

Supporting your young person to give their views

Short guide

Helping your young person to express themselves and tell you how they feel about life, school and college is an important part of making sure they get support that works. There are lots of ways you can support your young person to talk about their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

The law about special educational needs and disability is clear that local authorities must consider young people's views, wishes and feelings. The law also stresses how important it is that young people take part as fully as possible in the decisions made about them. It's important to support young people with the choices they make – first by sharing the decision making with you and then, if possible, starting to take the lead.

Your young person's views should be listened to alongside yours and those of any professionals. They're equally important.

Your young person's views, wishes and goals are the foundations of good planning and support. If the support isn't about what's important to them, then it's unlikely to work. Good support starts with helping them to understand and share what they're good at, what they need more help with and what their goals are for adult life.

Some young people create a one-page profile of themselves, which includes a photograph. It can help to think about and answer three main questions: What do people like and admire about me? What makes me happy? How I want to be supported?

If they need your help to give their views, or if they ask for it, here are a few tips to help you:

- Explain why people are asking for their views and make sure they know there are no right or wrong answers. Tell them they won't get into trouble for anything they say.
- Doing something active together while you talk can help, such as drawing, walking the dog or making something together
- Talk about the idea that 'you can't always get what you want.' You can't make everything better but hearing what they have to say can help them feel supported.
- Collect their views over a few days or weeks.
- Try not to ask leading questions – leave your questions open and give plenty of time. Open questions are those that have to be answered with more than just a yes or a no.

If you think your young person will say what you would say, ask someone they trust to talk to them, without you in the room. Young people can also talk to someone at DIAS and we can support them to give their views too.

When a young person reaches 16 and the end of compulsory school age (the end of the school year in which they turn 16) the legal rights around making decisions pass to them and away from parents and carers. To have the right to decide, they must be capable of making the decision. This is called mental capacity. If a young person can't make decisions then someone else can do it on their behalf, if it's in their best interest.

Young people can and do go to meetings and as they get older this is a helpful way for them to get involved in making decisions. If your young person wants to take part, it's a good idea to make sure they're well prepared. Ask them to decide what they want to say and what questions they have.

Tell your young person what difference sharing their views will make. You can explain how their views are discussed and what decisions are made as a result. If they've asked for something that can't be done, then it's important to explain why.

Published: September 2018

©Devon Information Advice and Support (DIAS)

T: 01392 383080 E: devonias@devon.gov.uk W: www.devonias.org.uk