EVIE JONES PARENT COACHING

Free SEND Parent Starter Guide

Your first steps with school, health and SEND.

A WORKING GUIDE

SEND PARENT STARTER GUIDE

If I were starting from square one with school, health, and the SEND system today.

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ABOUT

A bit about me



I'm a parent coach and SEND advocate, supporting parents of neurodivergent and adopted children as they navigate our school and health systems.

I hold a Masters in Child and Adolescent Mental Health and work as a sole practitioner, so you get me, not a rotating cast of case workers.

I also have 17 years of lived experience as an adoptive parent to two children with complex additional needs. I've successfully challenged the system to secure their diagnoses, EHCPs and alternative school placements.

My focus is practical: what to write, who to write to, what your rights actually are, and what to do next. I don't believe in platitudes. I do believe in working together for the best possible outcome for your family.

This guide pulls together five things I tell almost every parent in our first conversation, the things I wish I'd known at the start. Use them in any order. There's no correct starting point, only the one in front of you right now.

TIP 1 OF 5

Start a written log

Schools, GPs, and CAMHS work on what's written down, not what you remember under pressure at 5pm on a bad day. Writing things down allows a pattern or behaviour to be clearly seen. One difficult afternoon is an anecdote, six logged the same way is evidence.

You do not need a diagnosis to start this, and you do not need anyone's permission. You simply need five minutes a day.

How to fill it in

- Log as close to the event as you can. Same day if possible. Memory softens detail fast.
- Write what you saw, not what you think it means: “hit head on table, went quiet for 20 minutes” is infinitely more useful than “had a meltdown.”
- ‘Trigger’ means whatever came immediately before. If you don't know, write “unclear”. That still counts as useful information.
- Keep logging in calm weeks too. A log with quiet weeks in it is more credible than one that only records when things go wrong.

This week

Date	Trigger (what came before)	What happened	What helped	Who saw it / notes
21st July	Dad picked up from school	Shouting and screaming. Refusing to get in car. Crying all the way home.	Mum met car at home and had hot chocolate and a biscuit.	Witnessed by teachers. She expected mum to pick up so was dysregulated by the change.

A full four-week log template is available as a separate download if you want more space to work in.

TIP 2 OF 5

Request SEN Support in writing

It is not a legal requirement that you have a diagnosis in order to trigger SEN Support. Under the SEND Code of Practice, a school should identify and respond to a need through a graduated approach as soon as that need is apparent, whether or not a diagnosis exists. A graduated approach means assess, plan, do, review.

Ask in writing, not in the playground. A written request is dated, can't be softened in the retelling, and gives you a date to chase from.

What to include

- What you've noticed, with rough dates. Don't just put "he's struggling". Be specific, using observed detail.
- Any conversations you've already had, with whom and roughly when.
- A plain request: that your child be assessed for SEN Support utilising a graduated approach.
- A request for confirmation of receipt of the request together with proposed next steps, including timescales.

A starting template

> Dear [SENCO / Headteacher's name],
>
> I am writing to formally request that [child's name] be assessed for SEN Support under the graduated approach set out in the SEND Code of Practice.
>
> I have noticed the following: [specific, dated observations].
>
> I have previously discussed this with [name/role] on [date].
>
> I would be grateful if you could confirm receipt of this letter and let me know the next steps and timescales.
>
> Kind regards,
> [Your name]
> [Date]

General information, not legal advice. If a specific situation is contested, it's worth getting legal advice tailored to your case.

TIP 3 OF 5

Find one other parent who understands

Parenting is hard. Parenting children with SEN has been likened to herding black cats in a room with no lights. It can be isolating as people don't understand your child's needs or behaviour, and one by one the invitations drop away, leaving you to cope on your own.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. There are lots of support and social groups up and down the country that you can join. Hopefully find a likeminded parent with whom you can share a brew (or a glass of wine) and share the load a little.

You need one who's been in the same situation as you are, not someone who simply offers advice. Advice, however well meant, can leave you more depleted than when you started. What you need first is someone who gives you space to speak and nods instead of reaching for a solution.

What to look for

- They've lived something close to your situation, not just read about it.
- They listen more than they advise.
- Being around them leaves you steadier, not more anxious or feeling more overwhelmed.

Where people often find this

- Local SEND parent-carer forums (most areas have one, run by and for parents).
- Condition-specific or adoption-specific charities with peer groups, online or in person.
- A smaller offshoot of a larger group. Sometimes the real support happens in a spin-off chat, not the main group.
- Facebook is a good starting point. As is your local CAMHS or paediatric service. Local libraries often hold lists of different types of groups.

Worth writing down

> One place I could look this week:
> Search Facebook for ADHD groups in this area.
>
> One small step I could take (send a message, go to one meet-up, ask one question):
> DM the group organiser for information.
>
> A list of all local groups that you find. You might not want to go to them all straight away. You might find that the first group you try isn't right for you. Don't be disheartened, try the next one on the list:

TIP 4 OF 5

Learn the phrase ‘reasonable adjustment’

Under the Equality Act 2010, many children with SEND meet the legal definition of disabled, namely they have an impairment with a substantial, long-term effect on daily life. Schools and services have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children.

The phrase carries legal weight because it names a specific duty, not a favour. Asking for “some flexibility” invites a maybe. Asking for a “reasonable adjustment” invites a decision that can be put to a legal test.

A phrase to have ready

> “I'd like to request a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 for [specific situation]. Could you let me know how this will be considered, and by when?”

Adjustments for your child

Adjustment needed	Why it's needed	Who to ask
Move her to the front of the class away from windows.	Easily distracted by the window. Front of class seat helps teacher see if she’s losing focus.	Head of Year or Form Teacher

This is general information, not a judgment on any specific case. Whether a particular adjustment is “reasonable” depends on the circumstances.

TIP 5 OF 5

Build your paper trail, starting now

The system runs on written evidence. Not on how hard you've tried, or how many phone calls you've made, but on what can be produced, with a date on it, in a meeting.

Tips 1 to 4 are all pieces of this same trail: the log, the written request, the people who can corroborate what you've seen, the adjustments you've asked for in writing. This is where it comes together.

What to keep, and where

- Every letter or email sent or received. Print or save, don't rely on an inbox you might lose access to.
- Notes from every meeting, dated, ideally sent back to the school afterwards as "my understanding of what we agreed."
- Reports from any professional, such as school, GP, CAMHS or private assessments.
- Your written log. This should be a 'live' document that you fill in after every email, letter, or other interaction, rather than a document that is started and abandoned.

A simple tracker

Date	Document / email	From / to	Filed?	Follow-up needed
10th June	Letter from LA refusing EHCP assessment	B. Smith	Yes	Request reasons for refusal.

Four simple folders will cover you. I keep both physical and digital folders to cover all eventualities:

- Letters & Emails
- Meeting Notes
- Reports & Assessments
- Your Tracker

Nothing more complicated than that is needed to start with.



MSc in Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Need more help?

If you'd like support with your next steps, book a free 30-minute chat with me. There's no obligation, just a chance to talk through where you are.

Book your free chat

calendly.com/hello-evie-jones/30min

evie-jones.co.uk