

# SEND Threshold

## Parent/carer and family views and support



This booklet is designed to complement the SEND Thresholds, reflecting the voices and views of parents/carers and families in Gateshead. It has been collated by interviews with the Gateshead parent/carer forum. The focus of the following information mainly reflects “dos and don’ts” to successfully work with parents/carers and families when planning and discussing their children.

The importance of the involvement of parents, carers and young people is paramount and is referenced in the SEND Code of Practice 2014 – ‘It is recognised that at times, parents, teachers and others may have differing expectations of how a child’s needs are best met. Sometimes these discussions can be challenging but it is in the child’s best interests for a positive dialogue between parents, teachers and others to be maintained, to work through points of difference and establish what action is to be taken.’

The following statements reflect experiences of some parents in Gateshead and are intended to help practitioners and families work together as well as possible in the future by taking the following points into consideration. There is also a ‘Top 10 Tips’ for practitioners in the Thresholds Document that is based on these experiences.

**Central to all of this advice, is that all participants involved in any meeting should be treated as equals, including non-practitioners like parents and young people.**

# 1. Pre-Meetings with practitioners who work in Education, Health and Social Care:

When arranging a meeting consult parents/carers first regarding their availability for the meeting as you would with any other participant. Don't co-ordinate the diaries of ten practitioners and then tell the parents that the meeting will be at 3pm on a Wednesday – they might not be available, with good reason.

Make sure that parents are informed of the purpose of any meeting in advance. Ask parents if there's anything they'd like to discuss at the meeting and add it to the agenda. Circulate the agenda well in advance of the meeting, at least 2 weeks in advance, to everyone involved, including the parents/carers and families.

Use common sense about when meetings can realistically be held. School drop-off and pick up times aren't practical for the majority of parents/carers, including those whose children use school transport. Allow sufficient time for meetings to over-run slightly. (2pm seems to be a favourite meeting time for practitioners but a dreadful time for most parents/carers because it's too close to school pick up).

Make sure that the right people are attending the meeting – if a decision maker is needed make sure they attend. Someone coming along to then relay the conversation to an unknown decision maker isn't acceptable. It's unreliable and does nothing to build relationships or trust.

Don't hold obvious pre-meetings. Nobody likes walking into a room where the other participants have been there for an hour already discussing the meeting you're about to have. If you need a pre-meeting, have it the day before or earlier in the day.

Learn the name of the child you're discussing before the meeting and use it properly. It's not acceptable to be constantly looking up names during a meeting.

Read the files or the relevant information before the meeting. If you haven't had the opportunity to read the information beforehand, be honest about it and ask for relevant information to be explained to you. You might not realise it, but it is obvious and annoying when practitioners are "winging it" in meetings that they haven't prepared for sufficiently. Make sure all the paperwork is there.

Introductions: these can be really intimidating if people aren't used to round-the-table meetings. Ask in advance if parents/carers/child/young person would prefer to be introduced to the room or introduce themselves.

Parents/Carers and families who speak a different language must have an interpreter booked in advance and present at the meeting in order to understand information.

## 2. During meetings with practitioners who work in Education, Health and Social Care:

Know the purpose of the meeting that you are attending.

Arrive on time for meetings. If there is a delay, keep people informed. Don't leave people waiting in a reception area without an update. Remember that parents/carers will often have taken time away from work to attend day time meetings – it might not matter to you if the meeting starts 30 minutes late but it will matter to them if they are expected back at work.

Dress appropriately for meetings regardless of other events and activities you might be involved in on the same day. For example, attending an important meeting to discuss a child's EHCP dressed as a very convincing Christmas fairy, isn't appropriate.

Offer refreshments and comfort breaks during long meetings, even a glass of water.

Practitioners should either wear a badge or have card/paper in front of them with their name and job title written on it. (See the "Hello, my name is" campaign). It's hard to remember the names of lots of different people especially if you're stressed by the meeting.

If a child has a name like "Thomas" that some people might shorten, don't refer to them as "Tom" or "Tommy" without checking first – find out what the child is actually known as.

If a child has a difficult to pronounce or unusual name, ask the child's parents/carers how to pronounce their name at the beginning of the meeting – they'll appreciate the effort.

Be careful not to be gender typical in terms of comments throughout a meeting. For example, "He's just a little boy so that's why he is acting like that". Try and steer away from stereotyping genders such as "She's just a little girl, that is why she is shy".

