



Top tips for meeting with a parent/carer

Guidance for meeting with a parent/carer to discuss mental health and wellbeing, with tips for before, during and after the meeting.

Before the meeting:

- Consider carefully the purpose of the meeting and how it will ultimately benefit the child or young person. Discussing it beforehand with colleagues can be helpful. Contentious meetings might benefit from two members of staff being present.
- Invite the parent/carer to bring a friend or supporter with them. Many parents feel intimidated by school meetings.

During the meeting:

- Make the purpose of the meeting clear and get to the point quickly.
- Start – and finish – the conversation with something positive.
- Do not make any attempt at a medical diagnosis.
- Be compassionate, warm and respectful.
- Remember that the parent is an expert on their child. Acknowledge the parent/carer's feelings and any problems rather than offer immediate solutions.
- Listen without interrupting; make eye contact if appropriate; show with your body language that you are focusing on them and what they have to say. Note what their body language is saying and what may be being left unsaid. Let them talk until they are finished. All of this will help you understand more fully what is going on.
- Respect cultural differences. Remember that different cultures have different norms regarding parenting practices, as well as personal space, eye contact, etc.
- Encourage parents/carers to talk about any concerns they may have. Talk about your concerns and ask them for their thoughts, advice and possible solutions.
- Don't personalise parents'/carers' responses or react to criticism; accept that when raising difficult subjects, many parents may initially feel defensive, blamed, hurt or guilty. Listen and keep your attention on the joint aim of wanting to help their child move forward.
- Manage your own emotions before, during and after the meeting.
- Don't use 'teacher speak', long words or educational jargon.
- Resolve and summarise: be willing to find a different solution to the one you had in mind. Agree a collaborative plan for next steps. Sum up what's been agreed, be prepared to guide parents through the process and get help for their child or themselves.
- Thank the parent/carer for coming in.



After the meeting and ongoing support:

- If you have a counsellor or mental health professional in your school, suggest that you can arrange for a parent or carer to meet them if there is a need to refer their child for mental health support.
- If a child or young person in your class is referred to an external agency (such as specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – CAMHS), make sure that someone from school (school counsellor, class teacher, etc.) is in regular contact with that agency so that the school can support any treatment plan and staff know how to implement it. Make sure there is regular contact with parents/carers about the referral.
- If parents/carers disclose personal difficulties and are open to getting help to promote their own mental health, consult your pastoral or SEN/ALN/ASN lead, school nurse (or school counsellor or mental health professional – if you have one). You could also signpost them to national advice helplines and local services; encourage them to refer themselves to local NHS talking therapies, or encourage them to go to their local GP.
- Keep talking to the parent/carers regularly to build the relationship outside of any formal meetings.