



Parent and carer views

As your child or young person's parent or carer, you probably know them better than anyone. The relationship you have and the time you spend with them means you have a real understanding of what makes them tick. You'll know what they're good at and what they find hard; what they enjoy and what motivates them. This factsheet can help you to understand how best to share your views, when to do it and what kind of things to say.

DIAS is a free, confidential and impartial service providing information and support to parents, carers and young people about special educational needs and disability.

In this information we've used the term parent, but the information also applies if you're a carer or a guardian. We've mostly used the term child throughout too, but that also means a young person or young adult up to the age of 25.

Why are my views important?

Your views are important because you know your child best. You can help other people understand their strengths, difficulties and needs. You can say what life is like outside of school or college – at home, in your family life and in your child's social life and relationships.

Alongside your child, you can give a view of their life, so that those who don't know them as well can see who they are as a person and not just as a pupil or student. You can be their advocate, which means you can help them to get their voice heard and express their views.

The [law around special educational needs and disability](#) is clear that what you have to say is important. When making decisions about special educational needs or disabilities, your local authority must:

- have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of children, their parents and young people
- make sure that children, their parents and young people participate as fully as possible in decisions that affect them

"The most important people in any child or young person's life are their parents. You know your children best of all. What you as parents think, feel and say is important. You should be listened to and you need to be fully involved in decisions that affect your children."

Department for Education 2014: [Code of Practice](#) Special educational needs and disability - A guide for parents and carers

When are my views important?

There are lots of opportunities for you to get your views into the decisions made about your child's education and support. Your views are important always, but especially when

- changes are being made to your child's support and school plans are being reviewed and updated
- your child or young person is being assessed or re-assessed by a specialist team, such as having an educational psychology assessment
- big decisions need to be made, such as what type of school your child should go to, or what they'll do after they leave school
- your child's situation has changed quickly, such as if they're ill or there are family difficulties or a bereavement
- before big moves (transition) such as the one from primary to secondary school
- if social and health services become involved in your child's education support
- during an assessment for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan
- at an annual review or reassessment of an EHC plan
- at a disagreement resolution or mediation meeting or during an appeal tribunal

Shared decision-making

Being able to say what you think and feel is part of having a good relationship with your child's school or college and it's important for taking part in shared decision-making. This is where you and the professionals that support your child both have your own expertise to bring to discussions. You make decisions together along with your child. You won't always agree, but being able to talk openly, honestly and positively can help you work things out if they aren't going so well.

Pre and post 16

Your views should be a constant voice throughout your child's time in pre-school and school. When your young person reaches 16, the decision-making rights pass to them, if they're able to make decisions. But you can be there to support them, and your views are still likely to be important. If your young person can't make decisions about their education and support, you'll continue to be their voice and guide them.

How do I start?

What you need to share will depend on what you're giving your views for. So, if you're sharing your views at a regular school meeting you could spend a bit of time looking through your child's plan and write a short list of the main things you want to share with professionals. You could start with what you think is going well then write down any concerns you have plus the things you think may need to change. If you have any questions, jot these down too.

If you're giving your views as:

- part of an EHC needs assessment or reassessment
- part of a major review of your child's support
- when you're first getting SEN support for your child

you'll need to take more time to think about what you want to share and give more information than you would at a school meeting. There are lots of ways to get your thoughts down and share your views. Here are a few ideas.

- A. Answer these key questions:
1. What is important **to** your child – what makes life worth living
 2. What is important **for** your child – what support enables them to live a healthy and safe life and take part in their community
 3. What's working? What support works well and should probably carry on?
 4. What's not working – what needs to be changed?
- B. Write a brief list of the "headline" issues that affect your child. You can use the headings in the section below, or you can use your own. For each area, focus on what your child is good at (strengths and skills) and what they find hard (difficulties or challenges). Think about what support they already have and whether that works.
- C. Keep a daily diary for your child. Write down what they've managed to do for themselves, any progress you can see that they've made and what has made them happy. Keep a note of what they need help with and how you support them. If you have a home and school communication book you could use that too to see what kind of issues affect them every day.

It can sometimes help to write a few short paragraphs that say a bit about your child and their 'story' so far. You could talk about

- their history so far – did they meet their development milestones?
- how their SEN shows itself
- any diagnosis your child has
- what family life is like
- how they cope with the day to day routine, holidays or changes
- whether they have friends and if so what these relationships are like
- what helps you as a family and what support you get or need
- what your child does in the wider community – hobbies, groups like scouts, sports, leisure or social activities, volunteering
- the main things that they or you are worried about

Are there specific things I should be covering?

