

West Sussex SEND Information, Advice and Support Service Communicating with Professionals



Communicating with professionals

This leaflet is designed to assist parent/carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities to communicate your views, wishes and feelings; to be able to participate as fully as possible in making decisions and what to do if problems occur despite this. For the purposes of this leaflet, where it states child('s), please read child/young person

Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 makes clear that local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), must have regard to:

- The views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents
- The importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- The need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood (1.1)

It is important that those who work with your child/young person are given relevant, up to date information to help make the right decisions and have the appropriate support. Effective Communication plays a key role in building positive relationships you have with professionals.

Effective Communication

In order for communication to be effective the following may be useful.

Say what we mean – sometimes what we say gets heard differently by the other person and misunderstanding, frustration and conflict happens because of this.

More than just exchanging information – Communication is also about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information.

It is a two-way street – It isn't just about how we give a message so that it is received and understood by someone in exactly the way we intended but also how we listen to gain the full meaning of what's being said and to make the other person feel heard and understood too.

More than just words – effective communication combines a set of skills including:

- Non-verbal
- Engaged listening
- Managing stress in the moment
- Assertiveness
- Ability to recognise and understand our own emotions and those of the person we're communicating with

Deepens our connections with each other – When communication is used effectively; teamwork, decision making and problem solving are improved and even negative or difficult messages can be communicated without creating conflict or destroying trust

Reasons why effective communication is important – When working together on planning or discussing your child/ young person's SEND;

- Effective relationships are established
- You can express your aspirations
- Concerns can be shared
- Clear goals can be set and decisions made on how to achieve them
- Clarifies responsibilities of all parties concerned

Communication with Schools (includes Early Years and Further Education settings)

Schools give parent/carers opportunities through regular parent's evenings or at the annual review of your child's statement or EHC plan (if they have one) to discuss any concerns you may have about your child or their support.

However, if you feel that the situation cannot wait, then the following may help;

- Find out who is the most appropriate person to contact about your child / young person. This may vary depending on why you need to contact them. If your child has SEND then this may be the SENCO/ INCO (Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator / Inclusion Co-Ordinator/ Manager), the class teacher or the tutor
- Find out when and how it is best to make contact with them. Most school staff are not available to come to the telephone during the school day, but it may sometimes be possible to arrange a particular time to call and discuss an issue or concern. The school secretary may be able to help you with this
- If you are worried that you are not being kept informed about events or meetings, you may want to check that letters and information sent by the school are reaching you. Some children find it difficult to remember to pass on letters they are given in school. Your class teacher or school secretary will be able to let you know whether your child has been given letters to bring home. If this is a real problem for you, speak to the

school about arranging a different way of communicating with you

- Let the school know about important developments in your child's life. These may include new medical diagnoses, results of health investigations, tests or assessments; changes in family life which may have an effect on your child's behaviour or mood; new behaviours you have noticed at home and which you think may be important

Remember to let them know about the positive changes as well as the negative.

In return schools should:

- Listen and respond to any concerns you have about your child
- Share with you any concerns they may have about your child
- Tell you about additional support they think your child needs and why
- Invite you to participate in your child's learning / educational plan if they have one
- Invite you to review meetings about your child's SEN and provision
- Ask for consent if they want the Local Authority to formally assess your child's educational needs
- Provide an SEN Information report detailing what provision they give to those children with SEN and must include the school's SEN Policies. You should be able to find this on the school's website but you can also ask the school for a paper copy if you want one. Each school should also have a Disability policy which should detail how they include disabled children in all school activities

If you feel that communication is not working as well as you would like through normal conversations then it may be that a meeting is needed. In fact, meetings can be a successful way of communication, especially if there are a lot of professionals involved as it allows everyone to come together and discuss the situation and hopefully agree on mutual outcomes and actions.

Meetings

Preparing for a meeting

- If you are worried about a meeting, try and take someone supportive with you. Let the professional who has arranged the meeting know that someone else will be attending with you
- Make sure you and those invited to the meeting are clear as to why the meeting is happening
- Take time to prepare for the meeting in advance. Think about the outcome(s) you would like from the meeting and the questions you want to ask or the points you want to raise. Make a note of these to take with you to act as a reminder. Think about how you might raise any concerns without being confrontational
- Make sure any paperwork that you need is sorted and easy to find. Remember, you can request copies of paperwork (such as ILPs, school reports etc) from the school if you have lost them.

