

Sometimes, where our children's needs are involved, speaking to professionals about our concerns can be a daunting task. This factsheet is designed to assist parent/carers to communicate your views, wishes and feelings and be able to participate as fully as possible in making decisions.

The SEND Code Of Practice section 1.9 states that local authorities (LAs) must "ensure that children, young people and parents are provided with the information, advice and support necessary to enable them to participate in discussions and decisions about their support. This should include information on their rights and entitlements in accessible formats and time to prepare for discussions and meetings".

Although this statutory guidance applies to the local authority, it is also important that those who work with your child are given (and give) relevant, up to date information to help make the right decisions, including about the appropriate support. Effective communication plays a key role in building positive relationships.

Please note: 'child' = 'child or young person'

What do we mean by effective communication?

In order for communication to be effective the following should be considered:

- **It is a two-way street** – the giving and the receiving of communication. How we deliver the message and how the other person(s) receives that message and vice versa. Has it been understood correctly? Have we received the response correctly? Do both parties feel heard and understood?
- **It is more than just an exchange of information or just words** – Communication is also about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information. Effective communication combines a set of skills including: Non-verbal / Engaged listening / Managing stress in the moment / Assertiveness (not shouting or speaking the loudest).

It can be difficult to communicate effectively when we are worried, concerned or upset. However, where effective communication is in place then teamwork; decision making and problem solving are improved and even difficult messages can be communicated without creating conflict or destroying trust.

Reasons why effective communication is important

If effective communication is used, then when working together to plan or discuss your child's SEND and the support they may need:

- effective relationships are established.
- you can express your aspirations.
- concerns can be shared (by both parties).
- removal of obstacles can be explored together.
- clarifies responsibilities of all parties concerned.
- clear goals can be set, and decisions made on how to achieve them.



Working out the most effective ways to communicate

Schools give parent carers opportunities through regular parent's evenings, Individual Learning Plans (ILP) (or equivalent) meetings or at the 'Annual Review' of your child's Education Health and Care 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. 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 subject tutor.

Working out the most effective ways to communicate (continued)

- 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 letters are tricky – schools often send letters and communications home with the pupils. However, some children find it difficult to remember to pass these on. 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 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



Schools should publicise their SEN Information Report on their school website. This will detail the possible support they can provide. You can also ask the school for a paper copy if you want one.

If there are still concerns

Even when everyone is trying to work together, it isn't always smooth. If this happens:

- Try and find out the facts. Children 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. See our 'Preparing for a meeting' factsheet for more information.
- If your child has an Education, Health & Care Plan, and communication isn't going well with the school staff, consider talking to the SEN Governor. If this does not solve the problem, you may want to speak to your planning Coordinator at SENAT (Special Educational Needs Assessment Team).
- 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). See our [writing a letter of concern or complaint](#) factsheet for more information.

Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure that all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service 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. All our policies and privacy notice, are on our website.

How To Contact Us

Contact-line: 0330 222 8555
Email address: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk
(parent carers and professionals)
cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk
(children and young people up to 25 years)
Website: www.westsussexsendias.org

SEND: Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

To view all SENDIAS factsheets online: <https://bit.ly/3apJBmu>

or scan QR code:

