



## Is your child receiving the support they need at school?

By Stephanie Hirtenstein

I have two boys with Autism who both have Education Health and Care Plans to access their education. Here is my advice for anyone who has a child in need of support in school.

- Write a list of everything which is concerning you about your child and school. List all of your child's needs/issues/difficulties at school and at home.
- Make an appointment to see the SENCo.
- Ask for reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments are whatever the child needs to be able to access an education. Here are some examples of reasonable adjustments, but this is by no means an exhaustive list, just an idea of what others have needed;
  - Time out card to leave lessons when everything is too overwhelming
  - Being allowed to leave lessons five minutes early while corridors are quiet
  - Headphones/ noise cancelling ear defenders
  - Scribe
  - Voice recognition program
  - No Homework
  - Work completed in a quiet space away from busy classroom
  - Sensory breaks
  - Laptop for written work
- Every child is different so ask for the specific reasonable adjustments they may need to help them access an education.
- Your child is able to have reasonable adjustments before diagnosis - they should be anticipatory, (Equality Act 2010).
- After all meetings write down what you believe was said and list any action points and email these to the SENCo/teacher/Head (whoever was present). It is very helpful to have a written record if you go on to apply for an EHCP.
- Keep a diary of all related events, meetings, appointments, conversations. Keep a file of letters, emails and reports as they will all be useful if you ever need evidence of needs or difficulties.

- Request Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings be set up. It is really helpful to have an outside professional chair the TAC, Early Help or Youth Workers can do this. TAC's are usually half termly or termly. This is a space where all current issues at school and at home can be discussed and any necessary reasonable adjustments put in place. Again this can be very helpful to work out how well a child is doing at school, identify the issues and try various approaches to fixing them. The notes may be useful later if you need to apply for an EHCP.
- A SENCo must be a teacher but in reality they may not know much/ enough about your child's disability, SEN or the law.
- **You** are the most knowledgeable professional about your child.
- If your child needs more support than their peers then it is worth requesting an EHCP assessment. The school can apply and it is appropriate to request this from the SENCo. However, if the school are not supportive, maybe they say your child will not need an EHCP but you disagree, then a parent can apply for an EHCP themselves. This can be done by writing or emailing the SEN team at your Local Authority. There are excellent template letters on the IPSEA website.
- There are two criteria for an EHCP assessment in Section 36 (8) of the CFA 2014 - that a child HAS or MAY have a SEN, and that the child or young person MAY need special educational provision to be made for them in accordance with an EHC plan.
- Anxiety is classed as a disability if it is severe (affects normal day to day activities) and ongoing (lasted or expected to last for at least a year).
- If your child's anxiety fulfils these criteria it should be covered as a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act and the SEN CoP.
- The definition of SEND does not only cover learning difficulties and academic achievement. There are four broad areas of special educational need defined in the legislation:
  - **communication and interaction**
  - cognition and learning
  - **social, mental and emotional health**
  - **sensory and/or physical**
- You nearly always need professional, consultant level, reports to back up what your child's needs are, although a referral is by law equal. If you have a referral to CAHMS or

for an Autism assessment this must be taken into account, the same as the actual diagnosis (comes back to reasonable adjustments are anticipatory).

- It really helps to be informed about what your rights are and what your child's rights are in terms of their education.
- The legal documents that are worth knowing about are The Education Act 2011, Children and Families Act 2014, The Equality Act 2010, and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN CoP) 2014.
- If your child has a diagnosis then you can self refer to Early Help, this is available through Children Services at the LA . Their workers can attend meetings at school with you.
- You can speak to advisors at SENDIASS (this organisation may have a different name in different county locations). They are funded by the LA to support parent carers. They can attend meetings with you.
- The more you know the law, the better the provision will be for your child. Best places to find information are;
  - IPSEA
  - SOS SEN
  - Council for Disabled Children
  - Special Needs Jungle
  - Coram
  - SEN Action (has a good Facebook group)
  - For school refusal/anxiety, Not Fine in School (has a very good FB group with resources), School Refusal Support Services (FB group and resources are very good)

#### Commonly used acronyms;

- SEN = Special Educational Needs
- SEND = Special Educational Needs & Disabilities
- CFA = Children and Families Act
- SEN CoP = Special Educational Needs Code of Practice
- SENCo = Special Educational Needs Coordinator
- LA = Local Authority (LEA is just Local Education Authority)