Address parents/carers in the same way you address other attendees. If the meeting is formal with participants being addressed as "Mrs Smith", "Dr Jones" etc. address parents/carers as Miss/Mrs Bloggs, Mr Bloggs etc. If you're using first names, use the parents'/carers first names. Do not refer to parents as "Mum" and "Dad" (unless they specifically ask you to) it is entirely disrespectful and suggests you haven't bothered to find out their name. It's fine to introduce people as "This is Mary Smith, Henry's Mam". I've never attended a meeting where practitioners are referred to by their job title exclusively e.g. "Do you have the notes, Teacher?", "Can you update us please, Playworker?" – it's the same thing, please don't do it.

Be clear about who is taking minutes, who will circulate them and when they will be circulated. Remember to circulate the minutes, information and/or reports to all participants within a maximum of 2 weeks.

Allow parents/carers/families the opportunity to bring someone along to take notes on their behalf if they'd like to. Parents/carers/family members can record meetings to produce a transcript if they want to, this should be facilitated for them if they do not have the facilities/equipment.

All participants involved in any meeting should be treated as equal participants, including non-practitioners, like parents.

Ask throughout the meeting if anyone wants to go over anything again or if anyone has any questions. Do this in such a way that parents/carers don't feel put on the spot or embarrassed.

Don't be suspicious of parents/carers/families who are well informed about their child's condition/disability/needs – wouldn't you be if you were in their shoes?

Pitch the discussion so parents/carers can understand what is being discussed. Jargon or acronyms needs explanations. Someone in the meeting will usually have had previous contact with parents/carers/families and they will know where to pitch the discussions.

Do not pressure parents/carers into making important decisions in meetings (unless it's absolutely critical, and it hardly ever is). Give them the information that they need to make a decision and ask them to let you know their decision by a particular date. Nobody likes being forced to make important decisions under pressure.

Listen to all participants equally. Don't dismiss parent's/carers concerns or experiences without very good reason. Dismissive phrases like, "We don't see that behaviour here," or "She/He never behaves like that at school," with the implication that parents are exaggerating or making things up, aren't helpful. Remember that you, yourself will do things at home that you would never do at work and vice/versa.

Be respectful – remember you are discussing someone's baby/child/family.

Stay on topic – small talk with your colleagues isn't acceptable.

Be honest. Some conversations can be difficult, especially if you're giving people disappointing news. However, you have to be honest. Nobody wants to leave a meeting feeling positive only to receive an email at 5pm on the Friday following the meeting giving an entirely different outcome to that previously discussed.

At the end of meetings agree action points with the participants. Be clear about who is responsible for doing what and by when. Do the things that you have agreed to do, by the date agreed in the meeting. Actions should be completed or implemented at least 2 weeks after the meeting, maximum.

### **3. Post-Meetings with practitioners who work in Education, Health and Social Care:**

Allow time after meetings for parents/carers to debrief and talk to other practitioners in the meeting if this is appropriate and allow quiet spaces for this to happen.

If you say you're going to do something – do it. Give an update to say why it's delayed/why it can no longer be done in the way agreed if there is an issue. Also once it has been done, make sure you inform the parents/carers and within 2 weeks of the meeting please.

### **4. Additional views and information for meetings held in family homes:**

Always remember that you are in someone's home and be respectful of that.

Practitioners should advise parents/carers in advance who will be attending the meeting at their home. The attendees should not change without notice and without good reason. Nobody enjoys unexpected visitors. For example, a parent/carer discusses their child at length during a telephone conversation with "Jane" who will be attending a meeting at home. Parent(s)/carers prepare their child for the meeting with "Jane". "Susan" actually turns up for the meeting, who is unprepared, because "Jane" didn't know how to find the parents' house. This is unacceptable and unhelpful to all involved.

If possible, let people know what the meeting will involve. If you need to see people's bedrooms, tell them beforehand. The same goes for gardens, bathrooms, fridges etc. or anywhere else that visitors, to someone's home, wouldn't usually have access to.

If attendees would like people to keep their pets e.g. dogs, out of the way it would be helpful to ask in advance.

Arrive as close to the pre-arranged meeting time as possible. Do not arrive 30 minutes early – wait in your car if you need to or call and ask if turning up early is convenient. If you're going to be late, call and let people know. Let people know, in advance approximately how long you will be in their home and try to stick to that duration. Let families know if you are late/not going to be on time, families make arrangements for you and do not spring this on them. This can upset and distress children especially if it is transitional. It is protected family time that practitioners are taking up for meetings.

