

Your role and your child's role in meetings

Being a parent or carer of a child with SEND is a bit like being the driver in the car, with your child as your passenger.

It's your responsibility to drive the car safely and get your child to their destination – that means being in control in the driving seat and helping your child get to where they want to be and achieve the best they can.

As a driver on this SEND journey you'll need to do some key things.

- **Learn how to drive on the road safely** – be in control of your child's journey with SEND and respond to things in an effective way.
- **Navigate your way** – learn how to find the things your child needs in the SEND 'system' in the best way possible.
- **Use a manual, a map and recovery services if needed** – find the right information and get advice from the people who understand and who can give specialist advice.

Being in the driving seat at meetings

How you drive, how you respond to other drivers and how you prepare all make a big difference to your journey. These principles apply to the meetings you have too. How you are in the meeting, how you react and respond to other people and how well you prepare all make a difference to how well it's going to go. These are some of the things that parents say help them manage before and during meetings:



1. **Be realistic** about what one meeting can achieve and set the right destination each time. In the same way that if you've only got a quarter of a tank of petrol you can't expect to get to Scotland, you shouldn't expect to deal with a significant challenge for your child in just one meeting. Aim to take steps along the way to get to where you want to be. Think about the long-term goal and then think what the next step towards that might be.
2. **Always focus on your child** and if the discussion starts to drift or there are differences of opinion, keep bringing everyone back to what your child wants and needs. Everyone should have your child's best interests at heart and when that's the focus, the discussions are more constructive and powerful. Remember where you're going and try not to go off on a side road.
3. **Know where you're going but be prepared to take a detour** if the road is blocked. Be specific about what you want but be open to other offers. Try and be flexible - if you have a fixed position on something and don't feel you can compromise it can lead to frustration, stress, and stalemate. There is usually more than one way to get where you want to be.
4. **Remember you're an expert** and a professional too – you're the driver! You know your child well and that puts you in a unique position to understand their strengths and challenges. You can, and should, take part as an equal in discussions.
5. **Keep your eyes open for possible hazards**. Everyone at a meeting will have some 'uninvited guests'. These are your feelings, your past experiences and what you're expecting to happen at the meeting. You might be angry, scared or confused, or you might take meetings in your stride and be confident, hopeful, and optimistic. If you've had poor experiences of meetings before, if relationships have broken down or if just being in school makes you feel uncomfortable, all of these can affect how you walk into the meeting. Professionals may well bring these feelings too.

6. **Drive looking forwards and not in your rear-view mirror.** Try not to take things that have happened in the past into each meeting. Focus on where you're going and how you're going to get there. If you've got grievances, ask if these can be talked about separately at a different meeting.
7. **Use a map.** Focusing on something that's written down can really help in a meeting. That might be looking at your child's school plan, an incident log, or a record of academic progress. It helps to take some of the 'personal' out of the meeting and lets everyone take a step back. If you can see and understand what the plans are it can help you understand the reasons behind things.
8. **Remember that everyone else doesn't drive in the same way you do,** and they haven't been where you've been. Teachers and other staff don't have your life experience – they may not have much understanding of what you're going through.
9. **We are all human** – everyone takes a wrong turn, gets lost and runs low on fuel from time to time. It's natural and normal to forget things, make mistakes and have an off day. Be kind to yourself and others and if you need to pull over and stop, or take a break, do.

Keeping your child at the centre of things

It's very important for your child or young person to be at the centre of things, and to be able to share their views with professionals and have them properly listened to and acted on. It's a powerful thing, and when it's done well it can make a huge difference to everyone, not least your child. Support that works well is based on what your child does well (their strengths) and what their hopes and goals are.

Sharing Their views

As your child grows older and becomes a young adult, they'll become more independent. For most young people that means taking more control over what happens in their lives. Your role changes too – usually, you will have less and less control! So, gradually helping your child to be more involved is an important process in preparing them to become an adult. To go back to the idea of driving and being on a journey, one day your child will probably learn to drive, and they will sit in the driver's seat – you'll be the passenger!

Every child has a voice and something to say, but the challenge can sometimes be how to help them express themselves. Even if your child can't speak, their views, opinions, likes and dislikes are still very important. It's up to the adults that support that child to find ways that will help them to do that.

Going to Meetings

Children and young people can and do go to meetings and as they get older and this is a good way for them to get involved in making decisions about their life. Some also like to know what everyone is talking about! But not everyone will want to or will be able to manage it. Meetings can feel overwhelming and sometimes be boring too.

If your young person wants to be involved, you could ask them to come to the start of the meeting for a few

minutes. It's a good way to take part, see what the meeting is like and get to know why and how the meetings can help. They can talk about what's working at school or college and what they need help with.

Talk about the idea that 'you can't always get what you want.' You haven't got a magic wand that will make everything better. But hearing what they have to say is the first step in helping them feel supported and understood in school or college.