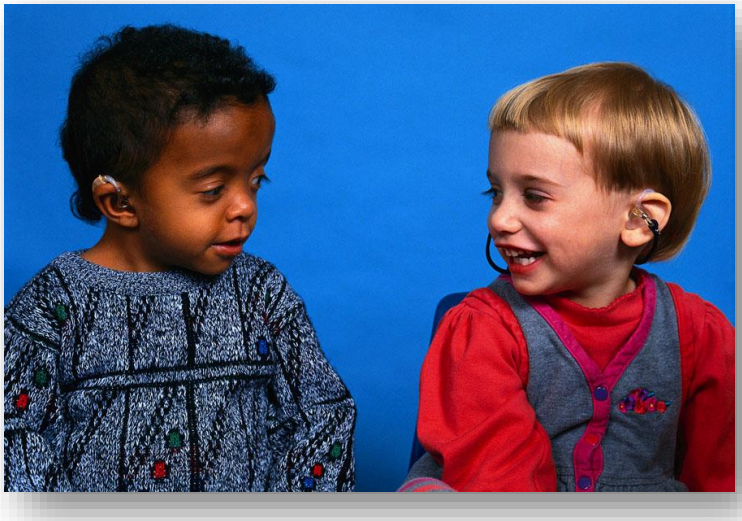
BARNET EYSEND

A GUIDE TO

Working in partnership with Parents/Carers of Children with Special Educational Needs

In Early Years Settings



Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team is committed to supporting early year's settings to move to more inclusive environments for children with a variety of special educational needs and disabilities. Please contact your SEND Advisor for further information. This Document has been produced by Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team

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A positive relationship

Developing a positive relationship with the parents and carers of children who attend your early years setting is very important. For parents of children with additional or special education needs (SEN) who may attend your early years setting this will be even more vital. Staff in early years settings who establish a positive and supportive relationship with parents of children with SEN will find that parents will be more willing to trust and work together with them for the best outcomes for the child. Parents are members of the team who know the child better than anyone else and it is therefore crucial that they are respected and valued as equal partners in the team.

A positive relationship between early years setting staff and parents of a child with SEN may depend on:

- When the SEN of the child was identified
- The attitude and approach taken by the parents
- The amount and quality of the help that the parents have already received

But above all:

The ethos of the early years setting that the child is attending.

Research shows that the actual timing of the identification of the child's special needs is one of the most important elements in the process for parents.

- Some conditions are evident at birth and the parents may have had time to adjust to the situation.
- Many special educational needs do not become apparent for some time – if the child's needs have only recently been identified, the parents may not yet have had time to consider the situation and its implications.
- Sometimes a child enters an early years setting without having had her/his needs identified and it is the observations of the early years staff that first highlight the SEN of the child. This means that early years setting staff may be the first professional to discuss the child's needs with the parents.



Whenever a child's special educational needs are identified, early years staff have a key role in supporting the parents through what may be a difficult time for them.

It is also a requirement of the Special Educational Needs Code

of Practice, that all parents of children with special educational needs should:

- Feel that they are treated as partners
- Play an active role in the education of their child
- Have their child's difficulties identified early, with appropriate intervention to address the difficulties
- Play an active role in any decision making process regarding their child's education
- Have access to information, advice and support during their child's assessment
- Have access to information, advice and support during any decision making process about the educational provision for their child.

Parents may react to the news that there are concerns about their child in a number of ways:

- They may have felt that there is something 'wrong' for a while. It may be that the parents have been too afraid to approach someone about their concerns. Or perhaps they have mentioned their concerns to friends or relatives and have had them dismissed and have been told that they are over anxious. If this is the case, the parent is often relieved that at last someone else has voiced the concerns.
- Some parents will experience denial, thinking that the setting or the specialist has made a mistake.
- They may feel that given time their child will catch up. Whilst this may be true for some children, for children with some conditions and syndromes it may not.
- In some instances the parents may feel anger and may blame staff for the difficulties the child is experiencing.
- Some parents will blame themselves feeling that they have 'done something wrong' or 'should have noticed it themselves.'

Working with parents/carers

The way in which staff help parents/carers to cope with the potentially stressful stages following the identification of SEN will influence their perception of the setting and the future relationship between the home and setting.

