

# Top Tips for professionals who support children and young people to participate in their Education, Health and Care plan



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## About this document

This Top Tips guide is for all professionals who are involved in supporting disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs, to fully participate in their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

This document aims to:

- a) Raise awareness of the barriers children and young people face when participating in their EHC plan
- b) Offer some advice and ideas to help eliminate those barriers.

## Background

All of the top tips in this guide have been co-developed with disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this Top Tips resource.

## Using this document

These tips and ideas are intended as suggestions and to prompt thinking about how best to involve young people in decisions about their EHC plan, as opposed to a prescriptive set of rules. Young people are all individuals and any approaches should empower them to be involved in whatever way works best for them.

The resource is divided into four key topics to support professionals to identify where barriers to participation are having an impact on children and young people and their EHC plans:

- Aspirations and Outcomes
- The Whole Child
- Content
- Processess

# SUPPORTING DREAMS, ASPIRATIONS AND OUTCOMES

**Including children and young people's aspirations and outcomes within their Education, Health and Care plan was identified by the Department for Education as being crucial to supporting the development of the whole child and ensuring that disabled children and young people achieve their fullest potential.**

The purpose of an EHC plan is to make special educational provision to meet the special educational needs of the child or young person.

To secure the best possible outcomes for them across education, health and social care and , as they get older, prepare them for adulthood. To achieve this, local authorities use the information from the assessment to "establish outcomes across education, health and social care based on the child or young person's needs and aspirations<sup>1</sup>."

Children and young people have identified the following areas as important to supporting their participation not only in the development of their individual Education, Health and Care plans, but also at local and strategic levels.

These key principles support all professionals to support children and young people's participation in decision-making.



<sup>1</sup> Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, January 2015, paragraph 9.2

## **Do...Include our dreams and aspirations**

Even if it seems unachievable to family or professionals, identifying aspirations, and working towards these gives disabled children and young people legitimate goals and supports skills development.

## **Do...Keep the young person at the centre, both of the plan and discussions about support**

Education, Health and Care plans must be developed and delivered with the needs and aspirations of the child and young person at its heart. Ensure that a young person's plan contains information about them, which they have been involved in developing. The plan must focus on supporting the young person to achieve the outcomes and goals they have agreed

## **Do...Be open minded, really listen, be empathetic and be aspirational**

Children and young people tell us they want adults to trust them to make decisions for themselves and to be on hand to offer support and guidance when needed. Most of all, they want professionals to believe in them, to believe that they are capable young people and can achieve their dreams.

## **Do...Listen to my wishes and respect them**

Approach the meeting with an open mind. Make sure you know the child or young person's access needs in advance of the meeting and use accessible language, avoiding jargon. Remember the child, young person and their family are the experts for their support needs.

## **Do...Get creative at meetings**

Some children and young people are not comfortable meeting in a formal environment. Creating a comfortable environment may mean:

- Involving other adults that they trust, or friends who give them confidence and encouragement
- Holding meetings at informal venues, such as a local arts centre, park or cafe
- Having a range of activities, craft materials or tablets on hand
- Frequent breaks
- And most importantly ensuring that the young people's preferred communication method is made available to them

## **Don't...Share personal information about me without telling me who you are talking to and why**

Privacy is important to everyone and access to personal information<sup>2</sup> included in EHC plans is a concern to young people. Children and young people have told us strongly that their personal information should stay private. Particular concerns include:

- Access to mental health information and emotional wellbeing concerns
- Details about personal care needs
- Information about a young person's home life i.e if they were under social services care
- Incidents of bullying, particularly if the bullying is carried out by an adult

## **Do... Remember, success varies**

A child or young person can be doing well in one area whilst needing additional support in another. Keep an open mind to the differing kinds of support needed.

<sup>2</sup> Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, January 2015, paragraph 9.32

# SEND CODE OF PRACTICE CONTEXT

## Involving children, young people and parents in decision-making

Paragraphs 9.21 – 9.24 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years provides statutory guidance for professionals on how to include children, young people and their parents in their individual process of assessment and production of an EHC plan. This guidance confirms that the needs of the child and young person should sit at the heart of the assessment and planning process. This includes their aspirations and the support they need to achieve them.

