The Graduated Approach to Person-centred SEN Support in Early Years

To get started, click on one of the tabs below:
This resource has been developed in partnership with Sunderland Early Years Team and Helen Sanderson Associates as a practical tool for SENCo’s and all those who teach and support children in Early Years settings in Sunderland. We hope it will be useful for parents and carers too. Our aim is to help make sure that children and their parents/carers are put at the heart of a graduated approach to SEN support in Sunderland.

The SEND code of practice explains the graduated approach in four stages Assess, Plan, Do and Review. This resource looks at each stage providing practical tips on how to gather person centred information and develop plans, how to include the child and their parents in effective meetings and links to other useful tools and resources.

Whilst this guide is for SENCo’s, there is a real advantage for settings in looking at this approach for all children.

This guide is a practical resource that provides information about how person centred approaches can be used within a graduated approach to deliver SEN support. There are a range of person centred thinking tools highlighted in this guide that can help to collect information as part of this process and to help develop person centred EHCP’s. This is not an exhaustive list and there may be tools you are already using which work well. It is important that this document is used alongside Sunderland’s SEND Toolkit. Once completed the Toolkit will provide detailed information and guidance about the SEND support process in Sunderland. Once the Toolkit is available on Sunderland’s Local Offer website, this document will be updated and a link to the Toolkit provided here.
**Additional Resources**

If you are viewing this guide on a computer which has access to the internet you can find links to additional resources where you see the mouse symbol. This could be a video on YouTube, a template you can download or a link to where you can find more information.

**Jargon Buster**

Understanding the meaning behind terminology is important, in fact, reducing jargon and using more language that everyone can understand is a key requirement of the reforms to SEND. You can find a jargon buster at the back of this guide.

**Top Tips**

Keep an eye out for top tips at each stage, top tips provide practical ideas about how best to collect person centred information, involve children and their parents and set up effective meetings.

**Interactive**

As well as links to additional information and resources, if you are viewing this resource on a computer you can use the tabs on the front page to get to information you want rather than scrolling through the whole document. To get back to the front page click on the home symbol at the bottom of each page.
The special educational needs and disability (SEND) code of practice 2014 replaced the categories of school action and school action plus with a single category of SEN support. Children with a special educational need and/or disability, may need additional input or support in addition to accessing quality first teaching. This may include increased support in the setting as well as input/advice from external agencies. What the additional support looks like for a child with SEND, depends on the plan that is developed as part of the graduated approach.

Find out more about SEN support

The diagram on the next page shows the three levels of intervention, quality first teaching, SEN support and an Education, Health and Care Plan. Whilst this resource is focused on the SEN support stage, if person centred practice is just what a setting does, something that happens for every child, it is more likely to work for children who need additional support.
THREE LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

Quality First Teaching
• For all children

SEN Support
• For children who are identified as needing input in addition to their access to quality first teaching.

Education Health and Care Plan
• For children who are identified as needing increased support in the setting as well as input/advice from external agencies.
The SEND Code of Practice outlines four broad areas of special educational need that include a range of difficulties and conditions:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, emotional and mental health
- Sensory and/or physical

The code states that “Many children have difficulties that fit clearly into one of these areas; some have needs that span two or more areas; for others, the precise nature of their need may not be clear at the outset.”

SEN support should start with understanding as much as possible about what is important to a child and their parents/carers and what best support looks like for them. Where it is identified that a child has additional needs and requires extra support, the graduated approach to SEN support should follow a cycle of action that builds on what is working and addresses what is not working.

The SEN and disability code of practice is clear that the purpose of identification is to work out what action is needed, not to fit a child into a category.

If a child is not able to tell you what is important to them, remember there are many ways in which we communicate, including how we behave if we are happy or not. Also, parents/carers, siblings and friends are usually the experts so make sure you include them when gathering information about what’s important.
**WHAT IS PERSON CENTRED PRACTICE?**

Person centred practices are a range of practical person-centred thinking tools and processes like person centred reviews that make sure the child and what is important to them is at the centre of the process.

