

## Day to day working with the people who support your child

If you have a child with special educational needs or a disability (SEND), one thing is certain – you'll be meeting and working with lots of professionals over the years.

Good relationships with the people who support your child are really important – they help your child and family to get support that makes a real difference and they help to keep stress levels down for everyone. Day to day, keeping communications going with professionals helps to keep things running smoothly and sort out small issues and difficulties.

There are lots of ways to stay in touch and make sure people get the information they need clearly and in good time. This factsheet has suggestions from parents and carers, teachers and SENCOs and DiAS Officers.

### What are the main things that can help build good relationships?

Firstly, it's important to remember that this is a journey. The relationships that you and your child have with some professionals will last for many years, so taking the time to get to know each other is key.

Find out who's who in your child's school and what their job roles are. Introduce yourself and find out who to speak to about specific issues, and how to best get in touch with them. For example, to keep updated on day to day progress and problems, the class teacher or teaching/support assistant might be the best person to speak to.

Meet and get to know the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). The SENCO is a teacher who coordinates the support for children with special educational needs or disabilities in schools. They will be the people who will make sure your child gets the right support.

When you first meet a new member of staff or professional, share the main things they need to know about your child. This could include how they like to communicate, their likes and dislikes, any triggers and strategies you use to help them focus or calm down – whatever is most important for your child. Some parents share a 'pen portrait' type of document, which is just one page of key information.

Stay in touch about important things. It sounds obvious but make sure you keep key school staff informed of any major problems your child is facing and any issues you're having at home. This can help the school support your child well, especially if they are having an 'off day'. Be mindful of over communicating too! If you've got more than one thing to ask or say, try and do that in one email or call rather than several and give staff time to reply. If you need a reply urgently, be clear about that when you make contact.



Ask the staff at school to share positive information about your child's achievements and progress and good things that happen during the day. If things haven't gone so well, ask staff to tell you by email or phone or privately at school. There's nothing worse than being told only about challenging behaviour or difficulties, or being told about them in front of your child and other parents.

## What is the best way to stay in touch?

The answer to that will depend on your child and their school. Here are some ideas.

- Lots of parents use home to school books or communication tools, particularly in pre-school and primary school. You and the class teacher, teaching assistants or other staff can use these to share information about how your child's day has been. You can tell school staff every day how your child is, or if something has happened that might affect how they are in school. Staff can do the same.
- You can have a chat when you drop your child off at school or pick them up. This can work well in pre-school or primary and is useful for quick sharing of information or questions.
- In secondary schools a 'go to' person can be helpful for getting day to day issues sorted out or for sharing information. This might be your child's form teacher or a TA.
- You can use email to contact TAs, support staff and teachers and many are very responsive to parents of children and young people with SEND. Try not to overdo the emails though! If you've got more than one query or things to pass on, pull them together in one email rather than sending several over a day or a week. So, send one email with six things rather than six emails with one thing!
- You can telephone the school, though during teaching hours it can sometimes be hard to get hold of teaching staff or a SENCO. Many schools have staff on reception who can help you find the right person or make sure messages are passed on.
- Parents evening is another opportunity to stay in touch. These meetings are usually brief and mostly about academic progress, so they give you limited scope for long discussions. But going to these regularly helps you stay connected to your child's school life and they reinforce the relationships you and your child have with teachers and staff.
- Some schools have pupil and parent apps and online systems where information can be shared both ways. Use these if you're able to.



### Important to know

You have a unique and expert knowledge of your child and you should be involved in decisions and discussions about the support they need and the goals they're aiming for. Your expert view of their strengths, challenges and needs is a key part of making sure they get support that helps them to be the best they can be. You have the right to:

- share your views about your child's support needs
- have your views listened to and taken into account
- have a supporter or advocate with you at meetings about your child's support

A 'parent' in education law includes anyone who has parental responsibilities, guardianship or care of a child or young person. This means that if you are a kinship or foster carer, these rights apply to you too.

## How do I keep things running smoothly?

Keeping things running smoothly is easier if you're organised. One simple thing many families find helpful is writing down important things and keeping reports, letters, emails, meeting notes and assessment paperwork. Just jotting down thoughts, concerns and ideas on post it notes or in your phone can help in the run up to a meeting for example.

Create a folder where you keep everything, so you always know where to find information when you most need it. If you have more than one child with SEND, have separate folders for each.

Follow up any spoken conversations about your child's support or care with an email or letter, so you have a record of what was said and agreed. Sometimes there is just a huge amount to keep track of and it always helps to have something in writing.

Give some positive feedback! If you think something is working well, say that. If your child's teacher or TA is using a strategy that is helping your child, tell them about the positive impact it's having.

Tell professionals what works for you. You know your child better than anyone and you've worked out how to get the best from them. You can offer suggestions about the ways they can support your child that work for you at home and which help them avoid distress and upset.

Remember that schools are busy and be realistic about how quickly you might get an answer to your query. So, if something is urgent, telephone rather than email.



Try to be constructive. You might not always agree with the way the school staff are supporting your child, but try and work from the assumption that you're working towards the same goals. The relationship between you and the school is much more likely to be positive and work well when everyone involved is constructive.

If you find you don't have a great relationship with a particular member of staff, and let's face it we all have the odd personality clash, ask to talk to someone else.

SENCO. In some smaller schools, or for more serious issues you might ask to meet with the headteacher.

When you ask for a meeting tell the school what you'd like to talk about and whether you need or would like other people to be there. Taking someone along to support you, such as your partner or a friend can be helpful too. We've got more detailed information about how to prepare for and have a good meeting. You can find it on our website.

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## What should I do if I'm worried about something or have questions?

If things feel like they are starting to go wrong, start the conversations straight away. First, talk to your 'go to' person – your main contact for day to day issues. Many things can usually be sorted by an open and honest conversation. It's common for parents and schools to miscommunicate and often schools are supporting a child well, but just forgetting to tell parents what they're doing.

If you're worried about something, if things have changed at home with your child's behaviour or you want or need to talk about in more depth, ask for a meeting. Depending on what you need to discuss, that could be with your child's teacher, form teacher or