You can give your views in whatever way works best for you – write a few lines, talk to someone about your child or write something with lots of detail. What's important is that you share your views and keep sharing them.

What do I do if English isn't my first language or I'm not comfortable writing things down?

If English isn't your first language and you're not confident that what you say will be properly understood by others you could ask:

- a family member or friend to help you write down your views or check what you have said
- for support from a local community group or an advocate
- whether you could have help from an interpreter or from a telephone translation service

If you're not comfortable with writing, you could:

- ask a family member or friend to write down what you say
- talk directly to professionals and ask them to write down what you say or
- contact us to see if we can give you extra support.

Some parents find it helpful to have some headings to get them started though. These cover the main areas of special educational need and they are:

Cognition and Learning

This is about how your child learns and how they think. Some learning difficulties may be obvious, whereas others aren't. You could include things like

- how they're finding reading, writing, literacy and maths
- any subjects they seem to have a gift or talent for or find particularly difficult
- any specific difficulties you know about or think they have, such as dyslexia
- strengths or difficulties with memory, organisation or planning
- whether they have any issues learning new skills
- any differences in progress compared with other children in their age group or class
- whether they have a reduced ability to learn because they have difficulty managing their emotions – because of change, transitions, early trauma and sensory difficulties etc.

Communication and Interaction

This is about how your child communicates with others and how they relate to other people (their relationships and social skills). You could include:

- speech and language difficulties
- any difficulties in communicating with others, such as not being able to say what they want to, or having difficulties understanding what's being said to them
- not understanding or using social rules of communication or how to interact with other people, such as if your child has ASD (autism)
- what their relationships are like, with you, any siblings, wider family and friends

Sensory and physical

This includes physical and sensory things that could make it more difficult for your child to learn in a usual school or college environment. This might include:

- difficulties with hearing or sight
- multisensory impairment
- sensory triggers or difficulties
- any physical disability
- problems with fine or gross motor skills - fine motor skills are small movement skills such as picking something up between thumb and fingers and using it, gross motor skills are larger movements such as running and jumping.

Social, emotional and mental health

This is a big area and these kinds of difficulties can show themselves in lots of ways, such as a withdrawn or isolated child, or challenging and disruptive behaviour. You could include things like:

- social anxiety, phobias or refusing school
- mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse or an eating disorder
- physical symptoms that there is no identified cause for
- attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD)
- attachment disorder or difficulties
- how their self-esteem and confidence are

- if they have tantrums or meltdowns or times when seem to ‘just lose it’

If your child doesn’t have a clear diagnosis, then think about and include the types of behaviour you see, and how that affects them at home and at school.

Self-care and independence

All the way through your child’s education, you and the people that support your child will be encouraging them to become more independent. This means learning to do as much as they can for themselves, developing life skills and applying what they learn to day to day life. We all naturally want to help someone who looks like they’re struggling, so it can be easy for the adults that support a child or young person to get into the habit of doing everything for them. So, writing down what your child can do for themselves and how they could develop these skills is a good idea.

You could include things like:

- self-care skills such as washing and dressing
- safety issues such as being unaware of danger, taking risks or being unsafe when walking or out and about
- for young people, whether they have skills to live on their own or with some support, such as whether they can manage money, cook and shop
- whether they have the skills to work or volunteer
- whether they can travel safely using public transport
- how they manage homework – do they need support or help to organise?

Health issues

Include any health issue that could affect your child’s learning and their ability to be in school. This could include things like:

- long term health problems like asthma, epilepsy and diabetes, especially if your child’s going to need regular hospital care and appointments or time off school
- sleep difficulties that could affect how tired they are and how much they can concentrate in school
- any health issues that need regular treatment or support during the day, such as medication or feeds or help with going to the toilet or personal hygiene
- health problems that could affect how well your child manages the school day, such as anything that causes muscle weakness, low energy levels or poor concentration and focus.

What kind of things should I be saying?

Whenever you’re sharing your views, it’s really important to start by talking about your child’s strengths, skills and talents. Support that works well is going to build on the things your child can do well and succeed at. Then talk about your child’s difficulties and what’s challenging.

It can be a good idea to include your hopes, dreams and aspirations for your child too. Parents are encouraged by the Department for Education to be ambitious for their child and that means thinking about what’s possible and not just about what might be available.

