

A successful reintegration meeting

When your child is due to go back to school after a suspension, the school should hold a **reintegration meeting**.

This is where you, your child and the professionals get together. The aim of the meeting is to plan how to give your child the best chance for a successful return to school. The plan should be realistic and based on what your child is able to manage.

Reintegration into school is a journey, where breaking the negative cycle of suspension is vital. The route will be different for each child, but the goal of making sure they feel safe and ready to learn will be the same.

It can be difficult for your child to go back to school after a suspension. They may be worried about work they have missed, relationships with teachers, staff and friends and getting suspended again. Parent carers often have a strong emotional response to suspension too. You may be worried about behaviour problems getting worse, your child's mental health and the support they're getting (or not) in school.

To get the most out of the meeting, it helps to prepare a little and think about issues beforehand. Here are some top tips from our enquiry line staff and parent carers about how to do that.

through things with you. It's helpful if you can explore with them how they felt about being suspended and how they feel about going back to school. This can be especially important if they think there has been an injustice or that being suspended wasn't the right decision.

One of the things that suspension is meant to do is to give your child time to reflect on what's happened and why. Some schools ask the child to write a "reflection letter" to do that. If it's appropriate, the letter can take the form of an apology to a specific staff member or another child. Your child, and the school staff, can find it helpful as it gives some insight into how your child feels about going back to school.

Arranging the meeting

Ask to meet at a time when you can physically be there to support your child. If you can't be there in person, ask for a virtual meeting or even a phone call. Or, if there is another adult you trust who knows your child well, you could ask for them to go in your place. What matters is that there is someone there who can be a supportive presence for your child.

Try and make sure it's at a time when you're not going to be rushed. Often meetings held the day before your child returns to school can work well. There is less pressure and stress because your child isn't going straight to lessons afterwards. There is usually more time to talk as well.

Find out who will be at the meeting, apart from you and your child. It makes sense to have professionals there who know your child well and know what led to the suspension.

Before the meeting

Talking to your child

Talk to your child or young person about what happened and give them the chance to work

That could be a SENCO or assistant SENCO, Head of Year, pastoral lead or member of the senior leadership team.

Ask for the meeting to be held in a room where it's quiet and you've got some privacy. This is helpful if you want to discuss support or if you think it's going to be a challenging meeting. You could say something like 'could we meet somewhere where we will be able to discuss things confidentially, as I'd like to talk to you about my child's support at school?'

Getting prepared

If you're angry or upset, try and put your own feelings to one side. The focus of the meeting is to make sure your child goes back into school well and successfully. That means focusing on positives and looking at their support constructively. Be committed to a good outcome - get into the right 'headspace'.

Managing difficult conversations can be hard, especially if the relationship between you and the school is poor or is breaking down. If you think the meeting is going to be difficult, prepare for it. Take someone with you if you think it might help to keep things calm and focused. Make notes about what happened, any questions you have and what support you think is needed or needs to change. Try and think through the issues that might come up in the meeting from the school's point of view. Prepare your answers if you think it will help.

During the meeting

Starting off

Sit next to your child or young person if you think it will make them feel less stressed.

If you don't know who anyone at the meeting is, ask them who they are and what their role at the meeting is.

If your child has written a reflection letter, it can be shared at the start of the meeting. That can help to guide the conversation about the behaviour that led to the suspension and about what can be changed in the future.

The tone of the meeting

Reintegration meetings should have a positive focus. They should be about improving things for the future and making a fresh start. There should be a clear message to your child that the staff believe in them and want them in school. It should also be clear that this suspension isn't a barrier to them being successful in the future. If this is not the tone you're hearing from the start, you may need to step in. You could say something like, 'I think it's really important that x knows that when he/she goes back into school it will be a fresh start. Can we talk about the positive things that can be done to help that happen?'

Sometimes reintegration meetings can end up focusing almost solely on the child and what they're going to do to change their behaviour. For a child with SEND, changing behaviour isn't something they're likely to be able to just do. Reintegration meetings should be about a shared responsibility to improve things – so a child and staff working together will both need to make some adjustments. You can ask staff how they are going to support your child in future, and what reasonable adjustments can be made to their daily life in school.

You can ask whether your child could have a **restorative conversation** with any member of staff or other child involved in the incident that led to the suspension. Staff trained in using this approach use restorative language and questions to allow children and young people to understand the impact of their behaviours. Those affected are invited to share what has happened, what the impact on them has been and what needs to happen to put things right or to make things better in the future.

Planning future support

Everyone will need a plan to follow to help your child return to school well. A good starting point is for you and school staff to talk to your child about how they're finding life in school. Having these conversations can sometimes be difficult, particularly if they struggle to express themselves. There are ideas for things to try on our website pages about sharing views.

Once there is a better understanding about how your child is managing in school, it's a good idea to look at your child's support. That can also involve looking at

pastoral support to help them manage their behaviour better in school.

You could ask whether your child

- has a special educational need that isn't clear, or being supported at all or enough
- needs more or different support and reasonable adjustments to be made to school life and policies
- needs to be assessed by an educational psychologist or other specialist
- might benefit from a review of their school support plan or relational support plan
- may need an early or interim review, if they have an EHC plan
- could find mentoring helpful – this is a trusted person such as a learning mentor to meet your child regularly
- would benefit from some counselling
- needs some specific support around their behaviour – this might be something like anger management course or advice from a specialist behaviour support teacher

If you're talking about changes in support or a new or updated school plan, it can be helpful to take some brief notes. You can do that on your phone. Many schools also have their own reintegration meeting forms. These will have information about what was discussed and agreed, and you and your child may be asked to sign them.

Ask for any new plan or way forward to be shared with other relevant staff too. For example, there is no point making a plan to change support in lessons, which class teachers do not know about.

Some schools give children a report card to use when they come back to school. This should have personalised targets for each individual child to aim for which lead to some personalised rewards if they achieve them.

Following up

Once the discussions have finished, it's a good idea to agree on the follow-up. This can be as simple as setting a time for staff to call you and share an update on your child's progress in a week's time. Or if there have been changes made to support, you might ask to set up a

meeting with the SENCO in a few weeks to see whether these are helping.

Make sure you're clear about who has agreed to do what and by when. That includes anything you or your child may have agreed to.



DiAS information that may be helpful.

These resources are on our website or available as a document by contacting us.

- About suspension and permanent exclusion
- At risk of suspension and permanent exclusion
- Suspension
- Permanent exclusion
- Getting the most out of meetings
- Managing difficult conversations

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