

Practical tips for effectively accessing public services for your disabled child

It is unfortunately the case that many families struggle to access the education, social and health services for their children that they are legally entitled to. Here are some ways that may be helpful for parents in effectively achieving their goals.

Support

Having support can be one of the best ways of being effective, be it emotional support, advising on how to proceed or empowering you to persevere, and so much more. Simply being told you are being treated badly can be extremely helpful – that you are not being unrealistic and you are not the only person to find yourself with your particular problem. Excellent sources of support can be found online; twitter, Facebook forums, **Mumsnet**, as well as local support groups which will be online as well as meet face to face.

The letterhead effect

If you have support from a person or organisation with some status – and one with a letterhead – this can make a significant difference. Here at Cerebra we have seen excellent letters written by families that have been ignored by public bodies, but when the same public body is sent a parallel letter with the letterhead of a respected Law School or charity, MP or head teacher, things often change.

Knowing your rights

Knowing what you and your child are entitled to is very important, that you are not seeking special treatment or making unreasonable claims. This is empowering and creates a sense of legitimacy and is extremely important when faced with actions by public bodies that you think are not following the law. Charities like **Cerebra**, **IPSEA**, **SOS!SEN** and the **National Autistic Society** can provide information on education issues or social care.

Get it in writing

It is vital to keep written records, to keep notes of telephone conversations, meetings and to get the public body to 'put in writing' what it is saying. The facts of your situation are crucial, and a case based on strong evidence is much more likely to succeed than one where the evidence is weak.

Recording key dates and promises

Delay is one of the greatest problems families face in accessing their statutory entitlements, things drift, people change jobs, unexpected things like summer holidays happen. By the time the public body finally gets its act together, your needs will probably have changed and you will then be told a reassessment is required. This is best avoided by challenging drift as soon as it happens. Keep a diary and challenge any failure to meet deadlines.

Putting it succinctly

Be as succinct as possible. Set out the key facts, the key problems and what you want to happen. It is generally best to devote most energy in spelling out what you require to be done. Letters and emails should be as short as possible and structured using numbers or bullet points.

Recording 'things said'

Not infrequently you may be told something by a public official that is crucial or troubling, or both. Sometimes a throwaway comment can sound like a threat, "we are under no obligation to care for your son, you know" or "if we give it to you we have got to take it away from someone else". Whenever such a crucial or troubling statement is made, it is important to get this confirmed in writing.

These tips and more are covered in greater detail along with further information on how to tackle different kinds of problems families often face, how to prepare for a meeting, a jargon buster, information on what public bodies must do and precedent letters in **Cerebra's Accessing Public Services Toolkit:**



A problem-solving approach, which is available [here](#). Cerebra also run workshops on using the toolkit, further information can be found [here](#).

Cerebra is the charity dedicated to helping families with children with brain conditions discover a better life together. We listen to them, we learn from them, we work with them. We carry out research, we design and innovate, we make and share. What we discover together makes everyone's life better. Join us on our journey, and who knows what we could find? To find out more about our services please click [here](#).

First published 2021. This edition 2021. Review date 2024.

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Registered Charity no 1089812 Company no. 4336208

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