

# Understanding SEND

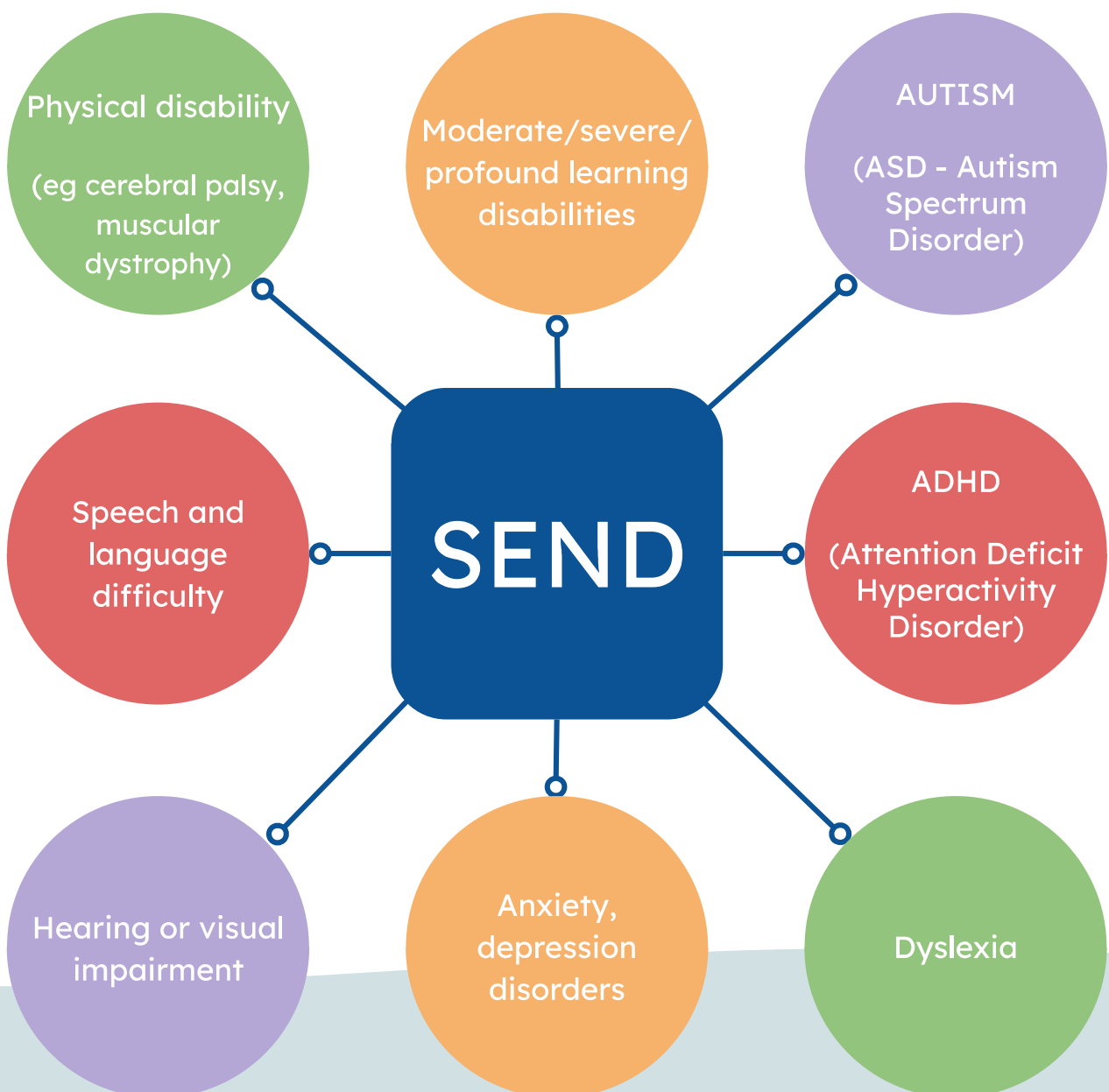


A toolkit for parents

# What is SEND?

A child or young person has SEND (Special Educational Needs and/or Disability) if they have any difficulty or disability that makes it harder for them to learn, compared to others their own age. They may need additional help and provisions in school to help them (also known as special educational provisions).

