What is a needs assessment

[00:00:00] **Meghan:** In this video, we will explore what a needs assessment is, what the different parts of a needs assessment are and the model that they are underpinned by. So what is a needs assessment? Well a needs assessment is a one-to-one conversation that's designed to support an individual to identify the things that, they're great at such as the strengths, and also the things they find slightly challenging.

We refer to these challenges as barriers that's because barriers are things that we can look at removing or helping somebody to overcome through use of assistive technology or various different strategies. After you have identified the strengths and the barriers in a needs assessment you'll then make recommendations in collaboration with the individual, and then write up a report that summarizes all of the things you've discussed in the session, the recommendations you've made and where they can go about finding those different recommendations.

Fundamentally a needs assessment is just a one-to-one conversation. You, as a needs assessor need to understand that there is also a hierarchy associated with doing an assessment like this and that hierarchy comes from a power divide between a needs, assessor, and individual who will be asked to share the things they find most challenging with you in order for you to both to come up with a collaborative solution together.

Your one-to-one conversation needs to start by ensuring the individual feels comfortable and this begins with building rapport. Building rapport can look like lots of things, but initially really it's a conversation to enable an individual to feel comfortable and safe and that might be through asking them things about their location or commenting on things like the weather.

Some people might refer to this as small talk, but it's fundamental in enabling that individual to feel safe and supported in the environment, because if they feel safe and supported, you're much more likely to have a conversation where they're able to share more things with you and ideally get to a place where you're able to come up with solutions together and collaboratively. Part of this conversation will need to be a discussion about what they do everyday.

You might know if they're a student or if they're at work already, but have a conversation around what that really means, what different tasks they do each day, how do they go about those tasks? And within that, you might start to already hear some of the things they find challenging. In this one-to-one conversation

you're going to explore the strengths of this individual, because it's really important that when we get to thinking about strategies, we start by building on those skills. It might be, that an individual finds reading, particularly challenging, but actually they're really creative and they're great at time management, by highlighting these skills, we ensure that the needs assessment doesn't become something that's quite negative and only focused on the things that they are finding difficult, but actually that it also becomes a celebration of their strengths because we know that diversity is in fact an asset.

Especially where that diversity is highlighted and celebrated. You'll also need to explore the things they find challenging and some of these things may have already come out in the conversation, but you all need to have a very open conversation about the barriers they experience, whether that's in relation to reading or time management, planning, organization, moving around the classroom, moving around the workspace, whatever those barriers are,

you need to try and understand them with that. Break them down into what specific aspect of reading or time management it is that they find challenging. Have they tried any solutions already, have any been successful? What do they do at the moment that you might be able to build on going forward to help them overcome that difficulty?

You'll notice as we go through this course, the language we use in relation to an individual is very much focused around strengths and barriers rather than symptoms, side effects and disability. This is for a few reasons. Primarily it's much more enabling for the individual, but it's also founded in models of disability.

There are two key models that we need to understand when we're thinking about needs assessments. The first is the medical model. You'll know this from healthcare systems, but in the medical model, an individual is diagnosed with a particular problem. You'll, often hear words like suffering, or this is the cause of all of the problems.

This is the disease. This is something that needs curing. And, this type of approach is particularly negative and we refer to this, the deficit based approach, this deficit based approach, doesn't highlight individual's wishes, isn't enabling for the individual to hear about and doesn't celebrate their diversity, but instead refers to it as something that needs to be fixed or cured.

This is not particularly helpful in a need assessment scenario. It may well be useful in a medical context where we need to understand diagnosis and to enable us to access certain treatments or therapies. However, in the context of a needs assessment, we want to identify the barriers an individual faces.

And this is because we can then think about strategies to enable them to overcome those barriers. What we're not trying to do is fix or cure an individual. We're merely trying to support the individual to be able to thrive rather than just to survive in their environment, whether that be at school or at work.

And this is the reason that we use the social model, the social model turns the medical model on its head and it says, actually the individual is not disabled by their diagnosis or the medical condition or disability that they experience. They're actually disabled by environmental and social factors.

For example, if you're a wheelchair user and you arrive at a restaurant and there are three steps to enter that restaurant and no ramp it is only in that moment that you would be disabled because you're disabled by a barrier. In which case, the barrier is the three steps, for that individual to no longer be disabled in that circumstance.

The only thing that is required is to provide a ramp or to remove the steps and change the foundations of the building. But one of those is slightly easier than, the other. By providing a ramp we've enabled access and therefore we've removed the disabling barrier. That's what we're trying to do with the needs assessment.

We are trying to remove the barrier rather than to suggest an individual might need to be cured or something needs to be changed with that specific individual. The idea of needs assessments is to ensure an individual can thrive in their environment, but very often that might need mean that the environment needs to change to support them better.

Once you've got to the end of your needs assessment and your conversation with the individual, you'll need to summarize all of your recommendations, verbally, talk them through with the individual and make sure they're happy with them and then summarize all of this in a report that report may only be seen by the individual, but it may also be shared with parents or workplaces, organizations or schools to enable that individual to receive the best support.

This report needs to be detailed. It needs to justify all the recommendations that are made and in the context where many people don't yet know about assistive technology, it also needs to link to the particular technology that you've recommended. I hope this video has been useful in helping you to understand what a needs assessment is throughout the course.

We'll be exploring this in much more detail. And by the end of this, we hope that you'll be brilliant needs assessors