All of the evidence in this Top Tips resource given by the children and young people we spoke with corroborates that EHC plans must be individual and person-centred and support the participation of children and young people from the very beginning.

"Tell a young person what to think and you lose their trust, ask a young person what they think and empower them for life."

-Megan, FLARE member

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## Section A

It is particularly important that Section A focuses on the experiences and aspirations of the child or young person and reflects where they have been included.

When views, wishes and aspirations are detailed it must be clear who is speaking, the child or young person, or their parent(s), teacher or other professional. Views and statements must never be represented as from the child or young person if contributed by another.

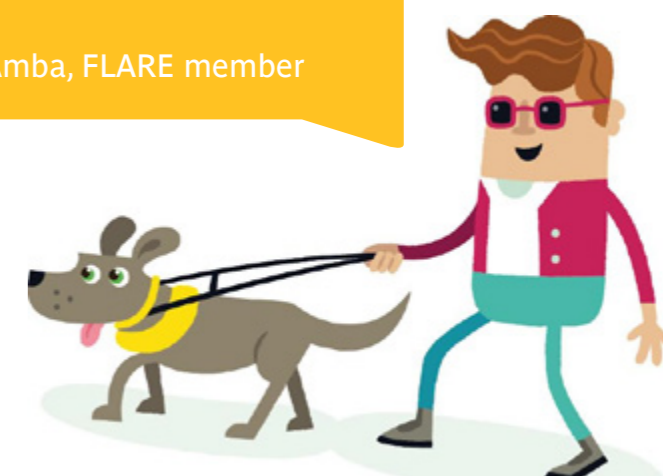
Include a one-page profile of the child or young person, co-produced with them, that reflects what they think is important for others to know. A good profile would include:

- Who they are
- Who and what is important to them
- How they like to communicate and be communicated with
- How they like to spend their time
- What things they need support with and what good support feels like for them
- Their likes, dislikes, interests

Information in Section A must be specific and relevant. Young people must also be allowed to see and agree to what has been included.

"Let a young person have a voice and give them a power of choice!"

- Amba, FLARE member



## THE WHOLE CHILD

Disabled children and young people are first and foremost children and young people, and must not be defined by their impairments or support needs.

Taking a whole child approach means arranging services around a child or young person and their family, empowering them to achieve the outcomes that matter to them.

### **“Do... Realise that everyone is different**

Even children or young people with the same condition will need different support. Listen to the needs expressed by each child or young person.

### **Do... Make sure young people get access to emotional support too**

Emotional support needs to be accessible for all children and young people. Let children and young people know what options are available and how to access support from the start rather than when things go wrong.

### **Do... Remember there is more to me than just my support needs!**

Talk directly to the child or young person, rather than the people around them. Young people have told us they feel better able to participate when professionals take the time to get to know them as individuals - their likes and dislikes, who their friends are, their hobbies, what motivates them and their preferred ways to communicate.

### **Do... Make sure our EHC plan reflects all our needs, not just the education or health or care ones**

EHC plans should reflect the whole child to ensure each child and young person is supported to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTENT OF THE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLAN

**The SEN Code of Practice states that every local authority must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision.**

A good EHC plan must include children and young people's participation and voice throughout all sections. Involving children and young people in Section A of their Education Health and Care plan should be a minimum.

Showing how CYP and their families views were gathered and how they link to the outcomes will reinforce that their participation is essential to a successful plan.

"There's no I in EHCP, there should be, it should be me!"  
- Megan, FLARE member



**Do... Focus on what we can do**

Keep the plan positive and focus on achievable objectives. Use language that is factual and constructive.

**Do... Use language we can understand**

Children and young people need to know what is in their EHC plan. Plans must be written in language accessible to them and reflect their own way of speaking.

**I need to know who is going to help me**

Be clear about what support is being offered, what it is for, when it will be given and who will provide it. Young people have said they must know at all times who to contact to co-ordinate their support and who it is that ensures that everyone involved knows what the young person's views are and can advocate for them.

