

A practical EHCP guide for parents and carers

With a printable young-person activity workbook

Understand the process, gather a young person's views, organise evidence and prepare for useful conversations. Use one section at a time and adapt it to your family.

For families in England

This guide describes the EHCP system in England as checked in October 2026. The Government has announced proposed SEND reforms and plans to update the Code of Practice. Proposals may change; check current guidance for the stage you are at. This is general information, not legal advice or a substitute for individual support.

1. What an EHCP is

An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is for a child or young person who needs more support than is available through special educational needs support. It identifies education, health and social care needs and sets out additional support. An EHC needs assessment gathers information to decide whether a plan is needed.

A plan should help the people around the young person understand their needs, aspirations and the support required. A diagnosis alone does not describe day-to-day barriers or what support works. Focus on the person and their experience.

In England, a young person aged 16 to 25 can request an assessment themselves. Families can also ask their local authority. The current GOV.UK overview describes a draft-plan comment period of at least 15 days and a 20-week overall timeframe in the usual process. Check the live guidance for current rules and exceptions.

2. Keep the young person at the centre

Participation should happen in a way that works for the young person. Views can be shared in conversation, writing, drawings, photos, symbols, AAC, video, a trusted adult's notes or a combination. Ask what they want shared and who they want involved.

Offer information in advance, processing time, breaks, accessible communication, a choice about meeting attendance and a chance to correct notes. A blank answer is not failure. Keep their own words distinct from adult interpretation.

3. Gather a rounded picture

Describe what happens in everyday situations, what makes it easier or harder, what support has been tried and what difference it made. Include learning, communication, sensory and physical access, emotional wellbeing, relationships, health or care needs where relevant, alongside strengths and aspirations.

Example: Instead of “does not cope with change”, describe the situation and its effect: “When a room or adult changes without warning, Sam may leave the activity and need quiet time before rejoining. A visual preview and a named adult have helped Sam take part in transitions.”

4. Organise evidence

Keep a simple list of the source, date, what it helps explain and any follow-up question. Select material that makes needs, barriers, strengths and effective support clearer. Ask professionals to describe functional impact and recommendations in plain, specific terms.

Source / date	What it explains	Question / next step

5. Describe support clearly

Make the practical detail visible: who will provide support, what they will do, how often and for how long, in what setting or group size, and what training or equipment is needed. Describe needs separately from the support response. Match requests to evidence and professional advice.

6. Outcomes and aspirations

Outcomes describe meaningful change or achievement the young person is working towards. Provision describes what adults will do to help. Ask what matters to the young person, what progress could look like, what support may help and how everyone will review whether things are improving.

7. Prepare for meetings

Ask for the purpose, agenda, attendees and reports in advance. Share access needs such as plain-language papers, communication support, breaks, a quiet space, remote attendance or extra processing time. Bring a few examples and questions. Afterward, record decisions, actions, owners and dates in language the young person understands.

8. Draft plans, reviews and disagreements

Read the draft carefully. Check that it describes the young person accurately, links needs to evidence, reflects their views and aspirations, and explains provision clearly enough to understand in practice. Check current local procedures and response dates. Under the current framework, EHCPs are reviewed at least annually, with different arrangements for children under five. For disagreements about assessment, plan content or placement, use up-to-date official guidance and seek independent advice promptly.

9. Sources and support

GOV.UK · Extra help for children with SEND

[gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help](https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help)

GOV.UK · SEND Code of Practice (0 to 25)

[gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25)

GOV.UK · SEND reform consultation (2026)

[gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first)

Local SENDIASS services and independent organisations such as IPSEA may offer information and advice. Check current service details and eligibility.

Companion notes for parents and carers · resources 1–4

Use these notes alongside the young person's own words. Offer the activities as invitations, not tests.

01 · START HERE · What is an EHCP?

In England, an EHC needs assessment gathers information to decide whether an EHC plan is needed. A plan is for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN support. A young person aged 16 to 25 may request an assessment themselves. Check current GOV.UK guidance for process details.