Person centred thinking tools are essentially methodical ways to ensure that each setting is meeting the needs of each individual child, recognising that each one of them has a unique style of learning, communicating, building relationships and making decisions.

Person centred practices are a perfect fit with the Graduated Approach to SEN support. This approach clearly puts the child and the family at the heart of the process and supports the fundamental belief that all those who support children with SEN have the highest aspirations for them.

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**ONE PAGE PROFILES AND PERSON CENTRED REVIEWS**

Almost always, the most helpful practices to begin with are a Person-centred Review or a One-page Profile. You can find more information about both practices throughout this guide.

One Page Profiles are a great way to build on good relationships with parents and carers. Ask them to contribute and use One Page Profiles to learn more about a child’s life outside of the setting.

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Find out more about One Page Profiles

Watch a video about One Page Profiles being used in education
The graduated approach is described in the SEND code of practice as four stages, Assess, Plan, Do and Review. Each stage of the process is an opportunity to understand more about the needs of the child and what will support them to make progress and secure good outcomes.

The graduated approach to SEN support should be a continuous person centred process and not a collection of one off events. Information gathered at each stage should influence what happens next in regard to planning support and building on earlier decisions made.
Assess

Do we know what is important to the child and their parents? – Understanding what really matters to the child and their parents/carers is fundamental to ensuring the graduated approach is a person centred process. Collecting information about what makes a child happy, fulfilled and content and using this information can help maintain a balance between what is important to a child and what is important for them. By involving children and their family from the outset means they are part of a process that is done with them not to them.

Do we know what’s working and not working? – It is important to identify where things are working well and where things need to be different (not working) by looking at an issue from different perspectives. Identifying what’s not working is essential information to take to the planning stage as it helps focus on areas where changes to existing support are needed, or additional support for the child may be required.

Do we know what is important for the child? – Understanding the child’s needs and what is important for them is key to identifying the support they need so that their experience of early years is happy and safe and that they are enabled to fulfill their potential. It is important to consider whether additional assessments are required at this stage. Where there is a need for more specialist expertise to identify the nature of the child’s needs, or to determine the most effective approach, specialist teachers, educational psychologists or health, social services or other agencies may need to be involved.

Holding a person centred review can help gather important information at this stage. Supporting the child to create their own invites can be a great way to encourage people to attend their meeting.
At the Assess stage there are a whole range of person-centred practices that can support staff in Early years’ settings to learn more about the children in their care.

The **what’s working/ what’s not working** tool is a very helpful tool to use at this stage and may in fact be an ideal first step. This tool can be used in different ways to identify where things are working well and where things need to be different (not working) by looking at an issue from different perspectives. It can include the views of several people while remembering that the pupil is at the centre. It gives us:

- A snapshot of how things are now.
- An opportunity to acknowledge what is working well.
- A clear way of highlighting what needs to be different, to build into actions.

Using this tool makes sure that although there are areas of concern that may have initiated the Graduated Approach, the focus is not all on what isn’t working and gives an opportunity to share good news too.
If the child does not have a well-developed One-page Profile, it would be useful to use the tool **Good day/bad day**. This involves gathering information about what makes a good day and what makes a bad day for the child. At the Assess stage this could give us a valuable insight into the child’s experience of early years and highlight where they may be struggling.

The **important to and for** tool would also be a helpful tool to use at this stage if not already undertaken as part of a One-page Profile. This process of separating out what is important to and for the child contributes to us knowing what we need to do to support the pupil in order that their experience of school is happy and safe and that they are enabled to fulfill their potential.
Considering the child’s communication is a great benefit of course when gathering information to inform the Assess stage.

**Communication charts** are a simple but powerful way to record how someone communicates through their actions as well as their words. We all communicate in a variety of ways. This chart gives an opportunity to describe these ways of communicating and how others should respond. Communication charts can also record how we can communicate effectively with the pupil.