**Do... Use constructive goals that will help me develop**

Children and young people have to be able to achieve the goals set in their EHC plan. Outcomes must be SMART and agreed in consultation with the child or young person and their parents where applicable. Tools such as an outcomes pyramid should be used to develop short, mid and long term outcomes. Information that is relevant to achieving those goals must be included and young people must be made aware of when they achieve their goals.

**Don't... Put words in our mouth**

If it hasn't been said by a child or young person then don't write it in the first

person.

Make it clear who is 'speaking' and what they are saying.

**Do...make sure information and facts about the child or young person are correct**

Personal information and support needs included in EHC plans must be discussed with the child or young person and, where appropriate and with permission, shared with other agencies to avoid repetition. Young people must be allowed to see and agree to what has been included. If you are unsure:

- Ask the child or young person, or their family
- Go through with them the information collected
- Review what is discussed in the meeting and agree actions

**Don't... Pressure me**

If a child or young person does not want to have a goal or a piece of information included in their EHC plan there should be a no pressure to do so. Young people say they must have all appropriate information to make an informed decision about what to include or not.

**Don't... dismiss my support needs, talk to me**

Children and young people feel their requests for support are valid and reasonable. They want professionals to understand the impact of their decisions to not meet support and funding requests.

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THEIR EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLAN PROCESS

**The process of supporting children and young people to participate in the development of their EHC plan is as important as including their voice in the plan itself.**

Children and young people need to be empowered to understand their own role in the process and develop the skills that let them take part.

They say they feel confused, frustrated and isolated by current methods to include them in plan assessments, development and reviews.



**Don't... Ignore me**

It's important to have everyone together in the room but it's important that adults don't dominate. Adults have a responsibility to ensure that young people have an equal voice at meetings.

**Don't... Have a meeting of professionals and the young person gets 'invited'**

Children and young person must be at the heart of the meeting, and their comfort and needs must be at the forefront. Professionals must plan and account for young people's involvement in all parts of the process. Young people say they want to know what is written in their plan and to 'sign off' each version.

**Do... Give me time to think and understand**

It is essential that all information about what happens and when is given to young people well in advance. All information must be age appropriate, accessible and in the young person's preferred format. Give children and young people the opportunity to prepare in advance of the meeting, and plenty of time and support at the meeting to share what they want to say.

**Do... Agree who will be involved**

The young person and professionals must agree together who is going to be involved in the meeting and why. Young people must have a say in who will support them and who they would like to be present at their assessment and review meetings.

**Don't... Give up on supporting me to be part of my EHC plan**

All children and young people will use different ways and need different support to take part in their plans. Use creative methods such as visual aids, video diaries, observations, drawing, storytelling etc. If the child or young person isn't saying anything about their EHC plan don't just assume the plan is ok, check things out and build feedback and review into the process.

**Do... Be flexible with content, meetings and reviews; things change and I want my EHC plan to change with me**

Have regular reviews and meetings to make sure children and young people can share their thoughts, particularly during periods of change, such as during transition to a new school or college, or during exam season. This must include:

- Access to support services to arrange changes to their support, and then reflecting these changes in their plan.
- Child and young person knowing whom they can discuss changes to their EHC plans with.
- When transferring from Statement to EHC plan, meet with the child or young person and discuss their support needs rather than just referring to the Statement.

**Do... Remember young people want to be involved throughout**

Professionals must expect and plan for a young person to be there for the whole process. A young person may choose to only be involved in certain sections or meetings but they must be welcomed to participate in its entirety. An EHC plan must be an iterative process where children and young people and their families are involved throughout and not just within Section A.

## Further Resources

Education, Health and Care plans: Examples of good practice. A resource for all those involved in the production of EHC plans

Your Rights, Your Future toolkit, co-produced with children and young people.

You might also find the VIPER Participation Ingredients particularly helpful when developing good participation practice.

Supporting the whole child: Policy, Practice and Resources

SMART outcomes – EHC outcomes pyramid has been developed by CDC as a tool to help professionals and parents identify outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs.





This resource is part of the Making Participation Work programme, a joint partnership between the Council for Disabled Children and KIDS, and funded by the Department for Education. For more information about the Making Participation Work programme, visit us at <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/> or contact [CDC@ncb.org.uk](mailto:CDC@ncb.org.uk)







