

Newcastle SENDIASS How to Guide:

How to have a successful meeting



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. Where a child is receiving SEN support the school should meet with parents at least three times each year.

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.

Different kinds of meetings

The regular 'how things are going' school or college meeting

Most children and young people with SEND are in school or college, and that means you should be meeting routinely and regularly with staff to see how things are going. Most parents meet with staff once a term. But you might meet more often if things aren't going well or if your child needs more support, such as in the first year of secondary school.

These kinds of meetings are usually with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). Other staff may be at the meeting too, such as your child's teacher, if they're in primary school, or their form tutor if they're in secondary school. Sometimes other professionals might be invited, and your child or young person can go too if they're able to and want to.

Meetings usually follow a pattern. Your child should have a school plan where all their needs and support are written down along with some outcomes. Outcomes are a bit like targets. They are about the difference the extra support should make for your child. The plan is usually talked about as the main part of the meeting - looking at and discussing each need and the support given, seeing what's going well and whether anything needs to change. You'll be able to share how things are at home and you'll hear how things are going at school. This kind of meeting often takes about an hour. This might be a meeting that you request if you have concerns about what is happening at school or your child's needs.

The ‘you’ve been called in because there is a problem’ meeting

This is the kind of meeting that many parents worry about and dread getting a request for. It could be about anything, so it’s important to find out what you’re going to be talking about before you go, so you don’t get any surprises. If it looks like it might be a difficult or challenging meeting, it can help to take someone with you for support. It can be difficult to prepare for a meeting like this, but it makes sense to get as much information as you can before you go. If it’s about something that happened at school or college, get your child’s version of the events. Depending on the situation, it might help to talk to other parents or chat informally to your child’s TA or support staff. Ask who will be at the meeting and ask for an agenda too.

Early help meeting

Early help meetings are about support for a whole family, not just a single child. So, they might include support for you and/or siblings as well as a child with SEND. If they want to, your child or young person can, and should, be at the meeting too. Early help meetings should be about building on a family’s strengths to help them support their child and themselves. That means focusing on finding solutions and ways forward that are led by you, rather than being ‘done to’. Everyone at the meeting is usually working to a plan, and that is usually reviewed on a regular basis to make sure it is working or if anything needs to change. Health and social care professionals may be at the meeting as well as staff from other support services and the school or college.

Education Health and Care plan review meeting

If your child has an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) it will be reviewed regularly. This is so it can change when it needs to, as your child grows and their needs change. A review usually happens once a year. Sometimes it can happen earlier if lots has changed for your child or they’re really struggling at nursery, school, or college. For parents, the main part of reviewing the EHCP usually happens at a meeting. This is when the people involved in supporting your child get together to talk about how things are going. This includes you and your child or young person and any professionals – including those in health and social care as well as education. At the meeting everyone will use the EHCP, alongside yours and your child’s views, to talk about needs and support and whether any of that needs to change. Every EHCP also has outcomes and these will be discussed too. Sometimes recommendations are made for them to be changed. Meetings usually last at least an hour, though this will depend on how much there is to talk about and how many people are at the meeting. The process of the meeting and the way it’s managed can feel quite formal. Someone will be leading the meeting and there may be an agenda. There is likely to be a focus on the paperwork, including reports that may have been sent in. It can have quite a different feel to it, compared to a termly meeting with school staff.

Meeting with a representative of the local authority

There is sometimes to meet with a representative of the local authority when you disagree with their recommendations or decisions. These meetings are usually arranged to see if all parties can come to an agreement without the need to go through formal mediation or appeal to the tribunal. They are an opportunity to have a more in-depth discussion about your concerns that may not have been understood on the paperwork. Sometimes other professionals may join these meetings if their professional opinion is needed for the decision, this means that you can also request a professional attends if you think it would be helpful

Asking for a meeting

You have the right 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 EHCP.

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.

Preparing 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.
- 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. 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 EHCP before the meeting.

During the meeting

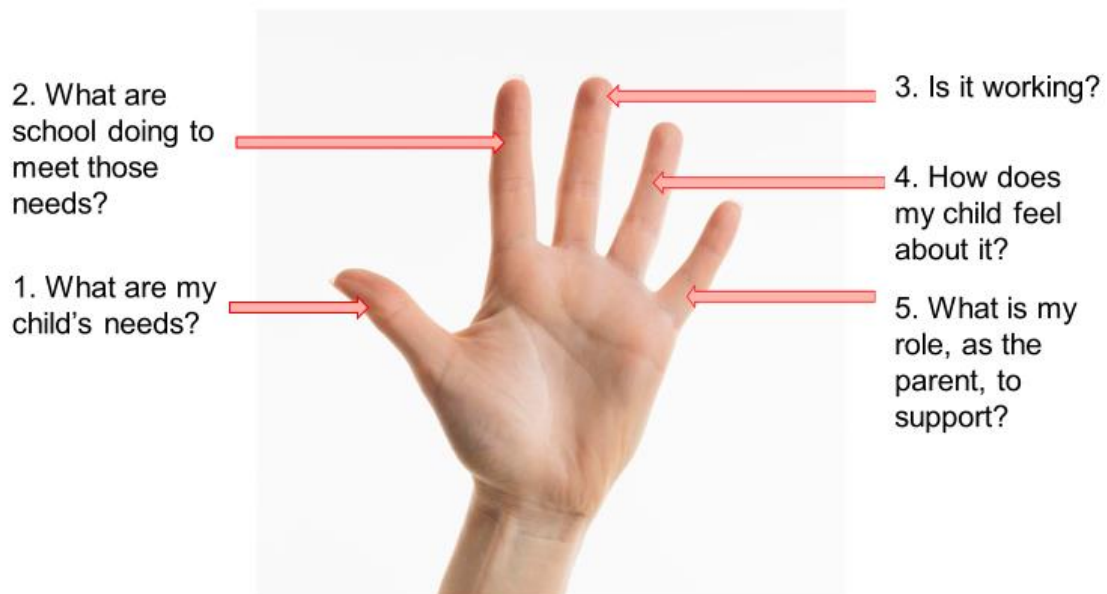
This is the part that some parents find the most nerve wracking but being well prepared should help you feel more confident and in control. Part of the preparation for having a successful meeting is being aware of how your feelings, and everyone else's, can affect how things go.

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.

We have a tool that you can use that helps to make sure the conversation remains child centred. You can use your hand to help you remember – each finger represents a question.



You can watch our video "How to keep a meeting child-centred" on our Youtube channel that explains in more detail how to use this tool. (<https://www.youtube.com/@newcastlesendiass4608>)

When the meeting is ending, ask the person running it to list the main actions that have 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. 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 SENDIASS.

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.
- You can always call SENDIASS after a meeting if you have any questions or would like some advice.