These Communication charts enable us to learn from what pupils do as well as what they say and are very effective with both pupils who do and do not use words to speak. They complement the whole school approach as they are easy to understand, use and add to. Where the school may be concerned about any pupil doing things that are difficult to understand and which may mean they are at risk of developing a negative reputation in school, these tools can be especially helpful and enable us to add further detail to the pupil’s One-page Profile.
Background

Erica started nursery with us in November 2013, at 8 months old. The nursery practitioners have loved watching her grow into a beautiful, confident, loving little girl!

Erica has just turned 4 years old and even though she has gone through a lot, needing a colostomy bag, going through surgery when she was younger, needing grommets and now hearing aids, she hasn’t let this stop her!

Where we are now

Because of Erica’s hearing difficulties, she has regular visits from the child sensory team to monitor her communication, language skills and her hearing. The team carry out observations and provide targets for the nursery staff to support Erica towards achieving her goals. Erica is also involved with Speech and Language therapy.

Erica’s speech and hearing might not be as developed as her peers; however, she is adaptable and confident within herself. She is outgoing and enjoys the company of others, rarely shying away from social situations and loves to get involved with her friends. Her hearing aids mean she is more alert to conversations and she is building on her speech and her listening skills.
CASE STUDY...CONTINUED

A Person Centred Approach

Using a person centred approach has enabled us as a setting to understand and share what really matters to this child, along with her parents and other professionals involved.

Planning SEN meetings as a team and involving parents every step of the way ensures that the child’s voice, interests and aspirations are not lost.

By gathering information from the child’s keyworker and SENCo through observations, tracking of development and how well we know Erica, we could share this with parents in regular SEN support meetings. With the added details from Erica’s parents using the ‘Preparing for the assessment process’ booklet and ensuring they were involved in the entire process, we could create Erica’s one-page profile together.

The one-page profile we have created clearly describes Erica and is individual to her. Including the sections ‘What people like and admire about me’, ‘what is important to me’ and ‘How to support me best’ gives a full picture of the child, and enables practitioners to get a better understanding of how she interacts with the world, and the best way to support her through it.

Having Erica’s profile easily accessible alongside her learning journey, has meant that practitioners developing SEN support plans, are easily able to ensure Erica’s specific needs and interests are at the core of any decision making.

Within the setting new practitioners, students and professionals working with Erica can quickly get to know her as an individual and how best to support her. The one-page profile will be incorporated into her application for an ‘Education, Health and Care plan’ and will also follow her to her new school in September to help support the transition between settings.

One of the main benefits of creating the profile as the SENCo, has been building on relationships with Erica’s parents, working closely and improving communication. It has also provided a very positive experience for the parents, enabled them to voice their opinions and feel involved and valued.
ERICA’S ONE PAGE PROFILE

You can view a copy of Erica’s one-page profile online here – Erica’s One Page Profile

QUOTE

“The dedication and work of the staff has been essential to our daughter’s development, and the open line of communication between all involved has been excellent!”

- Erica’s mother
Plan

What do we need to consider at this stage?

Do we know what aspirations the child has for the future?
– As well as understanding, what is working and not working at the planning stage, it is imperative to know what is important to a child and their parents for the future. As well as maintaining what is working and addressing what is not working, the plans you develop at this stage should work towards achieving these goals. It is important to check that any outcomes developed at the planning stage move a child closer to their aspirations.

Make sure parents/carers know how the meeting will be set up and what will be discussed so there are no surprises. Preparation booklets can be a useful resource to help parents/carers prepare information to share at the meeting. A telephone call or a discussion before the meeting can help make sure parents feel confident about taking part.

Do we know who needs to be involved in developing the plan?
– Knowing who to include at the planning stage is essential, this will always include the child and their parents/carers but it may also include other people who know the child well. Siblings and friends can often provide information that others could not. At the assess stage you may have identified professionals such as an educational psychologist or social worker, who need to be included in developing the plan. If professionals are not able to attend a planning meeting, make sure you have access to any assessments or recommendations so that this information can be included when you are developing outcomes and actions.
**Do we know how to prepare?** – Making sure you (and everyone attending) are well prepared for a planning meeting is essential. Think about where the meeting will take place and how you will use the space you have effectively. Making sure that the child and their parents are comfortable to contribute as equals is vital. Think about how you will record the information and the resources you need. Think about where you will place chairs, whether you need a table and whether you need a projector for photos or video. The conversation at a planning meeting is likely to be far more productive if everyone attending the planning meeting is well prepared and feels able to contribute. Creating an inclusive environment and welcoming atmosphere will help you to have an open conversation focused on what is positive and possible.

