was reviewed and signed by a parent/legal guardian.
- **All of the fields of the Referral Form will be inputted into the portal.** You are asked to confirm that you have reviewed the consent items at the bottom of the Referral Form with a parent/legal guardian and they have signed it prior to submitting the online referral. You can keep the paper copy for your records.
- The portal automatically selects the appropriate Checklist based on the child's age. You complete the Checklist within the portal. You do not need to complete the paper version, however if you choose to do so, you may keep it for your records.

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- The portal will automatically give you a result that indicates a referral is recommended or not, therefore you do not need to score it. You will be able to proceed with a referral from the portal or save your results to return later and complete the referral. **You have the ability to print these results in order to share them with parents/guardians.**
- If there are concerns in other areas of development, you are able to write additional concerns in the designated section of the referral portal. By providing this information, you are **not** referring to other Centre services. This information, however, will help guide the Intake Coordinator's conversation with the parent/legal guardian to ensure all appropriate Centre and community referrals are made in line with the Centre's established eligibility criteria and community service pathways.
- Upon completion of the online referral process, you will receive a confirmation email that your referral was received.

Submission Option 2: Via Fax or Mail (completed on paper)

- Complete the **Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech- Language Pathology Referral Form for QCCN** ("the Referral Form") and submit it with your referral package.
 - This contains: demographic information of the child, parent(s)/guardian(s) and "requester" (person submitting the referral), as well as questions pertaining to the Intake process and consent.
 - If there are concerns in other areas of development, you are encouraged to write additional concerns in the designated section of the referral form. By providing this information, you are **not** referring to other Centre services. This information, however, will help guide the Intake Coordinator's conversation with the parent/legal guardian to ensure all appropriate Centre and community referrals are made in line with the Centre's established eligibility criteria and community service pathways.
- Complete the appropriate Checklist based on the child's age. This must be submitted with your referral package.
 - The Checklist is divided into age categories: By 6 months, By 9 months, By 12 months, By 15 months, By 18 months, By 24 months (2 years), By 30 months (2.5 years), By 36 months (3 years), By 42 months (3.5 years) and By 48 months (4 years).
 - **Complete only ONE age category per child.** Choose the category that the child has most recently reached (e.g. if the child is 44 months old (3 years, 8 months), choose the "By 42 months (3.5 years) checklist because the child has reached/passed 3.5 but not 4). See the [FAQ Section](#) for more examples.
 - Infants under the age of 6 months can be referred without completing the Checklist if there are concerns with the child's interaction/early communication skills.
- Submit the Referral form and appropriate Referral Checklist to the Centre's Intake Coordinators via fax or mail:
 Fax: 905-688-9181
 Mail: 567 Glenridge Avenue St. Catharines, ON L2T 4C2.
Please note: Incomplete documentation will be returned to the child care.

Please note that all the forms (Referral Form, Referral Checklist, and Consent Form) have been updated as of July 2023. All updated documents can be found on the QCCN website.

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Next Steps (When the Referral is received)

- If you have chosen to refer using the Online Referral Portal, you will receive a confirmation email that your referral has been received by our Intake Coordinators. If you submit your referral via mail or fax, you will not receive any indication that your referral has been received. You are welcome to follow up with our Intake Coordinators to determine the status of your referral.
- Intake Coordinators will complete an intake with the parent/guardian and book an initial assessment with an SLP at the Niagara Children's Centre or at a satellite location or virtually based on child's communication needs, family preferences, and staff availability. Assessments typically occur within 2-3 months of the intake call.
- The Niagara Children's Centre is **not** able to offer initial assessments at the child care site.
 - Families who would experience significant hardship with transportation should indicate these concerns to Intake Coordinators for case-by-case problem solving.
- Reports and consultation notes from the initial assessment will **not** be sent directly to the child care. Ask the parent/guardian to share these with you or to provide the contact information of the SLP that completed the assessment so that you can reach out if needed.
- If you have questions about the status of your referral, please email intake@niagarachildrenscentre.com or call 905-688-3550 ext. 110.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) from the Child Care Community

- 1. I have questions about how to fill out the *Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech-Language Pathology Referral Checklist* and/or the *Niagara Children's Centre Birth to School Start Speech- Language Pathology Referral Checklist – Consent Form*. Who should I contact for assistance?**

Please email intake@niagarachildrenscentre.com or call 905-688-3550 ext. 110.