Some examples of conditions that come under SEND are as below.

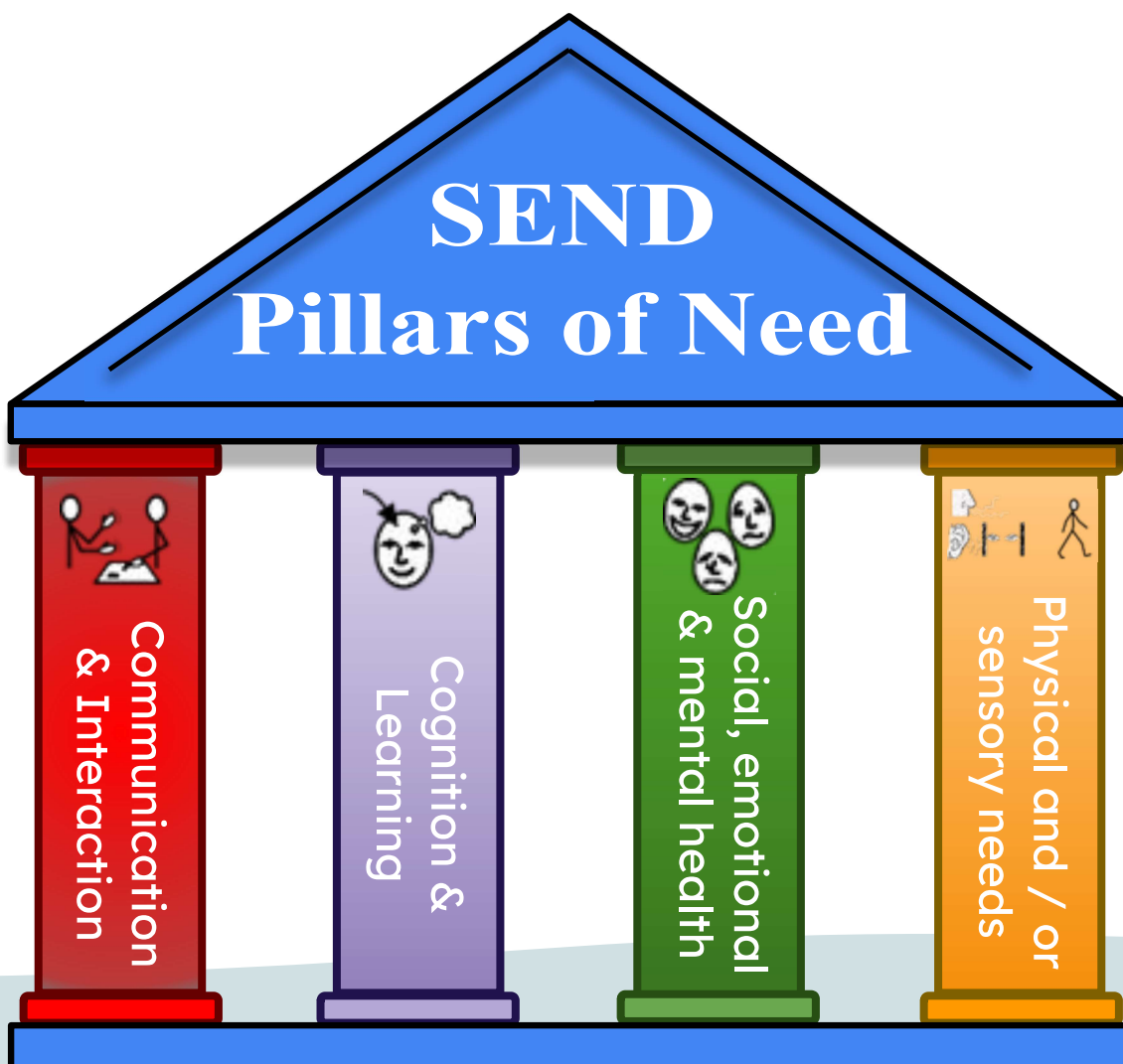


# The SEND Code of Practice

The **Send Code of Practice (2015)** is a statutory document from the Department of Education and Department of Health that sets out four broad areas of need, sometimes referred as the “*four pillars*”.