It is important to consider the following points when working with parents:

- **Time to talk**
  Give the parents time to talk – it really helps them to have someone who will listen to their concerns.

- **Positive feedback**
  Give positive feedback about their child's progress – the achievements, good behaviour, targets reached.
- **Be truthful**
  Don't tell them a child has achieved something unless he really has.
- **Involve the parents/carers**
  Involve the parents with planning the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Make sure parents are fully informed about what is happening for their child. Explain any jargon, procedures, etc.
- **Explain**
  Explain any programmes or strategies being used and any changes to programmes or IEPs. Try to work with parents on any programmes planned by outside agencies, e.g. from a Speech and Language Therapist, Pre-school teacher, etc.
- **Give credit**
  Give credit to parents for work done with the child at home.
  Always make sure that parents are aware of and have given permission for visits from outside agencies. Keep them fully informed of any discussions that they have been unable to attend.





- **Be a mutual support group**
  Pooling information about the child can be useful when planning activities to reinforce the development of a skill.

Some thoughts and ideas about how to approach parents

Staff are, understandably, often apprehensive at the thought of approaching parents to share their concerns about a child. It is vital to establish and maintain a positive relationship with parents. The following points may be helpful to bear in mind:

- **Check that parent has time to spare before you begin.**
  If the parent is in a hurry to get to work or an appointment, s/he may not be able to give you the time you need, and s/he may spend the day worrying about what you said. It may be best to meet parents at the end of the session or day. An alternative to think about may be scheduling in an appointment to meet with the child's parents in order to ensure you both have enough time to discuss your concerns.
- **Speak to parent/carer specifically**
  Ensure that you speak to the parent and not the childminder, nanny, grandma, etc. If the parent is not the person who usually drops the child off or picks her/him up you will need to contact the parent by phone or by letter.
- **Find a quiet place**
  Find a quiet, private place to talk. nobody wants to talk about their child's difficulties in front of other parents!



- **Thank the parent/carer**
  Thank the parent for their time and support.
- **Be Positive**
  Start by saying something positive about the child.
- **Be tactful**
  Be tactful – don't say: "I'm really worried about Sally" or "I think that Sally has special educational needs". Instead, you could say something like: "I've noticed that Sally sometimes has difficulties with (such and such an area). Have you noticed the same thing at home?"
- **You aren't complaining**
  Make it clear that you are not 'complaining' about the child, but that you are anxious to make sure that s/he is able to benefit from all the opportunities available in your early years setting.
- **Give the parent/carer time**
  Ensure that you give time to the parents to air any of their own concerns – let them talk too and make sure that you listen without interrupting. Some parents feel very relieved that they are not the only ones who have noticed a concern. If they share your concerns, make notes of any relevant points they make.
- **Suggest a SEN Support Plan**
  If necessary, suggest that you devise a SEN Support Plan together.
- **Additional advice and support**
  If you feel you need some additional advice or support, suggest that you involve the Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team. Explain the role of the SEND Advisor to

parents/carer and check that they are happy for her to be consulted.

- **Don't force your point**
  If a parent/carer does not share your concerns, do not force your point. It is fine to reiterate that you still have some concerns in the setting, but do not try to undermine or contradict the parent/carer. Perhaps suggest that you will continue to monitor the child's progress and arrange to speak again if you still have concerns after a period of time.

- **Keep accurate records**
  Ensure that you accurately record your meeting with parents so that you can refer to it in the future. It is very important to record the date and time and what you said and the parents/carers response to this. It may be most appropriate to do this after the meeting has taken place – but make sure that you do this straight away so that you do not leave anything out! You may feel that it is appropriate to give the parents a copy of your notes as well as putting a copy in the child's file.



- **Communication**
  Communication with parents/carers is vital in order to aid a positive relationship. Ensure that you establish a relationship based on trust: always let the parent/carer know what you are doing and why, and check that they are happy with this.

- **Further help from your SEND Advisor**
  If you wish to discuss working in partnership with parents/carers of children with SEN further or if you have any concerns, contact your SEND Advisor in the Early Years SEND Advisory Team.