

Information, Advice and Support Service



Preparing for meetings

Introduction

As a parent or carer of a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or a disability you may be invited to attend meetings about your child in school, hospital or other locations with other services. You may also want to request a meeting to discuss your child and aren't sure how to go about it.

This guide has been produced to give you some ideas on how to prepare for these meetings in order to get the best out of them.

We have included some notes pages at the back of this leaflet that you may find useful. If you want to please feel free to enlarge them and photocopy them for your own use.

Getting organised – things you need to do

Requesting a meeting

You have the right to request a meeting with any professional involved with your child. You may wish to discuss problems at school or worries about progress. You may wish to talk to a health professional to discuss other concerns. Ask yourself these basic questions:

- What do I need to discuss?
- Who do I want to meet with to discuss it?
- How do I organise it?
- Are there any special arrangements that need to be made so that I can go to the meeting?

What do I need to discuss?

Work out exactly what the problem is and why you feel you need to have the meeting. Write it down. This will help if you need to send a letter to request the meeting. Be as clear as you can about your reasons for needing the meeting. We can always help with this if you feel unclear and want to talk it through - our number is on the back of this leaflet.

Who do I need to meet with to discuss it?

If the problem is related to school you may want to meet with the class teacher or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). If you don't know who the SENCO is call the school to ask for their name and best time to talk to them. If the

problem is related to health issues you may need to speak to your child's Doctor or Specialist Nurse.

How do I organise it?

You can request the meeting by calling the relevant people and organising a time over the phone.

You can request the meeting in writing, giving times when you will be available. Ask people to get back to you to tell you when the meeting should go ahead.

If you have involvement of a number of professionals you may have been allocated a Keyworker or Lead Professional. They can request the meeting and organise it on your behalf.

Hints!

1. Make sure to have pen and paper or even a mobile phone ready to help you record dates and times and
2. Keep a diary to make sure you have no other appointments that could clash with the meeting.

Special Arrangements...

If you need help because of a disability or sensory impairment remember to tell the people holding the meeting to make sure they organise what you need.

If English is not your first language or you find it difficult, you can ask for an interpreter to help you. This may take some time to arrange for you so remember to ask for this well ahead of the meeting.

Tools to help you get organised

- Diary
- File for reports and correspondence

Diary – If you can, try to keep a diary about your child and their difficulties. Make a note of:

- Date
- Areas of concern
- Any difficulties your child has
- Any improvements that you or your child notice
- Anyone you have spoken to at school and any action taken
- Any knock-on effects – behaviour, health, anxiety, self confidence etc.

If you speak to someone on the phone about your child, check:

- what you have agreed to do
- what was decided

You could ask for them to put it down in a letter and send it to you to keep in your file. Write down for yourself what was agreed in the conversation.

File for reports and correspondence

- Keep all important information about your child including school records and reports, important medical information, copies of letters from the school and copies of letters or reports from other professionals.
- Keep copies of all letters that you send.
- Try to keep them in a file in a safe place and put them in date order.

Getting ready for meetings

- If you are not sure what the meeting is about ask the person holding the meeting.
- Ask who will be there and why. If you feel there should be a particular person at the meeting ask for them to be invited.
- Read any reports that are sent to you before the meeting.
- Plan what you are going to say. Be clear about what you are going to ask and what you want to discuss, for example 'What progress has he made on his individual education plan (IEP) or One Plan in the last term?'
- It may help to make a short list of your concerns, questions and suggestions so that you don't forget to talk about them when you get into the meeting. Use reports from professionals to help back you up if possible.

Your child's views

If possible, ask your child for their views including what they enjoy. Do they have any worries? Are there things they would like you to ask the teacher?

Taking people with you

- You may want to take your partner, a friend or advisor with you for support. This is especially helpful when a major decision is going to be made.
- If you feel you might lose your temper or become emotional during the meeting take someone with you for support and guidance.

The person with you will be able to take notes at the meeting of what was said and by whom. This can be a great help for you as you may not be able to remember everything that was said after the meeting.

At the meeting

- It is important to always attend meetings and be on time – if you are running late phone ahead and let them know. Give yourself enough time to thoroughly discuss any problems.
- Everyone at the meeting should be introduced to you but if not ask who each person is and what their connection is with your child.

- If the people in the meeting use complicated terms or words that you don't understand, ask them for an explanation. You have a right to know what is being said.
- If reports or any new paperwork are brought to the meeting ask for time to read them. If the information is new or very important ask for the meeting to be put back to another time or date to give you time to go through them.
- Don't forget you are a professional too – you are the parent and you know your child in a way they do not.
- If you disagree with people about their views do not be afraid to speak up. If you think what they are suggesting will not work discuss it with them. Ask them why they have suggested those things.
- If you do not understand how a person came to a conclusion ask them to explain it. Continue to ask questions until you are sure what they are saying. Your friend or supporter might also be able to ask for things to be explained more fully.
- Try to make your point in a calm and polite way. Being angry can stop you getting your point across. People are more likely to listen and take on board what you have to say if you say it calmly. This is when having someone with you can really help.
- Meetings can sometimes be stressful. It is okay to express emotions and cry or be angry but if you start to feel 'out of control' or are 'losing it' it might be better to have a break or ask for another meeting at another time.
- Be realistic about what you can ask for and be prepared to negotiate about what will be done. Be prepared to be flexible and suggest different options and alternatives.
- Try to be positive with the other people present and thank them for their help.
- At the end of the meeting ask for any actions to be confirmed while everyone is still present. Who is doing what? What happens next? How will this be reviewed? Will there be a further meeting? You may find the form used in Team Around the Child meetings very useful. (We have included a sample copy at the back of this leaflet). Actions are written down and everyone who has agreed to do something has to sign to say when they will do it. Ask before the meeting if this can be used.
- Ask for a copy of the minutes of the meeting.

You might want to write a letter after the meeting to confirm what has been said.

Have Your Say

Please let us know any comments you may have about this leaflet by contacting the Information, Advice and Support Service – Tel: 01325 405878 or email: iass@darlington.gov.uk

Further copies of this and other leaflets are available from the Information, Advice and Support Service.

This leaflet is also available in large print on request.

Data Protection

Although we are part of Darlington Borough Council, any record we make of your contact with us is confidential to the Information, Advice and Support Service except where you agree to us talking with other agencies, or if a child is at risk.

Further Contacts

If you need any further information, advice or support please contact:

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