

decision tree

the five tests

1 There is impairment to health.

Since the definition of an absolute judgement of impairment has been tightly drawn to include only children at risk of death or experiencing extremely limited functioning, it is reasonable to conclude that all children in this category will be experiencing significant impairment.

2 Impairment to development is at the extreme end of the continuum relative to the norm.

Any child at the extremes of any developmental range might be judged as experiencing significantly impaired development, for example, children below the 0.4th or above the 99.6th centile line for weight or height or scoring a maximum on a measure of anti-social behaviour.

3 Impairment has persisted for several developmental stages.

Since many impairments are time-limited, impairment in any case that is unusually persistent might be considered to be significant. So, many children experience periodic difficulties at school or emotional problems, but it is uncommon for either setback to persist for lengthy periods.

4 There is impairment in four or all of the five developmental categories.

The tool attempts to consider levels of impairment across five developmental dimensions: physical, behavioural, intellectual/educational, social and emotional. It is unusual to find impairment on only one dimension because risks tend to have multiple effects, but to encounter it on all five or on four out of five dimensions is uncommon enough to be taken as a reliable indication of significant impairment.

5 Development is poor relative to similar groups.

If a child is performing badly even against the norms for a clinical population or that provided for by a certain service, then the impairment may be said to be significant. If a special needs teacher finds a pupil's functioning to be low compared to others in a low functioning population or the youth justice worker considers a child's behaviour to be worse than most, then the threshold has probably been crossed.