**Do we know what is available locally?** – It is important to use information about what is available locally at the planning stage. Information about universal, targeted and specialist support and services can be found in Sunderland’s Local Offer. This information should be used at the planning stage to identify local resources and potential solutions.

**Do we know what is working and not working from different perspectives?** – It is important to revisit this information at the planning stage as it should influence the outcomes and actions developed.

There are lots of ways to involve a child in their planning meeting, incorporating the child’s favorite music or activity, including their favorite snacks, involving their friends and using pictures or video to share information or help the child communicate, are all ways to create an inclusive environment.

*Sunderland’s Local Offer can be found here*
Do we have clear outcomes? – The outcomes that are set at the planning stage should make clear what will be different if the outcome is achieved, what will be happening? What will people see, feel or be doing differently. You can test whether you have developed an effective outcome by asking yourself –

- Does the outcome keep something that is working for the child?
- Does the outcome address something that is not working?
- Does the outcome take the child closer to their aspirations?
- Can you measure whether the outcome has been achieved or not?

Do we have clear actions? – It is important to set clear actions identifying who will do what and when. Actions should be –

- Specific – so that it is clear exactly what needs to be done.
- Measurable – so you can measure whether the action has been achieved.
- Achievable – so you know the action is within your (or somebody who is involved) control to achieve.
- Relevant – so you know the action relates to the information in the plan.
- Timed – so you know when the action needs to be achieved by.

Do we know what has worked in the past? – Information about what has worked well in the past can help you identify support to address what is not working now or to plan activities that work well. Information from the child’s learning journal may be useful here.

You can test the outcome or outcomes you have developed by asking: what does it give the child? What does it do for them? What does it make possible for them? Keep asking these questions until you have the real outcome. Speech and language therapy may be one effective solution for a child who is aiming to improve their communication skills, but it is not an outcome. An outcome could be that the child is understood by their friends and is confident to play with them. If this is the outcome, there may be other solutions as well as speech and language therapy that can help to achieve it.

Find out more about developing outcomes
At the Plan stage, it is important to think creatively of ways to support the child to think about their aspirations. Whilst this is certainly an expectation of the EHC plan it is also a key part of this stage for all children, with or without an EHC Plan. There are several person centred thinking tools to help to do this.

The **perfect week tool** can be a great way to look with the child at what a perfect week might look like and what it would take to achieve what is possible and positive from this. This tool can help to identify what is important to a child, it can also help to think about aspirations for the future.
Making all staff aware of the child’s needs is key at this stage and again, **One-page Profiles** or a more detailed **One-page Profile Plus** are invaluable. They can act as a vehicle to enable supporters to summarise the views of the child and their family, what they have learnt from assessments and what changes and adjustments they need to make. This can be then shared with all staff who work with the child. A comprehensive good quality one-page profile can provide the information required to complete section A of a child’s Education, Health and Care plan. One-page profiles should be reviewed at least every 12 months as part of the person centred review of the child’s plan, the information from the profile should inform the review and vice versa.
The role of the SENCO and other support staff need to be carefully considered so that everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities in planning with and for the child and indeed at each other stage of the Graduated Approach. The Doughnut tool is of great benefit in doing this. The doughnut is a tool that helps people understand not only what they must do (core responsibilities), but where they can try things using their own judgment and creativity. It also identifies what is not their responsibility. It is often known as the Doughnut because it is a visual tool with an inner ring where core responsibilities are recorded, a second ring showing where people can use their judgment and be creative, and an outer ring which reflects areas that are not the person’s responsibility.

