

# Conversations, correspondence consultations and meetings



**Whether you're having a 'case conference' meeting with several professionals or seeing just one person for an assessment, you and your child have the right to be involved, listened to and treated with respect.**

- TIP!** **Keep a diary.** Note down the names of any professional you have contact with and which department they work in. Make brief notes of any conversations; referring to your notes can refresh a befuddled memory.
- TIP!** **Make copies of any letters** you send and keep all correspondence about your child in one place. Ask when you can expect replies, make a note in your diary and follow it up if you haven't heard by then.
- TIP!** **Make sure you meet deadlines;** it's in your interest to complete and return forms, and to arrive for appointments in good time.
- TIP!** **Try to negotiate appointments** at times that will help you get the best out of them. If your child cannot tolerate waiting, or would be too distressed for the assessment to be worthwhile, try and get the first appointment of the session. Maybe an appointment at 4pm is good because it gives the psychiatrist a chance to see your child Ritalin free?
- TIP!** **Always be friendly to receptionists** and secretaries and let them know how much you appreciate their help. They are the gatekeepers! Check that you are clear about who you are meeting with and why. It is easy to assume that the family therapist is the psychiatrist if you don't know them.
- TIP!** **Be prepared, clinics often run late.** If this happens, ask if your child can be seen before other children who are more able to wait, and say why! In any case, take activities to occupy your child, arrange for a friend to pick up siblings from school and sort out dinner before you leave the house.
- TIP!** **Lots of parents say it helps to take someone else to appointments.** It's not just the extra pair of hands to help with the practical things like keeping an eye on your child, or supporting your child's communication, it's the emotional support if plans fall apart and someone else to hear what's being said.
- TIP!** **If English is not your first language or you use BSL,** it's reasonable to expect support from an interpreter, but you will need to ask for this in plenty of time. Good interpreting services help everyone understand each other's wishes and concerns more easily. If you have additional needs ask that letters and reports are sent to you in an accessible format.
- TIP!** **Choose who is present.** People who are not working directly with you or your child should only be present at consultations or meetings with your agreement. Say 'no' if onlookers might make you or your child feel uncomfortable.

**TIP!** **Make a list of the things that you most want to discuss** and notes of the key points you want to make. Prioritise goals that are most important to your family and your child. Whatever it is, be sure to be clear about how much extra work you can take on. Remember it's likely to be you who delivers the interventions.

**TIP!** **It's reasonable that your child is assessed in several settings** if they respond differently in different situations, but you'll probably have to ask.

**TIP!** **If your child doesn't use speech to communicate**, you will need to explain how he communicates 'yes' and 'no' and 'tells' you about his wishes. It may be important to describe changes in your child's body language, mood or pallor that tell you that your child is in pain or wants to finish an activity.

**TIP!** **Often professionals talk over children's heads** and don't speak directly to them. How you manage to include your child in these conversations can influence the weight given to your child's views. You may need to be blunt and suggest that professionals ask your child themselves.

**TIP!** **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 makes sense to you.

**TIP!** **Get a friend or relative 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 what has been agreed. Summarise what you think you have been told to make sure you've got it right and check that the professionals have understood your views. Ask for a copy of notes or minutes to check before they are circulated.

**TIP!** **Try some strategies for handling meetings with lots of people.** Big meetings and case conferences can feel intimidating. If you don't know everyone ask them to explain who they are; ask someone to give you a glass of water (because being nervous may make your mouth dry) and ask for time to think if you need it.

**TIP!** **To be useful, you need to know what happens next.** What interventions or support have been agreed? When will this be reviewed?

**TIP!** **If you have to make a difficult decision**, say about treatment or surgery, and you don't feel confident that you have explored every avenue on your child's behalf, ask for another opinion. Don't feel bad about changing specialists if you don't get on or feel their approach is wrong for you or your child.

**TIP!** **If you're unclear or unhappy about anything**, make sure that the professional knows. A brief word or telephone call may be all that's needed to sort things out. Let people know in writing if things start to go badly wrong. If you need to talk about your child's services with someone neutral, **Contact a Family (CaF)** has a free parents' helpline. Their parent advisors can help by listening and by pointing you to other sources of local help. Call the CaF freephone helpline on: 0808 808 3555 (Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm).



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