

Meetings can seem scary. Things you don't understand, words that go over your head and not knowing what you have a right to say or ask for. To help with these common problems, we've put together a collection of tips to help make meetings less stressful and more accessible to you as a parent or carer. If you have any further questions or would like further support in preparation for/at your meeting, please feel free to give us a call on **0300 303 2677**.

Pre-meeting

- Talk to the school to be clear on the reason for the meeting and who will be attending
- If you have asked an adviser/friend/support worker to support you in the meeting, be sure to let the school know beforehand.
- Take a copy of the SEN Code of Practice or relevant pages from the document – highlight key points to reference to.
- Make a list or bullet-point your main ideas/arguments to keep you on track
- Write down any questions you have .
- Gather as much relevant evidence as you can (medical/professional reports, diagnosis, previous teacher comments etc).
- Set a clear goal(s) for the meeting.

During meeting

- Ask if anyone will be taking notes and whether these can be shared
- Be realistic - remember, you could be frustrated at something much greater than what the school and/or the LA can control.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions or for clarifications of terms/abbreviations.
- Remember that everyone at the meeting is there to support your child
- Stay focused on the needs and provision for your child or young person.
- Go through your list of points and questions with the school. Tick them off as they are dealt with. Begin with points which you think will be easily agreed. If you do not reach agreement on some points, it may be worth coming back to them at the end.
- Be prepared to negotiate.
- Allow yourself to be engaged in active listening. Be clear on what is being said.
- Allow yourself time to pause and take deep breaths. If you get upset, ask for a "time out" whilst you leave the room and compose yourself before returning to the meeting.
- Before you finish, check if you have covered all the points and questions made in your notes.
- Ensure that any agreed actions are recorded with who is responsible for carrying them out. How and when will these be reviewed?
- If necessary, arrange a date for a review meeting.

After meeting

- Email summarised notes back to the teacher/SENCO as written evidence of what was agreed at the meeting and time scales etc. You could also ask for them to confirm these are accurate. Evidence is key.
- Suggest that a date is set for a review meeting even if it is the next term.
- Start to note strategies which enable you to be effective at supporting your child, whilst still allowing you to be comfortable. This will increase your confidence.
- Follow up on agreed actions if necessary.
- Ask for a copy of the meeting notes. If you disagree with them then make your case to the author of the notes. If you do not do this, it will be assumed that you agree with them.
- If no notes are taken you could write a letter of thanks with any agreed actions included. This ensures that there is a written record of the meeting **outcomes**.
- Keep all paperwork in a file so you can refer to it at a later stage if necessary.

Frequently asked questions/worries:

I get really anxious in meetings and feel intimidated by the school...

With the school's permission you can bring a friend, or one of our SENDIASS Advisers (school's are usually fine with this).

Having that emotional support may help ease your anxiety.

Remember! Though school staff can seem intimidating, they are ultimately there to help support your child!

With our support, you can educate yourself in the duties and law that schools are bound by. Whether through conversations with our advisers or through reading our factsheets or using the [IPSEA website](#), you can be sure that you have the knowledge to back up your concerns.

Remember! The school are there to help and support your child, not to hinder their progress. Go into every meeting/interaction positively and proactively.

I feel like the school are trying to 'fob me off' or take advantage of my lack of knowledge...

In short, unfortunately, you don't...but keeping track of agreed actions and communications will give you something to refer to if you need to chase things up (**get everything in writing!**).

Review meetings are also very helpful, as they provide an opportunity to discuss progress since the previous meeting and refer back to those agreed actions.

How do I know the school will do what they agree to?

Non-Confrontational questioning

Asking questions in meetings about your child can be difficult, especially if you are nervous, angry or upset. Some meetings may be an emotional experience. Thinking about how to phrase questions ahead of time can: make a difference, keep the meeting positive, and set the foundations for a “working together” relationship. We have included some examples here:

Positive opening questions

- Tell me how well my child is doing in your class...
- What is my child good at?
- What are my child’s positive points?
- What do you /others like about my child?

Showing a willingness to “work together”

- How can **we** help my child with improving on _____ **together**?
- How can **we** _____?
- What are your thoughts on _____?
- It has been suggested that _____ can be helpful
- Can we try _____?
- How can I support you in supporting my child?
- I have found _____ particularly helpful and I wanted to share this in case it’s helpful for you too. (you know your child best, feel free to share that knowledge)
- My child thinks _____ may help, would it be worth a try? (your child’s view is very important, if they can vocalise what might help this is very useful)

Seeking clarification when you are unsure or don’t understand

- What do you mean when you say _____?
- How does _____ relate to my child?
- I am not sure what you mean, please could you put that another way for me?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean _____ or _____?
- I am not sure how _____ relates to our problem/discussion/issue please can you explain that to me?
- Could you give me an example of what you mean / how that would look/ how that will work?
- Would _____ be a good example of that?

If the discussion is not moving in the direction you want

- Have you considered _____ (you can give an idea)
- My understanding is _____ (especially helpful if you are certain of a fact and want to put this forward in a way that won't create ill feeling)
- I have heard that _____ can be helpful, could we try that?
- If you can't do _____, what could you do instead?

Planning for your meeting

- Note down the topics that you want to cover so you don't leave without the information that you require.
- Take a notebook and pen so that you can refer to what you wanted to ask and write down anything that will be done as an outcome or an action and who is going to carry that out and when
- Consider summarising the actions at the end of the meeting
- Take your partner / friend / family member with you for moral support. They may also be able to help you to keep track of your questions and possibly help you to write down anything that is said in response to your questions.

Southampton SENDIASS can help you to prepare for a meeting, and to reflect on the outcomes. If you feel you require more advocacy, one of our advisors may be able to attend the meeting with you as impartial support. For further advice on meetings, you can call us on our helpline: **0300 303 2677**.