If parents/carers do not want to have meetings in their homes, then a different, suitable environment should be offered.

Take shoe covers with you for “shoes off” homes and offer to use them or take your shoes off. This is also to protect people with immune suppressed conditions.

Remember that you are in someone’s home – be respectful of that.

All other pre, during and post meeting views are important and should be followed at family home meetings.

## **5. Practitioners who work in Education, Health and Social Care abiding by the law, legislation and understanding/handling people’s information:**

Practitioners who do not know about conditions or diagnoses should research and find out about a range of conditions in order to make comment or support in actions.

Don’t think because you know one person with that condition that all other children/people present in the same way. Everyone is different and unique. It might be the same label but all people need different levels of support.

Don’t be suspicious of parents who are well informed about the procedure that practitioners should be following or the legislation that sets out those procedures – again, wouldn’t you be well informed if it was your child that was being discussed?

Act within the law. Check if local policies, that you will rely on in a meeting, comply with the law – many don’t.

# Useful links and information for families:

## Gateshead Autism Hubs offer monthly drop-ins and provide:

- an opportunity to speak with a professionally trained autism specialist and seek advice about any concerns you might have
- guidance on autism assessment and diagnosis in Gateshead
- access to a wide range of books, information and resources on a variety of autism topics, including training, social events, group activities etc
- a relaxed refreshment area where visitors can meet people and share experiences
- guidance and signposting to appropriate support services and voluntary and charity organisations operating locally
- free exclusive access to the sensory room for parents and carers attending the drop-in (children must be supervised by an adult at all times in the sensory room)
- representatives from outside agencies who can advise on the help available from their services

For more information on Gateshead Autism Hubs,  
email [gatesheadautismhubs@daisychainproject.co.uk](mailto:gatesheadautismhubs@daisychainproject.co.uk)

## Gateshead Family Hubs

Gateshead's Family Hubs provide a welcoming space for families and the wider community. Our Family Hubs support families from conception to the age of two to give all children the best start in life. We continue to support families of children up to the age of 19 and to age 25 for young people who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Our hubs are also open to other members of the community who may need more help. There are currently seven Family Hubs located across Gateshead. More support is available from community locations right across the borough. We also offer a [virtual Start for Life and Family Hub](#) if you are unable to attend one of our physical locations.

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/22551/Gateshead-Family-Hubs>

## Gateshead Local Offer

The Gateshead Local Offer brings together information for children and young people aged 0-25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families.

This includes information about services and support, and advice and guidance on education, health, social care and transport.

Visit the site at [www.gateshead-localoffer.org](http://www.gateshead-localoffer.org)

## Parent Carer Forum

Gateshead Parent Carer Forum is an organised volunteer group of parents and carers of disabled children and young people who have a variety of special educational needs and disabilities living across the Gateshead borough.

Our aim is to support parents and carers of children and young people with SEND in our community, we do that by coming together in a relaxed atmosphere, having a drop in coffee morning, information sessions with invited speakers and training events.

We also aim to make sure that services within Gateshead meet the needs of disabled/SEN children and their families. We do this by gathering the views of local families and by working closely with our local authority, health, education and social care professionals, as well as other agencies to provide active parent participation on a strategic level to help influence and shape the development and delivery of the services our children, young people and families access. We will highlight where local services, processes and commissioners are working well, or challenge when changes or improvements need to be made.

Membership of the forum will ensure you are aware of consultations and events in our area and that your voice is heard in reviewing and developing service to meet the needs of our children and families.

For more information on Gateshead Parent Carer Forum visit [www.gatesheadparentcarerforum.co.uk](http://www.gatesheadparentcarerforum.co.uk)

## SENDIASS

SENDIASS is a free and confidential service for parents, carers, and young people with SEND. It helps them to understand and exercise their rights, and to access the right provision for their needs. SENDIASS can help parents/carers to compile a contribution to a statutory assessment or voice any concerns they may have at school or college or about an assessment on your CYP. It also supports them with SEND Tribunal appeals.

To contact SENDIASS call 0191 478 4667 or [email BarnardosDisabilityandInclusionSupportService@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:BarnardosDisabilityandInclusionSupportService@barnardos.org.uk)

Links to a wide range of different SEND services in Gateshead can be found on the Local Offer and in the Gateshead SEND Threshold Document.