BUNDLES AND STARTER KITS ENGLAND

New to SEND Starter Kit

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If you are just starting to wonder whether your child needs extra help, you do not have to work out the next step alone. This free kit gathers the first useful pages in one place: a short guide, a jargon buster, a one-page profile, a meeting planner, a home–school diary and a small set of visual supports.

Use what helps today and leave the rest. You can come back to it when you are ready. Live tools, including Help Me Now and the SEND Letter Builder, stay free on mysendfriend.co.uk.

Who this is for

Parents and carers in England who are new to SEND, or supporting a child who may need extra help at school or at home. No diagnosis is required to describe what you are noticing and what already helps.

What is inside

- A plain-English guide to taking the first steps, including SEN Support in England
- A jargon buster for the words you are likely to hear
- A one-page child profile you can share with school or other adults
- A meeting planner and a five-day home–school diary
- Printable now/next, help and break, and feelings check-in cards

Please read this first

This is a free starting-point resource from My SEND Friend. It is general information, not legal, medical or benefits advice, and it is not an official or government form. It does not guarantee an assessment, plan, adjustment, payment or any other outcome. Check current official guidance (for example GOV.UK) and get individual advice from SENDIASS, IPSEA or a suitably qualified adviser when you need it.

How to use this kit

You do not need to work through every page. Start with the part that would help this week.

- If you want a calmer picture of what is going on, start with the short guide and the jargon buster.
- If a meeting is coming up, complete the one-page profile and the meeting planner first.
- If school and home are missing each other's updates, try the diary for a few days only — it is meant to be light, not a long daily report.
- If your child finds change, waiting or talking about feelings hard, try one of the visual supports and adapt the words to suit them.

> **England first**
> The education process described here is for England, under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015). Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different systems. Always check the current official position for where you live.

Official sources and independent advice

My SEND Friend is not a government service, a council, a school or a helpline, and this pack is not legal advice. Useful starting points include:

- GOV.UK — Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- The SEND Code of Practice 2015, available on GOV.UK
- Your local SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) — free and impartial
- IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) for legally based information in England
- Contact, for families with disabled children, including a free helpline

On mysendfriend.co.uk you can also use Help Me Now, the SEND Letter Builder, the Reasonable Adjustments Builder, the one-page profile tool and the free resources hub. Saving work to My SEND Plan is optional.

A short guide if you are just starting

Many families begin here because something feels hard: learning, communication, sensory overload, big feelings, going into school, or a sense that the usual support is not enough. You do not need the "right" words, and you do not need a diagnosis before you can ask for help.

What "SEN Support" means

In England, most extra help in a mainstream school or setting starts as SEN Support. This is support provided by the school from its own resources, often agreed with you and reviewed over time. It is not the same thing as an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP). An EHCP is a legal document issued by the local authority for some children and young people whose needs cannot reasonably be met from the school's ordinarily available provision.

A diagnosis can be useful, but it is not a legal requirement for SEN Support, for a request for an EHC needs assessment, or for describing the barriers your child faces.

A first conversation with school

A calm, factual conversation with the class teacher or the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) is often a useful first step. You might want to share:

- What you are noticing at home, in the mornings, or after school, with a few specific examples.
- What already helps, including routines, language, sensory adjustments or recovery time.
- What you would like school to try or review, and when you will look at it together again.
- Any reports or appointments you already have — only share what is relevant.

> **Keep a short dated record**
> You do not need a formal file. A few dated notes about what happened, what was agreed and what actually took place will help you later, whether you stay at SEN Support or eventually look at an EHC needs assessment. The diary and meeting planner in this kit are for that purpose.

What to gather, gently

If you feel ready, these are the sorts of things that often help a first meeting. Collect what you already have. You do not need to wait for a complete folder.

- [ ] A short list of strengths, interests and what your child enjoys
- [ ] Two or three recent examples of what is difficult, with when and where it happened
- [ ] What you already do at home that helps, and how long it takes
- [ ] School reports, SEN Support plans, or emails that describe current support
- [ ] Attendance notes, if going into school is part of the picture
- [ ] Any professional letters you already have (for example speech and language, paediatrician, educational psychologist) — only if they are relevant
- [ ] Questions you want to ask, written down so you are not trying to hold them in your head

When families start thinking about an EHCP

Some families later ask the local authority for an EHC needs assessment under section 36 of the Children and Families Act 2014. In broad terms, the authority must consider whether the child or young person has or may have special educational needs, and whether it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan.

