

Early Years: working together with parents to identify SEND

Possible conversational openers and responses

When working in the Early Years, you may often be the first person to talk to a parent about their child's progress and development and any concerns that you may have about this. These initial conversations can feel difficult, but it is crucial that we have them, as the early identification of and support for individual needs can make a long-term difference to a child and their future. Conversations are more likely to be positive and helpful if we apply the principles of person-centred working, including the use of open questions and active listening.

Here are some suggestions for conversational openers and responses which may make this easier both for practitioners and parents or carers. You will need to adapt these to suit individual circumstances.

- I've noticed that [your child]
- Can you tell me about what you have noticed at home?
- As you know, we have been giving [your child] some additional support with XXXX and I'd like to talk to you about how that is going. How do *you* feel it's been going?
- [Your child] has been making progress with the extra support we have given him/her, but he/she is still having some difficulties with XXXX. We think the best thing for him/her now would be to identify him/her as having Special Educational Needs (or 'SEN'), because that means that we can give him/her even more help, and when he/she goes to school, the school will be able to support him/her appropriately. It is possible for him/her to be taken off the SEN register if he/she catches up and it is felt that he/she no longer has additional needs. How would you feel about that?
- We feel that we need some more advice and guidance on how best to support [your child] and we'd like to make a referral to XXXX [external agency]. How would you feel about that?
- I understand that you have some concerns around XXXX, could you talk to me about that?
- I can see that this is upsetting you – could you try and talk to me about that?
- Would you like to talk about this at another time, perhaps with your partner/a friend etc here as well?
- *Reflecting back:* I think you're saying that you're not worried because his brother was just the same at this age and he is fine now? Yes, it may well be that [your child] does catch up, and to help him to do that, we want to give him some extra help now.
- *Always consider the time and place for these conversations – ideally somewhere private where you are unlikely to be interrupted, and when both you and the parent/carer have enough time to speak properly – make an appointment with them if that will help.*

It will be helpful for you to reflect on how well these strategies work, and what you might need to do differently in order to provide the best possible support for parents at what can be an emotional time.

You may also find it useful to watch our free webcast: 'Working with children, parents, carers and families'

<https://nasen.org.uk/resource/working-with-children-parents-carers-and-families.html>

or our paid for webinar recording: 'Early Years: working together with parents to identify SEN'

<https://nasen.org.uk/resource/early-years-working-together-with-parents-to-identify-send.html>