The four pillars helps act as a framework for local authorities to organise and plan provisions in these areas, depending on the type of needs, the child’s learning difficulty or disability.

The four ‘Pillars of Need’ are:



# Pre-school Years, under 5

If your child is not yet in school and you suspect your child has learning difficulties and or healthcare needs, that could impact their learning, it is important to speak to your nursery and or your health visitor.

Health visitors can observe and do developmental checks to identify if there are delays. They have a wealth of resources they can signpost parents to help development and offer support.

[www.healthiertogether.nhs.uk](http://www.healthiertogether.nhs.uk) *A website with lots of advice, tips and videos of what to expect with milestones and development.*

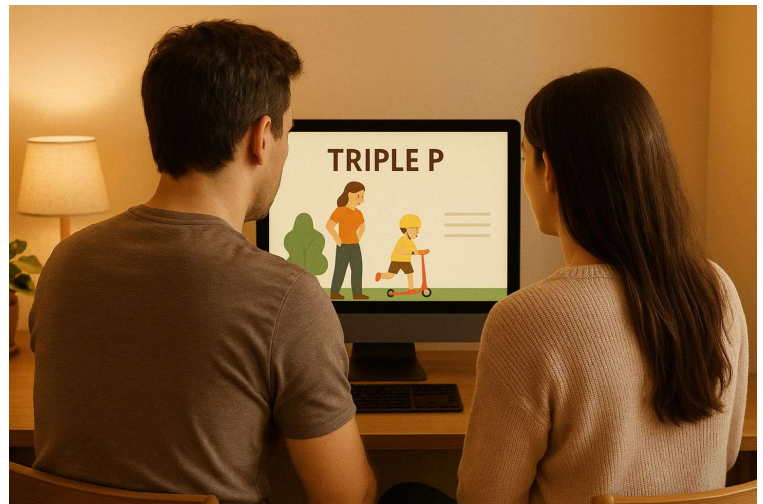
Recording unusual repetitive movements, behaviours or differences in speech can be helpful to show health visitors, speech and language therapists.



Health visitors can refer parents onto programmes to help children with tricky behaviours. They can also refer on to other healthcare professionals if needed, including; speech and language therapist, paediatrician, Portage, physiotherapy or occupational therapy.

# Parenting programmes - the evidence

Parent support programmes are recommended in national guidance for children with autism and ADHD. They are not about blaming parenting. They help parents understand their child's needs, strengthen communication, and reduce stress.



Research including NICE (National Institute Of Clinical Excellence) and Cochrane Reviews (medical evidence journal), shows parent participation improves relationships, supports emotional wellbeing and can help reduce anxious behaviours.

# Parent Support Programmes

These programmes are designed to support you and your child. They are friendly, practical, and focus on strengthening communication and confidence at home.

Programme

What it helps with

Who it's for

**Incredible Years**

Helps parents understand behaviour and encourage positive interactions

Children who show strong emotions or challenging behaviour

**Triple P**  
(Positive Parenting Program)

Gives practical ideas for routines, emotional wellbeing, and reducing stress

Children needing support with behaviour or emotional regulation

**EarlyBird / EarlyBird Plus**

Helps parents understand autism, communication and play

Young autistic children (usually before school age)

**Cygnnet Programme**

Helps parents understand autism day-to-day and find strategies that work

Autistic children aged around 5 years and up

# Portage

Portage is a home visiting education service for pre-school children with significant developmental delays. Your health visitor can refer, if your child:

- Lives in Bournemouth, Christchurch or Poole
- Is aged 1 - 3 years old
- Is significantly delayed in at least three areas of development by half of their chronological age OR has a recognised syndrome that is likely to have a significant impact on learning and development.

