

TOP TIPS FOR RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

Meetings should be child/young person and parent/carer centred and friendly, solution-focused, positive and building on strengths as well as identifying needs, open, honest and productive.

Consider:

- WHY:** What is the purpose of the meeting – is this known/agreed by all? And how will you know if you have achieved the agreed outcomes?
- WHO:** Inviting the relevant people and knowing who is coming. How will the child's voice be heard? (if attending, how should this be handled?)
- WHERE:** Suitability. What flexibility is there around venue?
- WHEN:** What flexibility is there around the timing of the meeting?
- HOW LONG:** How long do you need to meet?

Everyone attending the meeting should know all of the above, especially the parent/carers.

It can be the case that just as much thought has to be put into a one to one meeting with a parent/carer as a larger meeting involving several people and issues. The difference is with respect to the practical issues and the formality of the structure.



Creating a positive and welcoming environment

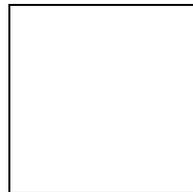
- Is the parent/carer happy with the choice of venue. Could any flexibility be offered regarding this?
- Meet and greet the child, young person and their family.
- Let the parent/carer come into the room first and choose where they would like to sit. Do not let them walk into a room with several people already seated.
- A few minutes of friendly chat as long as this includes the parent/carer (and child/YP if attending).
- Be aware of the other pressures that people may be experiencing at the current time – particularly the parent/carer, who is potentially the most emotionally vulnerable person in the room. Put yourselves in their shoes: what would make them feel more comfortable?
- When doing introductions, start with the parent/carer, or the child/YP if they are attending.
- Spending time talking about the structure of the meeting is a good use of time.
- Parent/carers may welcome some support with preparation for some meetings.
- It is respectful to all if the meeting starts and finishes on time.
- Give some consideration towards where parent/carers wait. Outside the Head teacher's office could bring back unpleasant memories...Also, waiting in a very public space is not always desirable for those parent/carers who visit the school frequently).
- Refreshments make people feel valued and respected, but don't let them dominate.
- Be honest about practical issues and check with parent/carer that they are happy. (Eg if you know that at one point you are likely to be interrupted, better to warn people of this, or if someone can only attend for part of the meeting).
- Consider suggesting a break if it is a long meeting, and make sure that parent/carers know that they can request a short break if they need to.
- To encouraging people to participate, refer to people by their name, ask open ended questions
- Give parents/carers some warning that a question or query maybe asked, by saying things like...'it would be good to hear your views on ' in a few minutes, after we have discussed ' etc. This gives them more time to prepare their answer.
- Show parents/carers (and child/YP if attending) through your actions, posture and warm and welcoming smiles and nods that you are actively listening to their response and expect everyone else to do similar.
- Always thank people for their contribution
- Try to ensure additional conversations that don't include the parent/carer don't take place after the meeting has finished. If you need to stay and talk about something else or fix diary dates, then let the parent/carer know that this is what you are doing.

Practical considerations

- It is respectful to all to have reasonable notice to attend a meeting
- How is a record going to be made of what is discussed and agreed, and who is going to do this? Will this person be able to take an active part in the meeting? How will any notes be circulated afterwards and who will do this?
- Are there any access issues to be resolved – eg physical access to the building, or access to the discussion if the parent/carers first language is not English.
- Consider circulating a piece of paper for everyone to write their name and contact details.
- Is any cover required to enable relevant people to attend?
- Consider who is going to make tea/coffee (and ask this person in advance).
- It can be useful to have a box of tissues available.
- Introductions, and don't forget anyone that arrives late.
- Arrive in good time, factoring in parking and signing-in.
- Some lead-in time (eg 15 minutes) could be factored in for a meeting that involves a large number of people, when people could arrive and have refreshments. When this happens, the meeting is more likely to start on time.

Venue:

- Think creatively about different venues.
- Is there a suitable (confidential) space/room available? Will there be any interruptions?
- Seating: is there suitable seating – ie adult-sized chairs or at least chairs of equal sizes.



The meeting process:

Facilitator/chair: it's helpful to explain this role. It is this person's responsibility to make sure the process of the meeting runs as smoothly as possible:

- Make sure that all items are covered, and the structured is adhered to; that everyone has the opportunity to participate, particularly the parent/carer and child/YP if attending. If you run out of time and there are items/issues left not covered, negotiate how to address this. (A second, smaller meeting may be appropriate).
- Consider having an agenda, dependent on the nature of the meeting. This should be agreed with those attending, especially the parent/carer. Some people find it helpful to have this on paper or on a flipchart/sheet of paper, so that everyone has a visual reminder of the structure.
- A structure to the discussion shared with everyone helps everyone to keep on track.
- There should be no shocks/surprises for the parent/carer.
- Agreed actions/outcomes are usually at the end. Make sure there is adequate time for these.
- It is helpful for all for the discussion and outcomes/actions to be summarised. Check who is going to do what by when.
- When people are sharing views, consider the most appropriate sequence in which to do this.
- It is respectful to have an end time (double check that this is OK with everyone) and stick to this.
- Allow time to fix another meeting date, if appropriate.
- Always finish on a positive tone, however the challenge of the agenda, reminding everyone of the value of sharing information and arriving at an agreed way forward.