You do not need the school's permission to make a request. A decision about whether to assess is usually due within six weeks of the authority receiving the request, subject to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 and any exceptions that may apply. Check the date on any letter you receive.

> **This kit does not start an EHCP**
> This starter kit does not request an assessment or complete an official form. If you later need that step, My SEND Friend has a free EHC Needs Assessment Request Pack and a live letter builder on mysendfriend.co.uk. Get advice from SENDIASS or IPSEA if you are unsure.

Looking after yourself as well

Starting this process can be tiring even when the first meeting goes well. It is reasonable to ask a friend, relative or supporter to come with you, to ask for notes in writing, and to take a break after a difficult conversation. The parent wellbeing pages on mysendfriend.co.uk are there if you need them.

SEND jargon buster

These are plain-English explanations of words you may hear. They are a starting point, not legal definitions. Where a word has a precise meaning in law or official guidance, check the current source.

SEN / SEND

Special educational needs, or special educational needs and disabilities. A child has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special educational provision. "SEND" is widely used to include disability as well.

SENCO

The Special Educational Needs Coordinator in a school or setting. They help to coordinate support and are often your main contact for SEN Support and review meetings.

SEN Support

Extra or different help provided by a school or setting from its ordinarily available resources, usually planned and reviewed with you. It is not an EHCP.

EHCP

An Education, Health and Care plan. In England this is a legal document issued by the local authority that describes a child or young person's needs and the provision that must be secured. Processes and timescales are set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, the 2014 Regulations and the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

EHC needs assessment

The statutory assessment a local authority may carry out to decide whether an EHCP is needed. A parent, a young person, or a school can request one. A diagnosis is not required.

Local authority (LA)

The council responsible for education in your area, including decisions about EHC needs assessments and EHC plans in England.

Code of Practice

The SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015). Statutory guidance that schools, local authorities and others must have regard to in England.

Reasonable adjustments

Changes a school or other organisation may need to make under the Equality Act 2010 so that a disabled pupil is not substantially disadvantaged. This duty can apply whether or not the child has an EHCP.

Provision

The extra or different support that is actually put in place — for example, a particular intervention, adult support, or therapy. In an EHCP, special educational provision is usually set out in Section F.

Outcomes

The differences the support is meant to make over time. In an EHCP these usually appear in Section E. Clear outcomes are easier to review than vague hopes.

Annual review

A formal review of an EHCP that must take place at least once a year. You should be involved, and your child's views should be sought in a way that works for them.

SENDIASS

The SEND Information, Advice and Support Service in your local area. It is free, impartial and for families and young people.

IPSEA

Independent Provider of Special Education Advice. A charity offering legally based information and advice about SEND law in England.

DLA / PIP

Disability Living Allowance for children, and Personal Independence Payment, usually from age 16. These are DWP benefits, decided under benefit rules, not by the school. A claim is separate from an EHCP. Check current GOV.UK guidance; this kit does not decide entitlement.

EBSA

Emotionally based school avoidance — a widely used description when a child is struggling to attend because of anxiety or unmet need. It is not a formal diagnosis.

Mediation and Tribunal

If you disagree with certain EHCP decisions, there are formal routes, which can include mediation and an appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability). Deadlines are short. Get advice quickly and check the decision letter.

Questions families often ask

Do we need a diagnosis before we ask for help? No. You can describe what you are noticing and ask a school or setting for support without a diagnosis. A diagnosis can still be useful later, but it is not a legal requirement for SEN Support or for requesting an EHC needs assessment in England.

Does the school have to agree before I request an EHC needs assessment? No. A parent, carer or young person can request an assessment from the local authority. It is usually helpful to work with school, but their permission is not required.

Is this the same as a DLA or PIP claim? No. An EHCP and disability benefits are different systems, with different tests and organisations. This kit does not make a benefit claim or decide entitlement. Check current GOV.UK guidance if you want to explore benefits.

