

## Getting your child's views Top tips from a DIAS volunteer

DIAS volunteers support parents, families and young people to get their views across in meetings, at school or college and as part of Education Health and Care (EHC) plan needs assessments and reviews. They talk to many parents and children. These are one DIAS volunteer's top tips for supporting your child to give their views.

DIAS volunteers sometimes work directly with children and young people to help them think about school and talk about what they like and dislike, what the successes and challenges are and what their hopes and dreams for the future are. Here are some of their ideas for working with your child to get their views:

- There's no 'right way' to get views of your child. You know your child best and you'll need to choose a method that's going to work best for them.
- Let your child know that when they're talking about school, you're not making any judgements; this is about giving your child a voice. So often, the discussion and planning about school or college is adults talking about it in adult ways. Talking to a child or young person about what they think allows them to express who they are and what they think and feel.
- Explain why you're asking to hear their views. You could say something like "this helps the grown-ups in school understand you better."
- It can help to tell your child that you understand that talking about school can be hard, and that they won't get into trouble for anything they say. It's OK if the child isn't saying what you'll think they're going to say, or if it's different from what you or the staff at school say.
- Put the control in their hands. Ask them when and where they would like to talk with you or play together, ask what they would like to do; "Do you want to write things down or shall we use Lego?"
- Doing something active together can help, such as drawing or painting, playing with toys or making something. This makes it more than just a conversation and if talking becomes hard, you've got something else to do instead. The main focus can be the play or the activity and the conversation is taking place alongside.
- It can help to dip in and out of the talk about school. Rather than asking direct questions you can come at it from a different angle. For example, you can talk about all of the things they like and don't like and within that ask a few questions about school. Or you could talk about superpowers and what powers the people in their lives would have and why, including their teachers and teaching assistants.
- If it's a good approach for your child, you could try being factual about it. For example, 'Lunchtimes – are they good or bad? Doing homework - thumbs up or thumbs down? Mr Jones's maths lesson – red, amber or green?'
- Write it all down straight afterwards before you forget! Record everything, because the small stuff can sometimes be the most important.
- Be honest about what you're doing – at this stage you want to hear what they have to say and are there to listen and record that. Tell your child that you can't solve all the problems, and that you haven't got a magic wand that will suddenly make everything

Choosing one of your child's interests to do with them can be a good way to start. Doing something together will help them to feel safe, comfortable and relaxed.

better. But hearing what they have to say is the first step in helping them feel supported and understood in school or college.

### Talking with Jake

“When I went to see Jake to talk about school we worked out a card game to play. We made cards with different subjects, teachers and elements of the school day like lunch and getting ready for school on them. We had three separate piles for the cards to go on – red for the things that Jake didn’t like or were difficult, amber for things that were OK or sometimes hard and green for the things he enjoyed or found easy.

We dealt the cards to each other and then took it in turns to turn over a card. Jake put the card on the red, amber or green pile. I would say something like ‘Oh, phonics – that would be a red for me, what about you? Or I would guess for him what I thought he would like/not like so he could correct me and we could talk about why I’d got it wrong.

Once the cards were on the different piles, we went through them and discussed them. Jake had almost all red cards, so we talked about traffic lights changing and moving from red to amber to green. So, we talked about what made him think he was a red for something, and what would need to happen to make it an orange instead of a red?

It’s a helpful way for them to see that not everything is always bad. It’s playful and non-threatening and it can start a conversation about solutions as well as challenges. “

DIAS Volunteer

Some children don’t want to talk about school at all. If that happens, try the following:

- Go somewhere neutral and well away from school. Do something that is an interest of theirs and not related to school at all.
- Lay down some ground rules. So, let your child know that they can stop if they want, give them a word to say or a signal which lets you know they’re feeling uncomfortable.
- Try other methods of communication instead of talking – for example, nodding or shaking their head to answer questions, hand signals, singing, making their own film, drawing or making maps or diagrams.
- Plan to ‘talk’ over more than one session. Often, the more you back off, the more a child will come forward.
- Use silence. Children often find it uncomfortable and will want to fill it!
- Always go back over what’s been said – check you’ve understood everything. You can say, “grown-ups get it wrong sometimes, so can I check I’ve understood ...”

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[www.devonias.org.uk](http://www.devonias.org.uk)  
[devonias@devon.gov.uk](mailto:devonias@devon.gov.uk)  
 01392 383080