- 2. Are the Referral Checklists, Referral Form, and supporting documents available in French? What about the referral Portal?**

The Referral Checklists, Referral Form, and supporting documents are available in French. As of August 2023, our secure online referral portal is not yet available in French. Please check back to the Portal regularly for when this option is made available.

- 3. Should I refer using the secure online referral portal or by fax/mail?**

The Niagara Children's Centre encourages you to use the secure online referral portal as much as possible, as long as parent/guardian provides consent. Fax and mail are still acceptable ways of submitting your referral

- 4. I would like to make a referral but I cannot get in touch with the legal guardian. What can I do?**

Unfortunately, without the consent of a parent/legal guardian, you cannot proceed with a referral. You are welcome to contact the Intake Coordinators to discuss your options and receive support (intake@niagarachildrenscentre.com or call 905-688-3550 ext. 110).

FAQ re: Completing and Submitting the Referral Checklist

- 5. The first age category for Referral Checklists is "By 6 months". What if the child whom I have concerns about is younger than 6 months of age?**

Refer to the [Referral Eligibility Section](#) of these Guidelines. A child younger than 6 months of age can be referred *without* the Checklist if concerns with interaction and/or early communication skills are identified by the educator and/or parent/guardian. Submit the Referral Form only.

- 6. What are the considerations in completing the Referral Checklist if the child's first language is not the language of the child care?**

Refer to the [Children Whose Primary Language is not the Language of the Child Care](#) Section of these Guidelines

- 7. When/how often is the Referral Checklist administered?**

As per the QCCN schedule, the Referral Checklist should be administered within 6-8 weeks after starting Child Care and at the annual anniversary of last Checklist completion, at a minimum. Educators do not need to wait until DPS is administered to complete the Checklist and make a referral. Please refer to the [Referral Pathways for Children attending Child Care Section](#)

Educators should follow these steps (in this order):

- Get consent from parent/guardian to complete the Referral Checklist.
- Complete the Referral Checklist.
- Share results and next steps with parent(s)/legal guardian(s).
- Obtain parent(s)/ legal guardian(s)'s signature on the Referral Form (consent to refer)
- Within one week of obtaining this signature, refer online OR submit the Referral Checklist and Form by fax/mail.



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8. How do I determine the number of words a child is saying?

Make a list of the word attempts/words the child says regularly and spontaneously (i.e. not copying). The words do not have to be articulated correctly to count as a word. It is sufficient that you know what the child is saying. “Fun” words are counted too (e.g. uh oh, wow, meow). If the child is saying words in the language of the home, make a list of these words by asking the family for their list of words. Add them together and you have an approximate total of words. If the child says “apple” in both languages, that counts as two words. Record the total on the checklist.

9. How do I determine the speech sounds that a child is saying?

Listen to the child’s spoken words and reference the word list you created for the child. On your word list, it is helpful if you also write down “how” the child articulated the word so that you don’t over count sounds (e.g. if you know he was saying “got” but said “dot”, don’t count the “g” sound). It is often easiest to write down the sounds you hear at the beginning and end of words.

10. I am completing the Referral Checklist for a child who was born premature. Do I use the child’s chronological age or adjusted/corrected age?

Use the child’s chronological age to complete the Checklist. You may choose to review the Checklist for the adjusted/corrected age for your own reference.

11. Which Checklist do I select at this child’s age?

Remember that you will be selecting the checklist based on the age that the child has most recently reached. They could be that age or older (but younger than the next “By...” age).