Who can I talk to if I feel stuck? Your local SENDIASS service is free and impartial. IPSEA offers legally based information in England. Contact has a helpline for families with disabled children. My SEND Friend is not a helpline.

One-page child profile

Give teachers, supply staff or other adults a short, respectful picture of your child. Complete what you can. Leave gaps rather than guessing. You can type into the boxes or print and write by hand. Update it when things change.

> **Keep it kind and accurate**
> Lead with strengths and what helps. Only include information you are comfortable sharing, and avoid details that are not needed for support. This is not a diagnosis, a behaviour contract or an official school form.

Child's name or initials

What they like to be called

Age or year group (optional)

Date completed

What we love about them, and what they are good at

Interests, strengths, humour, kindness, skills — the picture you want people to start with.

How they communicate, and how best to communicate with them

Spoken language, signs, visuals, needing processing time, written prompts, or a quiet space to talk.

What people often misunderstand

One-page child profile, continued

What can be difficult, and what that looks like day to day

Short, factual examples are more useful than general labels.

Sensory and environmental notes

Noise, light, smell, clothing, busy spaces, unexpected touch, hunger, or tiredness — only what is relevant.

What already helps

Routines, visual supports, movement breaks, a trusted adult, seating, preparation for change, recovery time after school.

What does not help

If things become overwhelming, please try this

Anything else it would be useful for a new adult to know

Completed by

Parent, carer, or young person — and anyone who helped

Adults this may be shared with

For example class teacher, SENCO, after-school club

Meeting planner

Use this before a SENCO, teacher or support meeting so you are not trying to hold everything in your head. Take it with you. You can also use the last boxes to record what was agreed.

Meeting type

For example SENCO meeting, review, or first conversation with the teacher

Date, time and place

Who will be there

Who is coming with me for support (optional)

The three things I most need discussed

Keep this focused. It is fine if other topics come up, but start with what matters most.

What is going well, or what already helps

What is not working, or what is missing

Examples I want to mention (with dates if I have them)

Meeting planner, continued

Questions I want to ask

The support or next step I would like school to consider

Be as practical as you can. "We would like to review X in four weeks" is easier to follow up than a general hope.

Adjustments I need for the meeting itself (optional)

For example, notes in writing, a quieter room, extra time, or joining online.

During or after the meeting

What was agreed, who will do it, and by when

What is still unclear, or what I want in writing

Date we will review this

If you would like help turning a concern into a letter after the meeting, the free SEND Letter Builder is on mysendfriend.co.uk.

Home–school communication diary

This is a low-burden diary for a few useful updates, not a requirement to write a full report every day. Agree with school how it will be used, and stop or simplify it if it becomes another source of pressure.

Five day pages follow. You can print only the days you need. Short notes are enough: what went well, what was hard, sleep or mornings if relevant, and anything school or home should know for tomorrow.

> **Privacy and tone**
> Only write what you are comfortable sharing. Avoid comments about other children. Keep the language factual and kind, even on a difficult day. This diary is a conversation aid, not evidence that anything has officially been "logged" with a local authority.

Child's name or initials

Week beginning

Class or teacher (optional)

Anything school and home have already agreed about using this diary

Diary: Monday

Date

Completed by

Home, school, or both

Mornings and arriving

Sleep, leaving the house, coming into school — only if useful.

What went well today

What was hard, and what helped

Keep this brief and specific.

Sensory, health or other notes we should know (optional)

Message from home to school

Message from school to home

Diary: Tuesday

Date

Completed by

Home, school, or both

Mornings and arriving

Sleep, leaving the house, coming into school — only if useful.

What went well today

What was hard, and what helped

Keep this brief and specific.

Sensory, health or other notes we should know (optional)

Message from home to school

Message from school to home

Diary: Wednesday

Date

Completed by

Home, school, or both

Mornings and arriving

Sleep, leaving the house, coming into school — only if useful.

What went well today

What was hard, and what helped

Keep this brief and specific.

