



Registered Charity No: 1079761

SUPPORTIVE PARENTS

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Providing the Parent Partnership Service for North Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire

This information is intended to address some of the questions asked about the service we offer to parents.

Supportive Parents is a parent-led organisation providing information and support to parents in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire whose children have any kind of special educational need.

Its aims are

- to work towards ensuring that children with special educational needs have equal educational opportunities
- to enable parents of children with special educational needs to support each other
- to provide parents with information
- to voice the views of parents and raise awareness of special educational needs
- to encourage parents and professionals to work more closely together in the interests of the children
- to work with other voluntary groups to benefit our children

The group grew out of a University of London Institute of Education research project carried out in 1987. This was based in the Southmead Health District and involved parents of children with special educational needs, the County of Avon Education Department, Social Services Department and the Southmead District Health Authority. This co-operative project was aimed at helping the statutory authorities review and develop their services for children with special educational needs with particular regard to the implementation of the 1981 Education Act. From April 1997 we were part-funded by the four Unitary Authorities that used to be Avon and the Department for Education and Employment, to offer a Named Person service.

The origins of the group, formed in 1989, are further described in chapter 17 of "Policies for Diversity in Education" (edited by Tony Booth, Will Swan, Mary Masterson and Patricia Potts and published by the Open University in 1992).

We provide information and support to parents, encourage partnership between parents and professionals and give feedback about services to education providers. The Code of Practice 2001 requires Local Authorities to provide a Parent Partnership Service for parents and this is funded by the three unitary authorities.

WHO CAN ACCESS OUR SERVICE?

We offer a service to parents of children who receive provision via school action and school action plus, as well as statemented pupils. Any parent who has concern about their child's education can contact our service (pre-school to 19 years). Membership forms are included in our leaflets but please note **parents do not have to be members** to access our service.

The Local Authority sends information about our service to all parents of children who are at the beginning of the statutory assessment process

HOW DO WE ADVERTISE OUR SERVICE?

Supportive Parents' information on our service, together with support group details, is sent out every term to all nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, units and special schools in the areas where we work. Our mailing list also includes interested professionals in education, social services and health, children's hospital department, voluntary organisations and information services, like libraries.

If you do not receive our information and wish to receive it to pass on to parents of children with special needs, please contact us on 0117 9897725.

HOW CAN PARENTS ACCESS OUR SERVICE?

1. Information and Support Line

Our Information and Support Line is staffed by trained and experienced parents, themselves parents of children with special educational needs, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10.00 a.m – 2.00 p.m., during term time (answer phone at all other times).

Information is regularly posted out to parents to back up that given on the helpline.

2. Face to face

When specifically requested by parents, we put them in touch with a Parent Supporter wherever possible. An appointment can be arranged for any parent to visit our Base (which is fully accessible), to meet a Parent Supporter and discuss any concerns they may have. If appropriate, home visits may be arranged. Preparation for meetings with schools or the Local Authority is available and we may also be able to provide support at the meeting if parents require this.

3. Support groups

These are held in different localities on a monthly basis and run by the Local Co-ordinator, with Parental Supporters in attendance. Interested professionals are welcome to attend.

The aim of these meetings is to provide information and to meet parents' need for mutual support, as well as developing the local network of parents and professionals. Speakers are sometimes arranged. We also give talks at meetings of other parent support groups.

4. Training

Supportive Parents provides a rolling training programme for parents to enable them to consider and explore both their own and others' experiences and to give them basic knowledge of relevant legislation, local policies and resources. It also provides them with a grounding in listening skills to help them look for the 'theme behind the words' needed if they then go on to support other parents.

5. Newsletter

We produce termly newsletters for members and interested professionals to give information on national and local developments, the group's activities and meetings of interest.

WHAT CAN WE ACTUALLY DO?

Listen to parents' concerns

Very often discussing a dilemma with another supportive parent is enough to enable an enquirer to simplify a complex and potentially frightening situation.

Help parents find appropriate information

Parents have often found this problematic. Our base has national and local information on educational policy and procedures, lists of locally based personnel, their roles and responsibilities. We have information for parents on education and disability specific special educational needs as well as on local and national support groups. Our library is also used to update and inform Parent Supporters.

Help parents to prepare for meetings with the school or Education Authority

For example this could be, identifying what the purpose of the meeting is, what happens next and what parent and professionals want to achieve in the meeting.

Help parents decide what questions to ask

Understanding who does what, who makes what decision, what happens next.

Explaining how children's needs are assessed and appropriate provision made, using the Code of Practice.

Help parents think about/draft/write their contribution about child's needs

This could be for Individual Education Plans, Interim or Annual Review of statement, Transition Review for child with statement, or a parental contribution for a statutory assessment.

WHAT WE DON'T DO

Supportive Parents do not accept referrals from other individuals, professionals or voluntary organisations.

We will provide information to professionals, other helpline services, parent support groups or relatives who wish to encourage parents to contact us, but we do not initiate contact.

Experience has taught us that self-referral is more acceptable and empowering for parents (this includes not taking referrals from relatives – again we would hope parents would contact us directly).

Only in exceptional circumstances, at the direct request of parents, will Supportive Parents initiate contact with education staff on behalf of parents. Experience has taught us that with full information, good preparation, support and any access requirements met, all parents can contribute effectively to discussions and plans for their children's education. Our Parental Supporters have the time, which busy professionals often lack, to encourage self-advocacy. We cannot provide expert opinions on professional reports or assessments, or legal advice, but can, and do, refer parents to organisations who can.

We would provide information and support to parents who are going to a Tribunal but we would not represent them. This support might include help with paperwork to prepare their case.

We do not accept or hold reports or paperwork from professionals. Although parents may choose to share these, they are for them to retain.

We do not work directly with children but we do emphasise the importance of taking the child's views into account.

Our Confidentiality Policy requires that we do not identify or discuss parents and their children with professionals or other concerned individuals.

Within Supportive Parents we do have a system of monitoring the types of difficulties encountered by parents that enables feedback on services to the LA, without any risk of identifying individual parents or pupils.

Inevitably, families who contact us may also be experiencing social and health problems but the focus of our work is educational. We signpost parents to the appropriate service for social and health care issues.

We hope this information is helpful, clarifies the service we offer to parents and addresses some issues that arise in partnership with professionals.

OTHER WORK

Supportive Parents also convenes termly meetings between parent representatives of Voluntary Organisations (Vol. Reps.) and each LA. We aim to have as wide a range of parent representation as possible to address concerns and questions.

We provide some parental involvement for consultation work, working parties and/or task groups as appropriate, and time permitting.

Supportive Parents is a registered Charity (No. 1079761) providing a Parent Partnership Service for Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire managed by a Board of Trustees.

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