Examples:

Child’s Age in Months	Checklist to Use	Why?
11 months	By 9 months	The child has reached (passed) 9 months, but is less than 12 months (the next checklist)
18 months	By 18 months	The child has turned 18 months
29 months	By 24 months (2 years)	The child has reached (passed) 24 months but is less than 30 months (the next checklist)
37 months	By 36 months (3 years)	The child has reached (passed) 36 months but is less than 42 months (the next checklist)

12. Do Resource Consultants use these forms and/or the same referral portal?

No. Resource Consultants can make referrals as per the information in the [Local Community Partners section of our website referral page](#). Resource Consultants are able to complete an OT/PT/SLP Checklist to thoroughly describe a child’s multi-disciplinary needs. QCCN Educators are able to describe a child’s additional needs on the referral form, rather than in a checklist. For both referral sources, this information will be used in conjunction with information from parents to determine other eligible programs/services.

13. Can I email in my completed Referral Form and Checklist?

Unfortunately we cannot accept emailed referrals. These documents contain Personal Health Information (PHI) and is it against our policies to send these via email. You may opt to mail or fax your documents, or transfer the information into the secure Online Referral Portal.

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14. Will I receive any confirmation when my referral is received?

- If you submit your referral via mail or fax, you will not receive any indication that your referral has been received. You are welcome to follow up with our Intake Coordinators to determine the status of your referral.
- If you submit via the secure online portal, the system will automatically send you and the parent/guardian an email confirmation that your referral was received, which will include an opportunity to book an Intake appointment to complete the referral over the phone with an Intake Coordinator.

FAQ re: The Online Referral Portal

15. What do I select in the "What is your relationship to the child?" drop down?

Please **always** select "Educator – using Quality Child Care Niagara protocols". The other options are for individuals outside of QCCN.

*What is your relationship to the child?

Educator - using "Quality Child Care Niagara" protocols

16. Can I put more than one email for my organization as the "requester"?

You can only put one email in at a time. If you choose to use your email address at the child care, you may need to forward the resulting confirmation email to your child care supervisor, if that is the process your site has agreed upon.

17. I completed the Checklist on paper and want to transfer my results into the online portal, but the Portal is giving me a different aged Checklist!

You may choose to complete the checklist within the child care environment on paper, and transfer your results into the portal to complete the referral. However, in the portal, the age the Checklist generates is based on the child's age the day you input your data. If you choose to complete it on paper first, it is wise to schedule time to transfer results to the online portal ASAP, as the child's age may change.

- **Example:** The child's birthday is July 15th 2021. You complete the Checklist on paper on January 1st, 2023. You select the "By 15 months" Checklist because the child is 17 months old on this date. You attempt to complete the referral via the online portal on January 28th. The checklist will generate based on the child's age on that day, which is 18 months – a different set of criteria will populate for the Checklist.

FAQ re: SmartStart Hubs

18. What is the SmartStart Hub at Niagara Children's Centre?

SmartStart Hub at Niagara Children's Centre is a one-stop shop to help families find the help their child may require. It is a clear point of entry to child development services for parents and legal guardians who have concerns about their child's development, are unsure of their child's development support needs, what services to seek and/or how to access them. You can learn more here: <https://niagarachildrenscentre.com/smartstarthub>

19. Can I make a SmartStart Hub referral?

When our Intake Coordinators contact the family Educators have referred to the Centre, they will complete a SmartStart Hub intake in addition to the speech and language referral you have made. This will explore any additional concerns brought forward by yourself as an Educator as well as the concerns shared by the parent/legal guardian during the Intake Call. If you are concerned that a child already involved with Niagara Children's Centre would benefit from a SmartStart Hub referral (for community service navigation or additional Niagara Children's Centre services), you may suggest the parent/guardian self-refer to the SmartStart Hub if there is not a clear solution within existing QCCN processes.