Conversation prompts: What have you heard about an EHCP? · What would you like to understand first?

02 · MY VOICE · My voice and choices

Support participation in a way that works for this young person. Offer accessible information ahead of time, processing time, breaks, choice about who attends and a chance to correct notes. Keep their words distinct from adult interpretation.

Conversation prompts: How do you like people to communicate with you? · How would you like to share your views? · Who helps you feel understood?

03 · MY STRENGTHS · What matters to me

Record strengths and aspirations in the young person's own terms. Include what the environment or relationships make possible. Avoid defining them only by diagnosis, difficulty or a list of deficits.

Conversation prompts: What do you enjoy or feel good at? · When does learning or being with others feel easier? · What would you like more chances to do?

04 · MY NEEDS · What feels hard?

Describe functional impact: what happens, in which situations, how often and what it affects. Use specific examples from relevant settings. Include strengths and context, not just diagnostic terms.

Conversation prompts: What can make a day harder for you? · What do people sometimes misunderstand? · What would you like adults to notice sooner?

Companion notes for parents and carers · resources 5–8

Keep the young person involved in deciding what is shared, what support is requested and how progress is described.

05 · SUPPORT THAT WORKS · What helps me?

Connect each need to evidence-informed support. Describe provision so it can be understood in practice: who provides it, what they do, frequency, duration, setting, group size, training or equipment as relevant. Review what has been tried and its effect.

Conversation prompts: What helps you learn or join in? · What helps when you feel overwhelmed or stuck? · What would you like adults to try?

06 · LOOKING AHEAD · My hopes and goals

Distinguish outcomes from provision. Outcomes describe meaningful change or achievement; provision describes the support adults will deliver. Link both to assessed needs and the young person's aspirations. Discuss preparation for adulthood in an age-appropriate way.

Conversation prompts: What would you like to learn, try or do more easily? · What might be one small sign of progress? · What would you like to explore as you get older?

07 · MEETING PREP · Getting ready for a meeting

Agree the meeting purpose, attendees, access arrangements and communication preferences in advance. Bring concise examples and questions. Afterwards, record decisions, actions, owners and dates; check the young person understands what happens next.

Conversation prompts: What do you want adults at the meeting to know? · What questions do you want answered? · What would make the meeting easier?

08 · WHAT HAPPENS NEXT · Checking my plan

Under the current framework in England, EHCPs are reviewed at least annually, with different arrangements for children under five. If there is disagreement about assessment, plan content or placement, consult current official guidance and seek independent advice promptly.

Conversation prompts: What support is helping now? · What do you want adults to change or understand? · Who can you talk to about the next step?

Printables for the young person follow.

Printable workbook for young people

Write, draw, talk or ask someone to help. You can skip any question. Use one page at a time.

This workbook belongs to: _____

01 · What is an EHCP?

What have I heard about an EHCP?

What do I want to understand first?

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

02 · My voice and choices

How I like people to communicate with me

How I want to share my views

Who helps me feel understood

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

03 · What matters to me

Things I enjoy or feel good at

When learning or being with others feels easier

What I want more chances to do

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

04 · What feels hard?

What can make a day harder?

What people sometimes misunderstand

What I want adults to notice sooner

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

05 · What helps me?

What helps me learn or join in?

What helps when I feel overwhelmed or stuck?

What would I like adults to try?

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

06 · My hopes and goals

What I would like to learn, try or do

A small sign of progress

Who could help me

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

07 · Getting ready for a meeting

Three things I want adults to know

A question I want answered

What would make the meeting easier

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

08 · Checking my plan

What support is helping now?

What I want adults to change or understand

Who I can talk to next

You can draw here, add a picture, or ask someone to help record your words.

My next-step card

One thing I want to happen next

Who can help me?

When will we check in again?

Your views matter. It is okay to ask for an explanation, take a pause or come back to a question later.