



Information Advice and Support Kent

A service for special educational needs and disabilities
helping you to make informed choices

Contact: Helpline 03000 41 3000

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Meeting Preparation and Support

You may be invited to meetings at your child's school or setting. You may also want to request a meeting to discuss any issues or concerns you have. This leaflet gives ideas about how to prepare for meetings so that you can get the best out of the meeting. This leaflet also explains how Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK) may be able to support you at meetings.

I want to request a meeting – who should I ask?

- If your concerns are related to a learning or special educational need, you may wish to meet with the class teacher and/or the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). If you don't know who the SENCo is, call the school to ask for their name and the best time to talk to them.
- If you wish to discuss any concerns further, you may want to meet with the Head Teacher.
- You can request a meeting by telephone, email, in writing or in person. Don't forget to include the easiest way to contact you, so that a suitable date and time can be arranged.
- If there are particular people who you feel should be there, ask for them to be invited.
- If you will need particular help at the meeting because of an individual need, remember to tell the people holding the meeting to make sure they arrange what you need.
- If English is not your first language or you find it difficult, you can ask for an interpreter. This may take some time to arrange, so remember to ask for this well ahead of the meeting, if possible.

Support

You could take a supporter with you to the meeting. This could be a friend, relative or **IASK** supporter. (It is usual to let the school know who this is, before the meeting).

Be prepared: take a pen and paper to make your own notes.

Preparing for meetings

Planning

- You may wish to check who else will be at the meeting, their role and what information they may be bringing. If you are calling the meeting, has everyone that you would like to be there been invited? If a key person is not available to attend, you may want to arrange the meeting for another time that will be convenient for everyone.
- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- What do you want to achieve?
- What outcomes are you looking for?
- Keep all important information together, including school reports, medical information, copies of letters from the school or reports from other professionals. Also keep copies of all letters that you send.
- What questions might you want to ask the school? You could make a list. For example: What are the areas that cause greatest difficulty? What help is being given? Is progress being made?
- You could set your own agenda for the meeting.
- Try to keep your questions relevant to what you want to achieve.
- If it will help you, practice saying your questions out loud in a calm and measured way; this may help you to be comfortable and confident with what you want to say.
- Your child may be able to attend the meeting with you. If they are not going to attend, remember to ask them for their views before the meeting. For example: Do they have any worries? What does your child find difficult at school and what would they like to see happen? What do they enjoy? What would they like to ask their teacher?

Timings

You may want to check how much time is being allocated for the meeting. If you feel that not enough time has been allowed you can request a longer time, or you may need to arrange a different day.

At the meeting

- It is important to be on time.
- If there are no introductions, ask who each person is and what their role with your child is.
- Check if anyone will take notes at the meeting. If so how will any actions be recorded and when can you expect to receive a copy of the notes?
- If the people in the meeting use jargon or specialist terms, ask them for an explanation. Your friend or supporter might also be able to ask for things to be explained more fully.
- If a report or any new paperwork about your child is brought to the meeting, ask for time to read it.
- If you disagree with things being said about your child, don't be afraid to speak up. You know your child in a way that others don't and if you think what is being suggested might not work, say so.
- Try to make your point in a calm and polite way. If you are able to do this, you may find people are more willing to listen and cooperate with you. If things become too difficult, ask to take a break.
- Be prepared to be flexible and talk about different options and alternatives to achieve the outcome you want.
- At the end of the meeting you can ask for any actions to be confirmed.

Think about what will happen next:

- who is doing what?
- how will this be reviewed?
- will there be a further meeting?

After the meeting

To clarify, you could send a letter to the school confirming what you felt were the agreed outcomes and actions.

How IASK Support at meetings

These are some of the ways we can help you prepare for a meeting:

- Explain any legal information and help you identify what you want to get out of the meeting
- Help you work out what questions you want to ask and how you might ask them.
- Go through strategies for remaining calm if you feel anxious.

We aim to empower you to feel confident to say the things that they want to say and feel listened to. We are not an advocacy service and therefore do not speak on your behalf. As an impartial service we do not favour either side or have influence over the outcome of any meetings. If you would like support at a meeting please let us know as far in advance as you can. We usually ask for a week's notice if possible, for us to look into availability.

IASK is often asked to support parents at a variety of meetings with their child's school and/or Local Authority. We can also support parents at multi-agency meetings where Special Educational Needs (SEN) are an issue.

IASK supporters include Family Involvement Workers and volunteer Independent Supporters (IS) who can provide individual, impartial support.

- Before the meeting the supporter can:
- help you to understand any paperwork;
- help you focus on what you want to achieve;
- listen to your concerns or views;
- help you to consider the points you want to raise in the meeting;
- rehearse with you how you wish to express your views;
- provide you with factual information on SEN and disability issues;
- give tips and strategies to help you feel more confident with your communication skills.

At the meeting the supporter will:

- remain objective and impartial at all times and has no vested interest in the outcome of the meeting;
- not make judgements about any party;
- help you to understand what others are saying;
- help you to get your points across and feel listened to;
- not speak for you or take minutes during a meeting, but possibly make an impartial comment if it will assist a shared understanding of an issue.

Although supporters do not take minutes at meetings, they may make a few notes about key points and actions agreed.

After the meeting the supporter can:

- discuss with you how you felt the meeting went;
- talk about the proposals put forward;
- discuss any points that need following up;
- help you plan next steps;
- clarify actions agreed and by whom

Please contact our helpline if you would like to talk to us about meeting preparation or if you would like support at a meeting.

On request, this information can be provided in alternative formats.

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