Portage is a collaborative service with parents. It adapts to the unique needs of each child, helping parents build the skills and confidence to support their child in playing, learning and developing new abilities. Portage officers usually work with parents and their child in their home but can also provide support through group sessions or via virtual video meetings.

Each small step helps the child to learn and make progress in their learning and development.



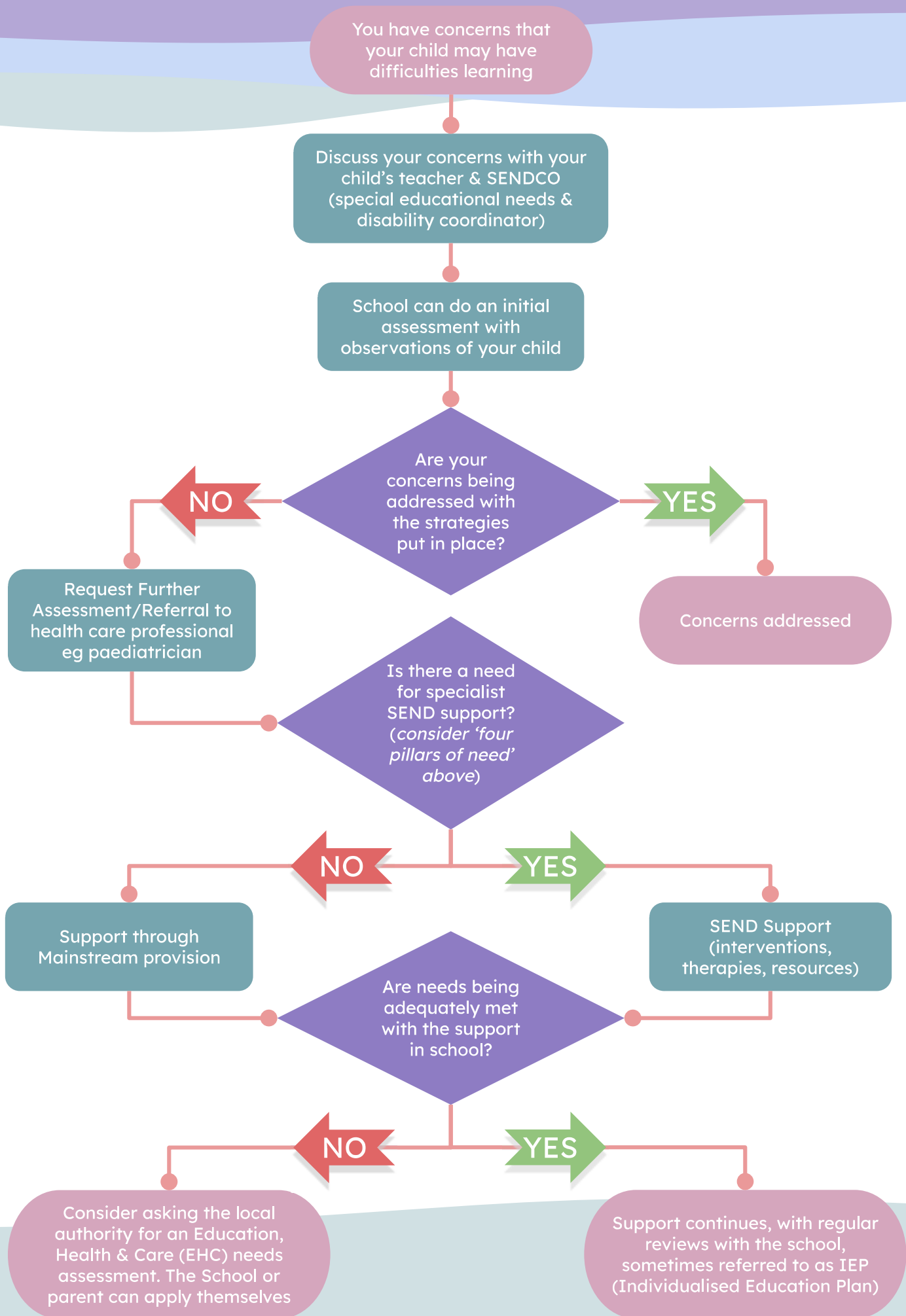
# Education

When your child starts school, working with the school is really important for your child or young person, especially if they have been identified as having or are being reviewed for special educational needs. This is because the school can feedback their observations of your child, whether they are meeting age related expectations and are crucial in providing your child with an education.

