

How to approach parents to discuss emerging difficulties

This is obviously a very sensitive issue, which needs to be well discussed with all staff; a very clear process decided upon and adhered to.

There are no hard and fast rules on how to make these approaches, as every family is different. Again it will come back to the strength of relationships and trust between setting and home.

Ask to have:

- an informal 'chat';
- a 'word' at the end of a session
- 'Have you got a minute - there's something I'd like to ask you?'

These approaches are better than immediately saying you are worried also start the conversation by saying something positive about the child.

Ask the parents:

- how they feel their child is getting along
- what they see as strengths as well as any difficulties that the child may be experiencing
- if anyone else has noticed or had any discussions regarding your child's development

If they say they are not aware of any difficulties then try to be more specific. Positive observations and information will enable more constructive communication.

If parents do not appear to share any difficulties then try to be more specific, e.g. 'I've noticed that T seems to need/be struggling with/isn't always able to... What happens at home?'

You could then say something like 'I'd expect most children of this age to be doing.... it looks like he needs a bit more help to get there'.

If the parents continue to resist acknowledging the difficulty you may say, 'Well, I'll just keep an eye on him and see how he gets on for a few weeks, and then I'll let you know. You then have the opportunity to set up a review meeting.

Ask if anyone else has mentioned difficulties to them, you may feel able to ask for permission to contact their health visitor or other involved professionals for information.

Other parents may in fact be quite relieved that their own worries are being clarified. They may welcome the opportunity to share their concerns and pleased to know that there is something being done.

Such conversations need to be noted and recorded.

It is always good to end a meeting with a plan, even if its simply gathering more information, to find out more about how the child is doing in specific situations or putting in a minor intervention such as having the child sit close to an adult at carpet time.

A review meeting a few weeks on will ascertain whether there is a concern that requires more substantive assessment or support. Ask how the parents feel their child is getting along, what they think his/ her strengths are as well as the difficulties he / she seems to be experiencing.

Partnership with parents requires workers to be:

- non-judgemental
- have a high level of sensitivity
- pay attention to processes as well as the content of communication

It requires not only interpersonal skills but also organisational structures and policies which ensure that good practice for SEND and home-school partnership is part of the whole early years ethos.