What Are We Assuming?

A reflection for noticing how beliefs about capability, maturity, independence and coping can shape a child's experience.

Adults naturally form impressions of children.

But when a child has a disability, those impressions can quickly become expectations about what they can do, what they should need and how they should behave.

This reflection helps us notice the difference between what we know — and what we have assumed.



What we notice and what we know are not always the same thing.

Look closer.

THE ASSUMPTION CHECK

They are capable.	→	Does that make it harder for them to ask for help?
They struggle academically.	→	Are we lowering expectations — or changing what we invest in?
They are mature.	→	Do they still have permission to behave their age?
They are independent.	→	Do they still have genuine choice about receiving support?
They are brave.	→	Do they still feel safe showing fear or distress?
They are emotional.	→	Are we listening to what the emotion is communicating?

AN ASSUMPTION CAN CARRY AN EXPECTATION

What does this child feel allowed to need because of the way we see them?

An assumption can sound positive and still shape what a child feels allowed to need.

What Is the Assumption Changing?

Look beyond the label

Assumptions don't only shape what we think.

They shape what changes around the child.

LOOK BEYOND THE LABEL

Ask:

- What opportunities is this child being offered?
- What opportunities might they be missing?
- What support do we assume they no longer need?
- What support do we assume they will always need?
- What skills receive the most time and attention?
- Are we investing differently because of what we expect their future to look like?
- Are we comparing them with another child with a similar disability?
- Are we treating something they did once as proof of what they can always manage?
- Are we interpreting composure as evidence that they are coping?
- Are we mistaking communication style for intelligence or understanding?

What we know

What we are assuming

What we need to find out from the child

BOTTOM REFLECTION

The emotional cost of an assumption often begins with what changes around the child because of it.

Leave Room to Be Wrong

Children need room to show us something different from what we expected.



An expectation can guide us.

It should not trap the child.

BEFORE DECIDING WHAT A CHILD NEEDS, ASK...

01 CHECK THE EVIDENCE

- [ ] What evidence am I using?
- [ ] Is this based on this child — or another child I have known?
- [ ] Has anything changed since I formed this view?
- [ ] Could health, fatigue, anxiety, communication or environment be affecting what I am seeing?

Today's child deserves today's information.

02 MAKE ROOM FOR CHANGE

- [ ] Am I allowing the child to contradict my expectations?
- [ ] Can they ask for more support without being seen as going backwards?
- [ ] Can they need less support without adults assuming they will always manage alone?

Changing support does not mean the child has failed or succeeded at independence.

03 LET THE CHILD BE MORE THAN THE LABEL

- Can the "mature" child be silly?
- Can the "brave" child be frightened?
- Can the "capable" child struggle?
- Can the child I underestimated surprise me?

Children are more than the version of them we expected.



ONE ASSUMPTION TO REVISIT

A belief I may be carrying about this child:

_____

What that belief might be influencing:

_____

Something I could ask or observe instead:

_____

How I can leave more room for the child to show me something different:

_____



The goal is not to avoid having expectations.

It is to hold them lightly enough that the child can still challenge them.

Children should not have to live inside the version of them adults decided on too early.