It is important to make sure the planning stage has the people who support the child at the very centre. This means that they are not just the most important topic of conversation, but that their opinion counts above all others. The Relationship Circle tool can be used to help the child decide who to invite to their planning meeting. This could include –

- Who the child wants there.
- Who is important in the child’s life.
- Who needs to be there.
Do we know who will do what and when? – The do stage is about putting the plan into action. It is important that everyone involved in delivering the outcomes set out at the planning stage are clear about their role and responsibilities, what they need to do and when.

Do we know what the child can do themselves? – It is important that the child’s strengths and qualities are at the heart of the graduated approach to SEN support. Identifying which aspects of the plan the child can work on helps to keep them involved and interested in achieving their goals.

Do we know what support is available from family, carers, friends and the local community? – Working in partnership with the people closest to the child makes it far more likely that outcomes will be achieved. Identifying the natural assets available to the child as well as paid support can open up new ideas and opportunities.

By regularly reviewing what is working and not working when a child’s plan is put into action, you can make small changes as and when you learn. The learning log tool and using 4 plus 1 questions are great ways to record what is happening. It is essential to gather this information to use at the child’s next review.
Do we know what universal, targeted and specialist support and services are available? – Identifying what support and services are available for the child to access and how to access them is key. Using Sunderland’s local offer should help.

Do we know how the plan can be refined if needed? – Being able to change elements of the plan as you learn what works for the child is essential to keep the plan on track. It means the plan is developed as you learn what works and what doesn’t and that the plan is not put on hold whilst waiting for review.

Do we know what information needs to be recorded and where? – What information do people need to have to carry out the actions from the plan? This might include information from the child’s one page profile about best support or a recommendation from an educational psychologist about a new support strategy. As the plan is put into action it is important to collect information about what is working and not working, make sure it is clear where this information needs to be recorded so that it can be used at the review stage.

Sunderland’s Local Offer can be found here
At the Do stage, it is important to think about how to make sure the child is included in putting their plan into practice and making decisions is key to this. This stage is also about collecting evidence and information regarding what you are learning, what works and what doesn’t. There are a number of person centred thinking tools that can help.

Supporting the child to share the journey is an intrinsic part of the Graduated Approach and enabling them to participate in decision making is key to this. It is important that there is a good understanding of how to best present information and choice to children to maximize their potential to fully participate and there is a tool that specifically can support this.

This tool creates a clear picture of how children make decisions, the range of decisions they make, and what information and support they need in decision-making. This person-centred thinking tool has two parts – the decision-making profile, which shares the child’s preferences in decision-making, and the decision-making agreement which specifies the important decisions and how best to support the child with them.
Ensuring that day to day learning about the child is not lost is part of this stage – the **what’s working / what’s not working tool** described earlier would again be useful here as would the **4 plus 1 questions tool**. This tool is a way of reflecting on what has been happening and what has been learned in relation to any situation. It first asks four questions:

1. What have we tried?
2. What have we learned?
3. What are we pleased about?
4. What are we concerned about

This tool offers an opportunity to acknowledge what has been working well but also gives participants in the discussion a way to share their worries about any issue. Following reflection, the next question is:

**Given what we know now, what next?** This last question – the plus 1- forms the basis of action planning.
Learning logs also contribute to this ongoing reflection. A Learning Log is a simple way to record learning and information about a child, to continuously improve how we deliver personalised learning and support. It can replace other daily records and be used as a structure for homesetting diaries. The learning log asks several questions to help us think about what needs to stay the same and what needs to change to support the child in different situations. This information can also help us understand what is important to a child. As well as being used in a formative way, learning logs can be used in a summative way, helping people put all the information together on a new One-Page Profile, a SEN support plan or to help review existing information.
Review

What do we need to consider at this stage?

What have we tried and learned? What are we pleased about or concerned about? – These are key questions as part of the review stage, checking progress on the actions set at the planning stage and identifying any concerns that need to be addressed.

Have the child’s needs or other important circumstances in their life changed? – If there have been significant changes since the plan was developed you may need to think about who needs to be involved at the review stage or additional information to help the group make decisions.

