



Meetings go better when you prepare

Meetings go better when there are no surprises. There is a lot you can do to avoid misunderstandings and tricky situations. Parents often tell us that if you feel at ease and can think clearly, meetings go better.

So here are some tips.

Check the basics. Do you know when and where to go? Who else has been invited and why? Is there anyone else you want to include?

Get the paperwork together so you can go through it beforehand. Have you been sent copies of everything you need? If not, you can ask for copies of Individual Education Plans, the Statement, reports about your child. You can also ask to look through your child's school record and get a copy of this too, although you may have to pay the photocopying costs to the school.

Is there any paperwork you should fill in and send back before the day? Try to do this in good time. If you need help with it, call Parent Partnership. If you miss a deadline, don't panic. Ring and check - it may still be worth sending it in.

Think about what the meeting is for Did you ask for the meeting or did someone else? Are you looking for information or particular action? Can this meeting make decisions or influence the people who can?

Think about what you want out of the meeting. What would be your "walk away" alternative (I'd rather walk away without an agreement, rather than agree to that).

Make a list of questions to ask and points you wish to raise. You may want to put these in a letter beforehand. Take a copy of your list and refer to it. Check everything has been covered. If not, say so. "I did note down some things I wanted to ask and there is one thing we haven't talked about yet"

Check how you are feeling about this meeting. Are you anxious, upset or angry? If so, why? What can you do make sure this doesn't get in the way of getting what you want from the meeting. Remember other people in the meeting may also be feeling nervous or defensive. Be ready to ask for a break or a glass of water if you need time to compose yourself.

Find someone else to come with you. It can really help to have someone to give you moral support and prompt you if you forget to mention something. This could be a friend or relative, or you could ask Parent Partnership for an IPS (Independent Parental Supporter).

Be on time! You will feel calmer. And give yourself time to do what you need to feel ready - take deep breaths, visit the loo, look over your notes.

If you don't know everyone, ask them to explain who they are.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Sometimes professionals slip into jargon or assume you have more knowledge than you do. Keep asking until whatever is unclear has been explained in a way that make sense.

Get your supporter to take notes, or ask if you can tape the meeting. It's easy for each person to come away from the same meeting with a different understanding of what has been said and agreed.

Summarise what you think you have been told to make sure you've got it right and check that everyone else has understood your views.

To be useful, you need to know what happens next. What interventions or support have been agreed? What should happen next? Who has promised to do what? When will this be reviewed? Sometimes you may want to send a letter afterwards to clarify this.