A child's special needs can impact on their learning, and it is important to have those conversations about what difficulties a child has with the school and their teachers. SEN support is extra help given in school for children finding learning or school life more difficult. This can be written in plans, sometimes referred to as a IEP (Individualist Education Plan) detailing what the needs are and what support is being used. If your child does not make progress despite SEN support, or the support they need is beyond resources the school can provide, EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) can be applied for.



# Steps in accessing SEND



# Doctors appointments

## What can help when waiting to see the doctor

Have a look at the hospital or doctors website for accessibility resources, hearing loops, lifts etc. Going to doctors appointments, can be challenging for children and young people with SEND. Some children can be sensory seeking, sensory avoiding or a combination of both and thinking about what triggers them / calms them, can help.

For some, noisy and or busy environments can be difficult. Sitting in the waiting area of a doctors surgery can be stressful for some. Taking a sensory kit can help, this could include ear defenders, fidgets aids, snacks or toys that your child doesn't play with during a typical day - that way it is exciting and captures their interest. Asking the surgery if there is a quieter area, can help if you know your child is particularly sensitive to noise, smells or busy spaces.

If your child finds waiting or changes difficult, talk through with them the upcoming visit in advance: where you're going, who you'll see, what might happen next. This helps build familiarity and reduce anxiety.



# Social Stories

Social stories are short stories (eg film or set of pictures/photos) to help children understand what to expect in a new situation. They show what will happen, who will be there and what the child can do. They are often helpful for children with SEND, especially autistic children, as they can reduce anxiety, build confidence and make new, unfamiliar experiences feel more predictable. They are read together beforehand, to help feel prepared.



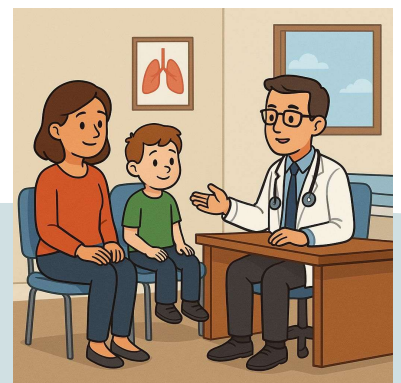
Today I am going to the doctors.

Mum will speak to a person at the desk to let the doctor know we've arrived.



We wait in the waiting room with other people, until the doctor calls us.

Mum will talk to the doctor, he might listen to my chest. It will not hurt.



# Communication aids

Consider the use of visuals to help your child if you think there is a difficulty with understanding. There are many resources available that can help with this, particularly with routines to help build independence or when trying to explain or tackle negative behaviours. They can help with making communication easier and reduce frustration.

Many educational settings may use simple symbols to help aid communication, eg widgets. These are simple symbols that can build understanding, where there is difficulty with verbal language.

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/visual-supports/>

Consider the use of Makaton or british sign language where there may be language difficulties to make communication easier and reduce frustration.

There is a programme called *Attention Autism*, which can be used whether your child has a diagnosis or not to improve attention. It aims to help build the time a child can focus on an adult and share attention. It references using a bucket, box or bag with a few toys that will recruit their attention. Below is a link from a dorset healthcare on how to do this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc0AAIMddfk>

# Referral for Autism / ADHD

## **What to consider when investigating a diagnosis behind SEND**

Schools can refer for neurodevelopmental assessment (which can involve, for example, assessing for ADHD, autism etc) and it is worth speaking to the school SENCO first, as having support from school is often the best route because they have got to know your child and hold information on, how their learning is going, what their interactions are like in school, whether they are meeting age related targets and the impact on school life for them, which can all aid assessment.

