

Getting the most out of meetings

Most parents and carers have regular meetings with school or college staff, as well as occasional meetings with health and social care professionals and SEND specialists. Some parents take meetings in their stride and feel confident and comfortable sharing their views and taking part in decision making. For others, meetings can sometimes feel intimidating, overwhelming, and stressful.

However you feel about them, meetings are a part of life with a child with SEND. So, it's a good idea to do what you can to get the most out of them, and to make them as positive and useful an experience as possible.

Asking for a meeting

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your child's education and support and to have your views heard. You also have the right to ask for a meeting with nursery, school, or college staff at any time.

You don't have to wait for your once a term meeting or a yearly review of an EHC plan. It's always better to talk to staff at school or college earlier rather than later – don't wait until things have gone badly wrong to start a conversation.

You might ask for a meeting if:

- your child's needs or circumstances change
- you've noticed a change in their behaviour at home or at school
- you're worried about something that's happened at school, such as bullying or challenging behaviour
- your child isn't making the progress you would expect

Depending on what the issue is, contact your child's teacher, form teacher or the SENCO and ask to meet. Ask for a meeting at a time and place that works for you or ask for a virtual meeting if you would prefer to stay at home.

If you think it would be helpful to have some support, you can ask someone to be with you at the meeting. They can help you by taking notes so you can focus on what is being said. Having someone with you can also help you feel more confident. Depending on the issue, you can also ask for a specific professional to be there to give their advice or recommendations.

Getting ready for a meeting

It's always a good idea to prepare yourself for every meeting, even if it's just making a list of what you want to talk about before you go in. How much preparation you need to do will depend on what the meeting is for and what you're discussing.

Here are our top practical tips for being well prepared.

- Give yourself time to think about what you want to say and what needs to be discussed. This is especially important for meetings where key things are being talked about, such as the move to secondary school or preventing your child from being excluded.
- Keep notes of all the things that pop into your head. You can use your phone or post it notes on the fridge - whatever works for you. If there's something you're not sure about, write down the questions that will promote you to unpick that.
- Gather any evidence you want to share about the issues being discussed. That could include a diary you've kept about events, communications with school or your own

research on a particular area.

- Talk to your child or young person and ask for their views. Think about whether you want them to come, and if it's appropriate, ask them if they want to be there. We've got more information about collecting and sharing views on our website.
- Find out the basic information about the meeting – time, date, where it's being held or whether it's online and who will be there. Ask how long it's likely to last if you know you need to be somewhere afterwards. Make sure you have a link to the meeting and the invitation if it's an online meeting.
- If the school or college staff have called the meeting, ask for an agenda so you know what's going to be talked about. You can also tell the person holding the meeting if there is anything you would like to discuss.
- Ask for a copy of your child's latest school plan, or any other relevant reports or information to be sent to you before the meeting. So, for example, if there has been an incident at school, ask for the written report about it.
- Tell school or college staff if someone is going to be with you for support.
- Make a list of things you want to discuss or use the DiAS meeting form to get your thoughts down on paper. Try and take a balanced view if you can – think about what is going well, as well as the challenges.
- Be realistic about how much can be achieved in one meeting. You may need to focus on small steps or prioritise one or two things to discuss. Be clear what you would like to get out of the meeting.
- Read any new reports and relevant documents, such as the school plan or your child's EHC plan before the meeting.

During the meeting

This is the part that some parents find the most nerve wracking but being well prepared should help you feel more confident and in control. Part of the preparation for having a successful meeting is being aware of how your feelings, and everyone else's, can affect how things go. You can find out more about this in our information about your role and your child's part in meetings.

Give yourself enough time to get to meeting so you're not feeling rushed and stressed before you've started.

Let the meeting organiser know if you will be late. Remember to have a pen and paper for notes.

At each meeting there is usually a meeting 'chair' – usually that's the person who called the meeting and who leads the discussion. If there are a few people at the meeting, they will usually start by explaining what the meeting is about and by asking people to introduce themselves. Say who you are and make sure you know who else is there (you can write names and titles in your notes). If you're not sure what someone's role is or why they're at the meeting, it's OK to ask.

During the meeting you can use the agenda and cross off any questions on your list as they are answered. If this isn't your first meeting, ask about any action that was agreed at the last meeting to check what has been done.

It's OK to speak up if you don't understand something or want something explained in more detail. It's also OK to disagree with what's being said. If you don't agree with something, you could try saying something like "I understand/hear what you're saying, but I have a different view, or I disagree."

Listen carefully to each person and try not to interrupt. Try and respect other people's views in the meeting. We know that sometimes this can be hard, especially if you strongly disagree with something, but in the long run it's more constructive to give everyone a chance to air their views.

When the meeting is ending, ask the person running it to list the main action that has been agreed, and who will be doing what by when. Write it down so you have a record. Check all your questions have been answered and write down when the next meeting will be.



Sometimes meetings can feel quite negative, especially if your child has challenging behaviour and that is what's being discussed. In these situations, try and be as positive as you can and focus on how things can improve, rather than on what's gone wrong. Ask if you can talk about solutions rather than problems. We have some tips about managing difficult conversations that can help you prepare if you think it's going to be a difficult meeting.

Don't feel pressured into agreeing to things that you're not sure about. You can ask for time to think about things or say you'd like to talk to others such as your partner or someone from DiAS.

After the meeting

Most of the time you won't need to do much after each meeting unless you have agreed to act on something specific at home. Here are a few tips for things you may need to follow up.

- If you forget something in the meeting, email straight away and ask your question.
- If notes were taken, make sure you get a copy of them. If you haven't had anything within a couple of weeks, contact the person leading the meeting to ask for them.
- You could send the person who led the meeting a summary of the action points and agreed timescales for these, to check your understanding is correct and so there are no misunderstandings.
- Some parents find it helpful to add the actions to their diary, to make sure they get done before the next meeting.
- If things didn't go well at the meeting and you said or did something you regret, contact the people at the meeting afterwards and explain and/or apologise.

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