What is working and not working from different perspectives? – It is important to re-look at this from different perspectives and check back to see how people are feeling about progress and the areas of the plan that are working or not.

Where does the child and their parents/carers want to be in a years’ time? – Setting new outcomes and actions as part of the review doesn’t mean everything must change, some outcomes may remain the same if there is more work to do. Identifying the priorities for change can help the group focus on the most important aspects of the plan.
In addition to the tools described at the Do Stage of the Graduated Approach, that is what’s working/what’s not working, the 4 plus 1 questions and learning logs, the review stage sees the use of Person-centred Review processes take centre stage.

If an Assessment Planning meeting is needed, a Person-centred Review is the ideal way to gather the information required at this stage of the SEN Support cycle.

**Person-centred reviews**

Person-centred reviews were initially developed in education to transform Year 9 Transition reviews, as a way of ensuring that the young person was at the centre. The annual review process is a way of learning what is important to and for the child, together with the people who are important in a child’s life and the focus of the review is on creating action plans. It is now widely used across all ages, bringing together the information from other person-centred thinking tools and always having the child and their family central to the process.

**Person-centred Reviews look at:**

- Who’s here? (who’s involved in the plan)
- What we appreciate/like and admire about the child.
- Progress on actions.
- What is important to them now?
- What is important for them now and for the future?
- What do we need to know or do to support them?
- Questions to answer/issues we are struggling with.
- What is working and not working from different perspectives.
- Outcomes, provision, targets and actions.

[Watch an animate about person centred reviews](#)
Person-centred Reviews are key to personalising services and support as they offer children:

- A chance to attend an annual review meeting in a format that is truly child-friendly and where they can be effectively included in the meeting, on equal terms with the professional’s present.
- An opportunity to be listened to about what is working and not working for them.
- Time to focus on what action could be taken to make things better or maintain what is working well.
- A way of starting to draw up a One-Page Profile so SENCo’s and support staff know what is important to the child and how best to support them.
- An opportunity for them and their parents/carers to think about their future and make plans based on what they want, and what is important to them as well as what is important for them.
- An opportunity to influence the action plan that is put into place for them (as part of an annual review) to address issues that are important to them rather than others.

For families, a Person-centred Review provides a forum to contribute to a review meeting on equal terms with professionals as well as the opportunity to share their views on what is important to and how best to support their child. It also offers a way to share what is and isn’t working within a setting from their perspective and following this, a way to contribute to actions to bring about change now and planning for the future.

If you have permission, taking photos or using video can be a great way to create a record of a child’s review. Playing music can create a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere and help put people at ease. Make sure you give yourself enough time to set the room up before people arrive, use a room where the child will feel comfortable and make sure you have all the resources you need. Agree ground rules with the child and their family before the review and keep language accessible for all involved.
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<th><strong>Code of Practice</strong></th>
<th>The SEND Code of practice is a set of written regulations issued by the Government that explains how to implement the SEND reforms.</th>
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<td><strong>EHC Plan</strong></td>
<td>Education, Health and Care plan</td>
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<td><strong>External Agencies</strong></td>
<td>Agencies such as social care and Health that may be represented by a Social Worker or a Pediatrician.</td>
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<td><strong>Graduated Approach</strong></td>
<td>The provision of SEN support that follows a cycle of assess, plan, do, review</td>
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<td><strong>Person centred practices</strong></td>
<td>A range of practical person-centred thinking tools and processes that make sure the child and what is important to them is at the centre of the process.</td>
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<td><strong>Quality First teaching</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SEN Support</strong></td>
<td>Support provided to those children who have an identified special educational need.</td>
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<td><strong>SEN Support Plan</strong></td>
<td>The plan that is developed to identify how the child’s special educational needs will be met.</td>
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<td><strong>Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Bespoke support designed to meet specific needs that can't be met by universal or targeted services. This may include using a personal budget.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted</strong></td>
<td>Support and services that are designed to meet a specific need such as a service provided for a child who has autism.</td>
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Universal Services that are available to all children.

Find more jargon busting here