You can also speak to a GP about your concerns but bear in mind they do not hold the educational records your school has on your child and information on educational attainment may be asked for by the specialist assessing. It can help to be clear and give specific examples and clear descriptions of what behaviours you are concerned about, the impact on key relationships these behaviours have at home and with peers outside of home, at school etc and what your questions are for the GP. If there is a lot to discuss, it can be helpful to write these points down and ask for the doctor to read them before seeing you and or ask for more time in an appointment. Consider if there are sensitive matters that you may not wish your child to hear, especially if discussing negative behaviours or difficulties.

ADHD is usually assessed from around age 7 because children's attention and behaviour patterns are clearer by this age, which helps make the assessment fair and accurate, but support can still be put in place earlier.

If a child's safety, vulnerability puts that at risk of harm, there are urgent services for speedy support that can also be sought eg, Early Help services.

<https://fid.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/send-local-offer/information/bcp-council-early-help-teams>

# Learning Disability versus Learning Difficulty

A learning difficulty means a child may find certain areas of learning harder than others' but with the right support they can make progress and learn at a similar pace to their peers. Examples include, dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD.

A learning disability is different. It means the person has a persistent reduced level of understanding and may take longer to learn new skills in many areas of life, not just at school. They may need support with everyday activities such as communication, self-care, or independence. A learning disability is lifelong, and the level of support needed varies from person to person.

Education psychologists work with children, families and schools to understand how a child learns and what support they need. They look at thinking skills, problem solving, memory and how the child responds to different kinds of teaching. Their assessment can help identify whether a child may have a learning disability or specific learning difficulty and what support would be most helpful. When assessing a child, professionals always consider the child's age and speech and language skills. Some children find assessments more difficult because they are still developing communication or understanding. This does not mean that they cannot learn. It simply means that assessments need to be interpreted carefully and sometimes repeated over time to build a clearer picture.

# Learning Disability Annual Review

Annual learning disability health reviews are important because they create a regular opportunity to check in on a person's physical and emotional wellbeing in a proactive way.

People with learning disabilities can be at higher risk of certain health conditions, and sometimes changes in health can be harder to spot or may be attributed to the disability rather than explored further. These reviews help to pick up early signs of illness, monitor long-term conditions, update medications, and make sure reasonable adjustments are in place to support good communication and access to care.

By taking the time to understand the person, their needs, and any changes in how they are managing day-to-day, these reviews play a key role in prevention, improving quality of life, and supporting people to stay well.

For simple read health guides for patients with learning disabilities, you can visit the dorset healthcare website for accessible information:

<https://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-and-sites/mental-health-and-learning-disabilities/learning-disabilities/accessible-information/annual-health-check>

# Professionals who may be involved in children and young people with SEND



SENDCO

## Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator

Professionals based in schools, who observe children to see whether they may have signs of special needs and disability. They work with parents, the child, other health professionals and teachers to devise strategies to help a child's challenges with learning.

## Speech and Language Therapist

Health professionals who help children overcome communication and language difficulties. They can help with expression of speech, speech delay, hearing and problems with understanding of communication.



SALT



OT

## Occupational Therapist

Health professionals that help children who have difficulties with movement. This can include difficulty holding a pen ('fine motor skills') or with bigger movements like running, jumping ('gross motor skills'). They offer assessment, equipment and support.

# Professionals who may be involved in children and young people with SEND



EP

## Educational Psychologist

These professionals can assess a child's learning ability, cognitive skills and developmental progress. They identify needs where a child may be struggling, including any emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. They can provide recommendations to schools.

## Education, Health & Care Coordinator

These professionals work for the local authority and coordinate assessment including the statutory EHC Needs Assessment process, drafting and amending EHCPs (Education and Healthcare Plans.)



EHCCO



EHCP

## Education, Health and Care Plan

A legally binding document in the UK for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It outlines a child's educational, health, and social care needs and specifies the support required to achieve their outcomes.

