



# The Rotherham Parent Partnership Service

## FACTSHEET

### Involving your Child in Making Decisions

"Children and young people with Special Educational Needs have a unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances and their own views about what sort of help they would like to help them make the most of their education. They should, where possible, participate in all the decision making processes that occur in education"

"They should feel confident that they will be listened to and that their views are valued."

Special Educational Needs Code of Practice - Chapter 3 (3:2).

As the SEN Code of Practice suggests, involving your child in decision making processes within their education can offer an invaluable insight into what they feel would work for them to help reach their potential. However, it also recognises that a fine balance has to be reached between giving a child a voice and encouraging them to join in making informed decisions, and overburdening them with procedures where they may not have enough experience and knowledge to make the right judgements for themselves. The code also acknowledges that finding out what your child's views are may not always be an easy task. This may be particularly true of children and young people who have severe communication difficulties or children who are very young.

Involving your child in the following processes would help when planning their future education:-

- Setting learning targets and contributing to their IEP's (Individual Education Plans).
- Discussions about a choice of school.
- Adding their views to the assessment of their needs.
- Giving their opinion towards the Annual Review process.
- Being involved in transition planning.



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## So where do you start?

Recent work from the Yorkshire and Humberside SEN Regional Partnership has put together a good practice pack on "Involving Children and Young People in Meetings and Reviews". Within the pack are 6 guiding principles:-

1. Children and young people should understand that their views are as important as everyone else's, in whatever way these views are expressed.
2. They should understand the purposes and processes of the meetings/ reviews
3. They should be given genuine options about how to communicate their views
4. If they attend their reviews, the agenda and the manner in which the meeting is run should be child centred
5. They should be given a realistic understanding of the remit of the review and what decisions their views can change or have an impact on
6. They should be given information about the outcome of any review in a manner that is meaningful to each child.

A child centred review or meeting needs to take into account that they should be meaningful to the child and include systems or methods of communication which are appropriate. Joining in with reviews and meetings does not necessarily mean that all children should attend their review. Some children may need additional support from a familiar adult to enable them to join in, while others would find the experience too stressful and in some cases meaningless. Participation may mean that a child attends all or part of the meeting but may also mean that their thoughts and feelings have been collected to feed into the meeting. There are a number of ways in which your child's views may be recorded. This could be in the way of drawings, written accounts, photographs and even video. Obviously some of these suggestions take time and planning and so would need to be considered in advance.

A child's views should be circulated with other papers, ideally before or at the beginning of any meeting. This will ensure that their views are taken into consideration and not presented as an afterthought.



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**Children need information so that they can work towards:**      **Adults need to:**

- Understanding the importance of information
- Expressing their feelings
- Participate in discussions
- Indicate their choices.
- Provide an appropriate environment
- Give information and support
- Learn how to listen to the child

Rotherham Schools have developed many different ways to help a child join in the decision making processes and reviews. Schools have access to the "Box of Tricks" which gives different examples of how to record a child's thoughts and feelings about their education. This includes ideas which range from smiley and sad faces, tick charts, to recording a child's responses to specific or open ended questions. Many school's within Rotherham also have other systems in place such as School Councils, Peer Mentoring, Circle Time and Buddy Systems. These strategies also promote your child's participation in making informed choices about their education.

## So how can you help?

- Accept that your child may have important thoughts and feelings to share with you.
- Plan ahead (where possible) for any meetings and reviews that are due.
- Attend as many meetings and reviews as you can (your views are also important)
- Speak to school in advance. Ask for suggestions on how to get your child's views without causing extra stress or worry.
- Find out if other people feel it is appropriate for your child to attend meetings. Give some thought to what you wish to add at the meeting and if you are happy for your child to hear your views. You may also wish to speak to your child about this as they may feel uncomfortable attending such discussions.

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