Sensory, health or other notes we should know (optional)

Message from home to school

Message from school to home

Diary: Thursday

Date

Completed by

Home, school, or both

Mornings and arriving

Sleep, leaving the house, coming into school — only if useful.

What went well today

What was hard, and what helped

Keep this brief and specific.

Sensory, health or other notes we should know (optional)

Message from home to school

Message from school to home

Diary: Friday

Date

Completed by

Home, school, or both

Mornings and arriving

Sleep, leaving the house, coming into school — only if useful.

What went well today

What was hard, and what helped

Keep this brief and specific.

Sensory, health or other notes we should know (optional)

Message from home to school

Message from school to home

Now and next visual board

Show what is happening now and what comes next. This can make a short transition easier to understand. Print this page, cut out or fold as you prefer, and use the cards on the next page. You can write your own words in the boxes, add a simple drawing, or use the cards provided. Adapt it to the person — this is a support, not a test.

How to try it
Point to "now", then to "next". When the first activity finishes, move "next" into the "now" space. Some people also like a "finished" pile. There is no single correct way. Stop if it adds pressure.

NOW

Place a card or write here

NEXT

Place a card or write here

These visuals use simple original drawings from My SEND Friend. They are not from a licensed symbol library. Change the words to whatever your child already understands.

Activity cards to cut out

Cut along the pale lines and use these with the now/next board, or as a simple first/then pair. You can also write on the blank cards. If you laminate them, they last longer. The pictures are simple on purpose, so they stay clear when printed.



Home



School



Reading or work



Eat or drink



Play



Quiet time



Outside



Toilet



Help



A break



Finished

(Write your own)

(Write your own)

(Write your own)

(Write your own)

(Write your own)

Help and break request cards

Some people find it hard to say they need help, a break, or the toilet when they are already overwhelmed. These cards can sit on a desk, a keyring or a fridge. Agree with your child, and with school if you share them, what will happen when a card is used — and honour that as consistently as you can.



I need help

Please come and help me.

You can add your own wording here



I need a break

I need to stop for a short time.

You can add your own wording here



I need the toilet

I need to leave to use the toilet.

You can add your own wording here



Please wait

I need a little time before I can answer.

You can add your own wording here

These cards are optional. They do not replace a child's own communication, speech, sign or any AAC system they already use.

Feelings check-in

A simple way to show how the day, or this moment, feels — without having to explain everything in words. There is no right answer. This is not a diagnostic tool and it is not a trademarked "zones" programme. You can change the words to the ones your child already uses.



Optional notes

What might have led to this feeling? (only if the person wants to add it)

What might help right now?

For example a quiet space, a drink, a movement break, a trusted adult, or more time.

You can print several copies of this page for a week, or cut the four faces into separate cards.

Useful next steps

When you have used what you need from this kit, these are common next steps. Choose one, not all of them.

- Share the one-page profile with the class teacher or SENCO and ask for a meeting using your planner.
- If you are not sure where to start, use Help Me Now on mysendfriend.co.uk — you can describe what is happening in your own words.
- If you need to put something in writing, try the free SEND Letter Builder, then edit the draft so it sounds like you.
- If you are thinking about reasonable adjustments, use the Reasonable Adjustments Builder or the Classroom Adjustments Checklist.
- If attendance is becoming difficult, look at the free School Anxiety and Attendance Diary and the Attendance and EBSA resources on the main site.
- If you later need to request an EHC needs assessment, use the free request pack and check current official guidance before you send anything. Note any deadline on letters you receive.
- If you need to talk to a person, contact your local SENDIASS service, IPSEA, or Contact. My SEND Friend is not a helpline and cannot give individual legal advice.

Where to find official information

Check these sources for the current official position, because guidance and benefit rules can change:

- GOV.UK: Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- GOV.UK: SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years
- GOV.UK: Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for children, if you are exploring benefits
- Your local authority's Local Offer website, for services in your area

A reminder about this free pack

This starter kit is a free resource from My SEND Friend. It is general information for families, not legal, medical or benefits advice, and not an official form. Using it does not start a statutory process or guarantee a particular outcome. Adapt every page to your child and your situation.

Thank you for trusting My SEND Friend with a first step. You do not have to do all of this at once.

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