# Helpful websites for SEND

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/>

*A website with lots of information how to navigate getting additional support for a child struggling in their education, with SEND.*

<https://sendiass4bcp.org/>

*Free impartial confidential advice helpline for parents and families looking after a child with special educational needs.*

<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/>

*Empowering parents with information around the legal aspects of SEND law, with free helplines and facility to book appointments online.*

<https://www.autism.org.uk/>

*A website run by the national autistic society with a wealth information, resources and advice about Autism.*

<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk>

*A website with more resources to support young people and their families with autism. It includes information about the 'Autistic and ok toolkit' a free programme that provides a toolkit for secondary schools to support autistic pupils with their mental health and wellbeing.*

<https://www.childdautism.org.uk/>

*A website offering advice and support for families that open up more choices for children with autism.*

<https://add.org/>

*Website offering information and support for adults with ADHD.*

<https://adhdembrace.org/living/>

*Information and support resources for parents with children ADHD.*

# Helpful websites for SEND

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

*Information on dyslexia, and how to get an assessment.*

<https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/cerebral-palsy-introduction#Symptoms-of-cerebral-palsy-click>

*Resources and support, living with cerebral palsy, understanding how it can present.*

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/children-and-young-people/send-system>

*Information on how to navigate the SEND system, getting help for a child with a learning disability.*

<https://bda.org.uk/>

*British deaf association website with lots of resources and tips for support living with hearing loss.*

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/development-additional-needs/neurodiversity/support-pda/>

*Information on managing pathological demand avoidance.*

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-is-PDA/>

*A website providing information on PDA, what this is and strategies to help.*

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-challenging-behaviour/what-is-challenging-behaviour/>

*Understanding challenging behaviours in learning disability, why they occur and how to help relieve and investigate triggers.*

# Websites for mental health and emotional wellbeing

<https://www.place2be.org.uk>

*Place2Be website provides mental-health support and information about counselling services in school settings (primary, secondary and all-through).*

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/factors-that-impact-mental-health/vulnerable-children/neurodiversity/>

*A website providing resources to help promote students in schools mental health and emotional wellbeing including.*

<https://www.childnet.com/resources/connect-with-respect-send/>

*A website with information on how to promote online safety for children aged 7-11 with SEND.*

# Learning Support Websites for Children & Young People with SEND

| Resource                | What it offers  | Best for   | Cost   |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| BBC Bitesize (Bitesize) | Free online study/ revision support across many age groups and subjects in the UK.  | Pupils of school Age (primary through GCSE) needing revision, curriculum support or homework help. | Free   |
| Oak National Academy    | Provides free downloadable lesson plans, slide-decks, quizzes and full curriculum-unit resources aligned to UK national curriculum.               | Teachers, pupils (especially when self-studying), schools looking for structured resources.        | Free.  |
| Twinkl                  | A commercial resource site offering large numbers of teaching resources (worksheets, interactive games, planning tools) for many ages/subjects.   | Teachers, parents, home-educators, support for SEND or mainstream lessons.                         | Paid: e.g., monthly from ~ <b>£9.99/month</b> for individual membership.             |
| Nessy                   | Online programmes specifically for reading & spelling support (structured literacy), often used for learners with dyslexia or similar challenges. | Children (ages approx 6–11) who need extra literacy support / dyslexia-friendly approaches.        | Subscription model (e.g., “from \$14.99 a month” US info)                            |
| Reading Eggs            | Online reading programme for younger children (ages ~2–13) with phonics games, reading lessons and books.   | Early readers, children developing reading skills, home/school use.                                | Subscription (e.g., \$9.99/month for home) in US pricing; local UK pricing may vary. |
| Speech and Language UK  | Charity offering assessment, support, tools for children’s speech, language & communication needs—including free resources and paid services.     | Children with communication difficulties, schools & families seeking speech-language support.      | Many free resources; some paid services.   |
| Book Trust              | (charity focusing on books, reading for children, book grants, reading encouragement)   | Younger children, building reading habits, families, early years.                                  | Many free resources (charity) though some paid.                                      |