

PARENT COMMUNICATION · ALL GRADES

Suspected SEND

The first conversation

Why this conversation matters

Raising a possible SEND need with a family is one of the most consequential conversations a teacher can have. Done well, it starts a partnership that supports the child for years. Done badly, it produces defensiveness, denial, and a family that disengages from school. The most common mistake is going TOO HARD — naming a condition, suggesting a diagnosis, pushing for assessment. The second most common mistake is going TOO SOFT — hinting so vaguely that the family doesn't realise anything was said. This article is about the middle path.

Before the meeting

<p>Talk to the SENDCo first</p> <p>Don't do this alone. The SENDCo can: confirm your observations, advise on framing, suggest who else should be there. They may want to attend.</p>	<p>Gather specific evidence</p> <p>Vague impressions ('he just seems different') don't help. Specific behaviours, dates, examples. Compare with peers if relevant. Be ready to show, not just tell.</p>
<p>Avoid diagnostic language in your prep</p> <p>Don't think 'I'll tell them I think their child has autism.' Think 'I'll share what I've noticed and ask what they've noticed.' You're a teacher, not a diagnostician.</p>	<p>Plan time and space</p> <p>30+ minutes. Quiet room. No interruptions. Tissue box on the table, just in case.</p>
<p>Prepare for emotion</p> <p>Some families have suspected this for years. Some will be hearing it for the first time. Tears, denial, gratitude, anger — any of these are possible.</p>	



How to open

AVOID: • 'I think your child has [condition].' • 'Have you ever thought your child might be [condition]?' • 'I want to talk about your child's special needs.' **USE:** • 'I want to share some things I've been noticing about [child]. I'd love to hear what you've been seeing too.' • 'I've been wondering whether there might be some specific support [child] would benefit from. I want to think it through with you.' • 'I want to make sure we're supporting [child] well. There are a few patterns I've noticed that I'd like to talk about.' The goal is to open a CONVERSATION, not deliver a diagnosis.

Sharing observations

Effective	Avoid
I've noticed [child] finds it really hard when the routine changes	Your child has rigid thinking
[Child] seems to find busy social situations overwhelming	Your child has social difficulties
I notice [child] struggles to focus in long sessions, but is amazing in 1:1	Your child has attention problems
[Child] often takes longer to learn new vocabulary than I'd expect	Your child has a language disorder
When [child] gets upset, it takes them a long time to recover	Your child has emotional regulation problems

Listening for what they bring

After you've shared 2-3 specific observations, STOP. Ask: • 'Have you noticed similar things at home?' • 'What does [child] say about school?' • 'What do you think might be going on?' • 'Is there anything you'd like to share?' Many parents will say something like: • 'Yes, we've been worried too...' • 'They've always been a bit different...' • 'They struggle so much at home with...' If they validate what you've said, you're aligned. If they push back ('I don't see any of that') — listen. They may be right. They may be defensive. They may be in denial. Don't argue — gather information.

What to suggest as next steps

DON'T suggest: • 'You should get them assessed for autism' • 'Have you taken them to the GP about ADHD?' • 'They probably have dyslexia' **DO** suggest: • 'I'd like to put some specific support in place at school for the next half-term and see how it goes.' • 'Would you be open to a meeting with our SENDCo? They might have ideas about what could help.' • 'Sometimes when children



show these patterns, an outside professional can give us insight. We could explore what's available.' Match the next step to readiness. Some families want immediate action. Some need to sit with the conversation for weeks before they're ready. Both are OK.

Common reactions and how to respond

<p>Tears / shock</p> <p>Pause. 'Take a moment.' Don't fill the silence. Don't take it back. The tears mean it landed.</p>	<p>'You're saying my child is broken'</p> <p>Gently: 'No — I'm saying [child] has strengths and challenges, and I want to support both. Many brilliant people have these patterns.'</p>
<p>'They're fine at home'</p> <p>'That's really helpful to know — children often present differently in different settings. Maybe there's something about school that's particularly hard.'</p>	<p>'Other teachers haven't said this'</p> <p>'You may be right that this is showing up more this year — sometimes things become clearer with age. Or I might be seeing it differently.'</p>
<p>'We don't believe in labels'</p> <p>'I respect that. Whether or not we ever pursue a label, what I want is to support [child] — let's focus on that.'</p>	<p>Gratitude</p> <p>Sometimes parents thank you for finally naming what they've been worrying about. Receive the gratitude. 'I'm glad we're talking about this.'</p>

After the meeting

1. WRITE A SUMMARY EMAIL within 24 hours. What you discussed, what you agreed, what's next. 2. INVOLVE THE SENDCo formally. They open the SEN Support file or equivalent. 3. PUT IN AGREED CLASSROOM ADJUSTMENTS. Don't wait for formal processes. 4. CHECK IN with the family in 2-4 weeks. Don't disappear. 5. RESPECT THEIR PACE. If they need to take time before next steps, give them time. SEND identification is not a race. 6. KEEP TEACHING THE CHILD WELL. Whatever happens with formal processes, the work in the classroom matters most.