- You may want to make some notes during or straight after the meeting, so make sure you have some spare paper and a pen with you or ask the person accompanying you to take brief notes for you

During the meeting:

- Ask to be introduced to anyone at the meeting that you don't know and their roles at the meeting to be explained
- Don't be afraid to ask for any jargon or abbreviations to be explained
- Try to stay calm and polite. If you feel that you are getting upset or angry: ask if you could take a few minutes away from the meeting to collect your thoughts and emotions
- At the end of the meeting ask for someone to sum up what has been agreed and what will happen next (with time frames)

After the meeting:

- Revisit your outcomes to see whether these were addressed at the meeting
- Ask for clarification on anything you cannot remember / were confused about
- When you get home, check and tidy up any notes you made, so that you can refer to them in the future if necessary

Decide the next steps to take.

- If actions were agreed, try and leave until the time agreed to see if the support / actions make any difference
- Keep a log of any incidents/ concerns that continue so that the actions/outcomes can be revisited at an appropriate time

If there are still concerns

The SEND Code of Practice says:

Decisions about provision for children and young people with SEN or disabilities should be made jointly by providers, parents, and children and young people themselves, taking a person-centred approach, with the views of children, young people and parents taken into account when those decisions are made.

And

Relations between education, health and social care services and parents and young people should be marked by open communication so that parents and young people know where they are in the decision-making process, their knowledge and experience can be used to support good decision-making and they know the reasons why decisions have been made (11.1)

Even when everyone is trying to work together, there may be times when things go wrong. If this happens:

- Try and find out the facts. Children and young people may not always understand or recall situations or conversations clearly, so always try and check out the facts before acting on something your child has told you. Try and keep an open mind until you have heard all the details
- Ask to meet with the staff involved to talk through the situation and try and resolve the problem
- If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health & Care Plan, you may want to talk to the SEN Governor. If this does not solve the problem, you may want to speak to someone from SENAT (Special Educational Needs Assessment Team). This will usually be your planning coordinator and you will have their name and number on any correspondence regarding the statement / EHCP
- If things still cannot be sorted out despite discussion, you may wish to write a letter of concern setting out clearly and concisely what the concern is about and what you would like to see happen (outcome)

For concerns about Health and Social Care please refer to the 'Additional information for HEALTH and SOCIAL CARE' insert which can be found at

West Sussex SEND IAS Service <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/information/2-information-advice-and-support>

Mediation

In a few cases, mediation might be appropriate. Mediation is one of a number of different ways of resolving a disagreement and tends to be used when the people involved are finding it difficult to communicate about an issue. Mediation involves an impartial third party who won't take sides.

- Mediators are interested in helping people who disagree to find solutions that they can all agree to
- They will help both parties to identify the issues that need to be sorted out and what can be done to resolve them
- This approach may bring out helpful ideas that no-one has considered before and can lead to acceptable solutions for both parties
- The process of mediation can only be started if both parties are willing to join in
- It is a confidential process and either party can withdraw at any time
- Taking part in mediation may not resolve all the issues but it will not affect any legal rights you have, such as your right of appeal to the SEN Tribunal

Details of the mediation service in West Sussex should be available from your child's school, the Local Authority or West Sussex SEND IAS Service. You will also be able to find details on the West Sussex Local Offer

Complaints Procedure

If despite taking the above steps you decide that the only way forward is to make a complaint then firstly find out about your setting's complaints policy (applies to Schools, Early Years and Further Education) to start a formal complaints process. This process will need to be taken before being able to take your complaint higher. See 'Complaints Regarding Education' for further details on the Local Offer at <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/information/6-education>

It is advisable to:

- Put your complaint in writing (marking the email / letter 'Complaint')
- Be clear about the issues you want resolved
- State what you want to happen as a result of making the complaint (outcomes)
- Give a reasonable timescale by which you would like a response. This is usually written into the school's complaints policy.

An effective complaints procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- Be easily accessible and publicised
- Be simple to understand and use
- Be impartial
- Be non-Adversarial (encourage co-operation)
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- Provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved

(taken from Best Practice Advice for school complaints procedures 2016- best practice tips)

Where to find more help and information

West Sussex SEND IAS Service: The West Sussex SEND IAS Service is available to help where the problem is related to a child's SEN. They can help you by:

- Listening to you about your situation
- Helping you define the issues
- Helping identify the person to talk to
- Helping you decide what to do next
- Supporting you to prepare for a meeting (and attend if there is availability and need)
- Suggesting other ways forward, if after a meeting, your concerns have not been resolved

How to contact us

Helpline: 0330 222 8555

By Post: SEND Information, Advice and Support Service, Oriel Lodge, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RZ

By e-mail: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk

You can also visit our web pages at:

<https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/7>

SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

For other helpful information and guidance

go to the Local Offer: [//westsussex.local-offer.org/search_information](https://westsussex.local-offer.org/search_information)

The role of the WS SEND IAS is to ensure that all parents have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions about their child's special educational needs.

Any information that is shared with the WS SEND IAS is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with other individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help the family with their circumstances.



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