

What is consultation?

Consultation is a confidential forum for focussed collaborative discussion in which people who share concerns work together to identify ways forward. Some people like to use consultation as an opportunity to solve problems that are faced where others prefer to use it as an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and to develop their thoughts about the barriers that they face in meeting the needs of their pupils. A consultation meeting can provide a framework for assessment and intervention for individual pupils and it can also be used to consider work related or personal management issues. During the consultation process the EP can employ a number of psychological approaches (e.g. solution focussed approaches, structured problem analysis, attachment and resiliency models and process approaches where the influence of a range of experiences and perspectives can be considered). . Consultation involves joint investigation, joint solution-building, joint planning and intervention, and joint evaluation and review. The approach will vary according to the presenting issues and the stage of involvement of the EPS.

Consultation has a number of key features:

- Participants are seen as equal in status and in sharing expertise
- Consultees should be the people most concerned and should retain ownership of the problem
- The goals of consultation are to facilitate *reflection* upon potential ways forward in the current context and to develop future *problem-solving skills*.

Consultation can apply to different levels of working:

- At an organisational level (e.g. helping to inform local authority policies; helping to develop whole school policies)
- At a systemic level (e.g. family and school dynamics)
- At a group or class level (e.g. managing a difficult group or introducing a new way of working with a class)
- At an individual child level (e.g. devising behavioural or learning programmes; identification of additional support needs). Although staff often use consultation in reference to referred pupils it can also be used for children who have not been named to our service

There is flexibility in this way of working. For example, if a school raises concerns about a number of children who fight at playtimes, the consultation approach could result in developing social skills within a class group, or perhaps a whole school project on managing playground behaviour.

What does Consultation look like?

Consultation is designed to help the person most concerned, and it can be applied to different levels of working.

Consultation with the school link EP- where the relevant staff member meets and discusses with the Educational Psychologist, to develop a fuller understanding of a problem which may also lead to the generation of strategies leading to solutions. Parental involvement is not required at this stage, though schools may wish to share their concerns with parents.

Full consultation requested through the EPS referral process where a fuller discussion takes place involving parents and school staff, where a variety of perspectives are considered in order to generate a shared understanding of a problem. This may also involve generating further strategies and solutions A written

record of the discussion and the agreed action plan is provided for all that attend the meeting. Follow up can be arranged as required.

A school may wish to include other agencies in consultation with the EPS. (e.g., a member of the ASSC service/ speech and language therapist) who can contribute to generating a shared understanding of the problem in order to facilitate change.

Example models of consultation:

1. Single consultations with individual or small groups of staff in relation to the same issue or pupil (this might take between 50 - 90 minutes depending on needs).
2. A series of 'drop-in style' individual consultations for staff in relation to development of their role or support for an individual member of staff (you could potentially set up 3 x 30-40 mins consultations in a visit or spread them over the year as a smaller part of each consultation visit).
3. A work discussion group: a small group of staff attend and take it in turns to discuss work or pupil related issues in order to problem solve and share good practice (this would need at least 50 mins per group and around 6 members of staff would be an ideal maximum)

Example case studies:

1. A primary school were struggling to understand and plan appropriately to respond to the needs of a LAC child presenting with very challenging behaviours. He was at risk of exclusion and school felt confused by conflicting advice that they had received from the range of professionals working with the child. The EP met with the Head Teacher, SENCO, class teacher, FSA and LSA. The first part of the consultation was used to examine the most challenging elements of the child's behaviour and to develop hypotheses for the 'purpose' of those behaviours. In the latter part of the consultation the EP supported staff in matching current interventions/developing new interventions that were relevant to each hypothesis. This helped the school to feel more confident in interpreting the child's needs and in knowing when each intervention might be most helpful/relevant.
2. A teacher had a very challenging class in which 4-5 children with high levels of challenging behaviour and SEN were grouped together. The teacher met with the EP for 40 mins on 3 consultation visits (delivered over the course of the year). During that time the teacher was supported in thinking about i) how to understand the children's behaviours ii) environmental aspects of the classroom and how they might be manipulated to ease the challenge of responding to the group iii) how to make best use of TAs to allow effective teaching to the whole class.
3. A secondary school with a high number of school refusers asked the EP to support them in thinking about different psychological theories/research relating to meeting the needs of these pupils. 3 x 50 minute groups were set up over the year and attended by all the LSAs, learning mentors and SENCO. In those sessions the EP facilitated discussions informed by theory and research evidence in order to help the school understand different reasons for school refusal and how to use the resources/systems they already had in school to respond effectively to these pupils.
4. A SENCO requested that 1 hour of consultation time be dedicated to looking at ways of evaluating interventions in the SEN department following an OfSTED recommendation