When you say what your child’s needs are, add a few examples of how these might show themselves at home and in school or college. For example, your child might have difficulty with relationships with other people. That might show itself as lack of eye contact and not

wanting physical contact at home. At school it may show as being isolated, playing alone and not being able to make friends. You could say how you manage this at home and how well that works.

You might see a behaviour in your child that you aren't sure about - you don't know what's behind it or causing it or it may not make sense to you. If this happens, talk about the behaviour and your thoughts about it. This can be a sign of an 'unclear need' and it may need to be explored further. That could mean talking more to the people that support your child, having an assessment for your child or getting a specialist involved.

Whenever you give your views, it's worth thinking 'long-term'. Even from early years the support you child gets should challenge them to become as independent as possible. This means thinking about how to help them take small regular steps towards developing the skills they'll need for adult life.

How much do I need to say?

That depends on what your giving your views for, but a general rule is to try and be as concise as you can – try not to waffle!

If you're sharing your views at a regular review meeting, think about what's changed since you last met and focus on that. Keep it brief and to the point and mainly stick to the things that affect school and learning. You could write yourself a list of bullet points before the meeting so that you remember what to say. Some parents fill in a meeting form that helps them to focus and make sure that action is agreed. You can contact us for a copy.

If you're sharing your views in writing for the first time or for something that doesn't happen often, such as an EHC needs assessment, you're going to need to say more.

If your child's story is a long and complicated one, it can be very easy (and tempting) to write lots and sometimes parents share many pages of information about their child. If you have a lot to share that's fine, but it can be helpful to also write a short summary or a few main bullet points too. For EHC assessments and plans for example, if the views sent in by parents are long they sometimes go in as an appendix, whereas a summary would go in the main document. Summing up the main points helps professionals and people who don't know your child to get a picture of them quickly and easily.

What do people do with my views when I have given them?

Your views should be listened to alongside your child's and those of any professionals. They're equally important.

If you've given your views as part of an EHC needs assessment they should be recorded in the paperwork. In a final EHC plan, parent or carers views go in the first part of the plan - section A. If you give your views as part of an assessment for your child these should be recorded and set out in the final report, though they're likely to be in the form of a summary. In meetings, your views should be summarised and recorded in the meeting notes or minutes.

What should I do if I feel like my views aren't being listened to?

In reality, how much parent views are listened to and acted on varies. Some professionals and schools have equal partnership relationships with parents and carers. This is where both sets of views are important and parents have a key role to play in shaping support and identifying needs. Other parents find their experience is very different and it can sometimes feel as if you're talking and no one is listening.

The bottom line is that the law is clear that what you have to say is important and you should be involved in the decisions made about your child. It's in your child's best interests for parents and professionals to work together to get the best outcomes. If you feel that your views aren't being listened to or taken into account:

- Ask for a meeting with the school or college and take someone with you for support. Say clearly that you don't feel you're being listened to and ask how you can work together to change that.
- Try and stay calm and constructive when you're talking to professionals. It can be all too easy for relationships to fall apart and for the people involved to get defensive, angry or upset. Once this happens, it's often very hard to repair the relationship, so do what you can to keep things friendly and respectful.
- Be clear about what your views are. Put them in writing and ask for a response to your questions or concerns.
- Some parents find it helpful to gather extra evidence that supports their views. For example, you could show a film of your child having a meltdown at home after a day when staff said they had managed very well in school. Or you could share relevant research or information you've found or been given, such as about how autism shows itself in girls or the impact of trauma on an adopted child in school.
- Ask for support for your views from another professional.

If none of this seems to be working, you can contact the head teacher or principal about your concerns, or the governor with responsibility for SEND. If the issue isn't resolved after that then you can make a formal complaint to the school or college, following their complaints procedure. If that doesn't resolve your complaint, then the next stage would be to contact the Department for Education and/or Ofsted. You can find out more about that on the [IPSEA website](#).

You can contact DIAS for help and support with getting your voice heard or making a complaint. There is also information on our website about [helping your child to share their views](#) and [supporting your young person to share theirs](#).

Other helpful resources

SEND Code of Practice – version for parents and carers

Guidance on the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system for children and young people aged 0 to 25.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-parents-and-carers

All About Me and This is Me

Editable forms for parents and children to use to record their views.

Available on the DIAS website and by contacting the enquiry line.

www.devonias.org.uk

About my child or young person

This is guidance and a form for you to give information and views about your child for an Education Health and Care (EHC)

Needs Assessment

Available on the DIAS website and by contacting the enquiry line.

www.devonias.org.uk

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