

Helping your young person to give their views

When you're helping a young person to give their views, it can be hard to know where to start. The pressure of getting everything down on paper can feel overwhelming for a young person and their parent.

There are many ways to gather views and how you do it will depend on how the young person likes to communicate, how they like to record information and who they feel most comfortable with.

Always remember though – there is no right or wrong way to do this and everything a young person says is relevant.

Who is going to help?

Often parents are the best people to support a young person to share their views. But sometimes, as a young person gets older and becomes more independent, it can be helpful for someone else to do it.

A trusted adult who's seen as not taking sides may be able to help a young person express ideas or feelings that are different from their parents, teachers or the local authority. You could ask your young person who would be the best person to help them, such as a teaching assistant, support worker or friend.

Whoever gives the support, it's important that they're focused on the young person's needs and goals. If they can help them to think big, be independent in their views and clear about exactly what they want, that will help too!

DIAS has Children and Young Person's Workers who provide information and support they can be contacted through the contact form on the DIAS website.

Helping a young person share their feelings and ideas

Every young person should feel free to say whatever they like. It's the job of whoever is with them to enable them to think about and decide what really matters.

A good way to do this is by using a mix of open and closed questions. Open ended questions are those which take more than one word to answer. Closed questions usually give one-word answers. So, "How was college today?" is an open question and "Did you have lunch today?" is a closed question (the answer would be yes or no).

Mixing the two types of question up can help to move a conversation on – you can listen to an answer and then ask another question to get a bit deeper into how they're feeling.

If the young person says something which you feel they could expand on, you can use the technique of repeating it back to them and acknowledging their feelings at the same time (see the example below).

What are you trying to find out?

Start with a loose plan and some questions, which allow your young person to go off on a tangent. Often when people know it's OK to speak freely, you can find out more. They might say something which seems so basic, but which tells you a lot about how they are feeling, if you dig a bit deeper.

So, for example

Q: "What do you do in your spare time?"

A: "I play Minecraft."

Q: “So what do you really like about Minecraft?”

A: “I have friends on Minecraft, but not at college. No one talks to me, but on Minecraft everyone thinks I am good at the game, so I feel happy.”

These are the kind of questions you can use:

- What makes you happy and what do you enjoy (if anything)?
- What do you feel proud of (if anything)?
- What worries you or makes you feel sad?
- What do you find hardest at the moment?
- If you could change anything, what would it be?
- Do you ever think about what you’d like for your future?
- Do you ever think about a job you might like?



Here’s an example of a conversation

Q: It seems like you’re finding things a bit difficult in school at the moment. What do you think are the hardest things?

A: I don’t know – it’s just all of it. I don’t want to talk about it.

Q: I understand. I’m sorry - that sounds really hard. I wonder if there’s anything that can make it feel any better. What comes to mind when you think about school?

A: I hate it. It’s too much. Nothing can make it better the teachers have no time and too many kids.

Q: Ok – is it to do with the noise? Or any pupils being unkind? Or the work, maybe?

A: It’s the work – I don’t understand stuff in lessons but the teachers are too scary to ask.

Q: Ok. Can you tell me more about that?

A: Yes. Well, it’s mainly Maths, Science and Geography. The teacher goes too fast. I can’t keep up and I feel anxious about being behind all the time. But I don’t want attention or everyone to think I’m stupid.

Q: Ok. Well – I can tell you you’re not stupid. In terms of your work – do you prefer work being put on the board, or a work sheet, or being spoken to you?

A: I can’t listen properly when it’s spoken to me, and I get distracted when I have to look at the board a lot. So I prefer worksheets but I’m not always allowed them so it’s useless.

Q: Ok, but I think it would help school to know what you find easier and harder; so that if they can change anything, at least they can try to change the right things where possible. It may not make it much easier, but it might just make a difference.

How do I record what’s been said?

There are lots of ways to record a young person’s views. Here are a few ideas for your young person to try:

- use a big sheet of paper and jot down lots of ideas
- record a video
- draw pictures - use pens, pencils, a computer, paint, cutting and sticking, do a collage
- speak to a supporter who can write things for you
- fill out the ‘All about me’ or ‘This is Me’ profile pages - these are on the DiAS website
- use pre-made online personal profile one-pagers
- write a letter or song or rap and record it



Example of how views might look, after discussion about work:

Things I find difficult:

- I struggle to understand the work in lessons; I don’t feel able to keep up with the pace
- I don’t feel able to tell teachers I don’t understand
- Maths, science and Geography are the hardest three subjects for me
- I find it difficult when teachers verbally speak the work, or put it on the board as I get distracted writing it down
- I can’t focus easily in lessons

How you can help me:

- I prefer work to be given to me on worksheets
- I find it easier if I am not rushed in lessons
- If you’re checking I understand, or I’ve done something wrong, please don’t draw attention to me in front of other pupils

Need more information?

Sheffkids (part of the site for adults)

One-page profiles to download

w: www.sheffkids.co.uk/resources/

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