

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE · ALL GRADES

Trauma-Sensitive Family Meeting

Prep guide

Why these meetings need extra care

Family meetings about a trauma-affected child are often more loaded than they look. The family may: • Carry their own trauma — sometimes the same as the child's • Have had bad experiences with services (school, social work, health) • Be worried about safeguarding referrals • Be defensive about parenting under hostile scrutiny • Be exhausted and overwhelmed by everyday life • Genuinely not have insight into how their child is in school A poorly-handled meeting can damage trust permanently. A well-handled meeting can be the start of real partnership.

Before the meeting — purpose

What is the meeting actually for? Pick ONE main purpose: ■ Sharing initial concerns about behavior or wellbeing ■ Discussing existing support and what's next ■ Planning a transition or change ■ Family-initiated concern — they want to talk ■ Multi-agency coordination If there are multiple agendas, clarify which is primary. Don't try to do all in one meeting.



Before the meeting — three strengths

Whatever the meeting is about, START with strengths. Three specific positive things you've observed about the child: 1. _____ 2. _____

_____ 3. _____

_____ Not 'is a lovely child' but specific moments. The family needs to hear that you SEE their child as a whole person, not just a problem.

Before the meeting — observations to share (carefully)

What specific observations are you sharing? Stay descriptive, not diagnostic. Examples: • 'When the routine changes, [child] often becomes very quiet and finds it hard to engage' — descriptive • '[Child] has attachment issues' — diagnostic, avoid • 'I've noticed [child] eats very fast and sometimes asks for more food' — descriptive • '[Child] is showing signs of food insecurity' — diagnostic, avoid Observations to share: 1. 2. 3.



Before the meeting — what to ask

What do you want to learn from the family? Genuine open questions: • What does [child] say about school at home? • What's a typical evening / weekend like at home? • What's [child] like at home? Different from school? • Anything happening recently that we should know about? • What works at home when [child] is overwhelmed? • What worries you most about [child]? • What support, if any, would help? Pick 3-4 to actually ask. Don't grill the family with all of them.

Pitfalls to avoid

Going in with assumptions Even with strong observations, hold them lightly. The family knows things you don't. Listen as much as you talk.	Implicit blame 'Why doesn't [child] sleep at home?' lands as 'you're not parenting them properly.' Reframe: 'Sleep can be tricky for kids — what's it like at home?'
Long lists of concerns More than 2-3 concerns becomes overwhelming. They hear judgement, not collaboration. Focus.	Talking AT them If you're talking 80% of the meeting, it's not partnership. Aim for 50-50 or even 40-60 (you-them).
Withholding information Families resent finding out concerns at parents' evening that you've been holding for months. Don't accumulate.	Promising things you can't deliver 'We'll get [child] EP-assessed by Christmas.' If you can't guarantee, don't promise. Trust takes years to build, minutes to break.

What to do if the family becomes upset



Three concrete next steps

After the meeting

1. SUMMARY EMAIL within 24 hours. Brief. Bullet-pointed. What you discussed, what you agreed.
2. UPDATE THE SCHOOL TEAM. SENDCo / DSL / pastoral lead need to know.
3. DO WHAT YOU SAID. The follow-through is everything.
4. CHECK IN. Send a brief 'just thinking of you' message a week later. Maintains relationship.
5. NOTE YOUR OWN FEELINGS. These meetings are draining. You may need debrief, time, or support.