



PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER 16

The Connexions service

About Connexions

Connexions services were set up as a 'one-stop-shop' information and advice service for young people aged 13–19 (and up to 25 in the case of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). They built on the old careers services but offered a much wider range of information and, in addition, had a particular brief to support young people considered to be at high risk of failing to make a smooth transition through adolescence to adulthood. This included young people with SEN.

In recent years funding for Connexions services has been substantially reduced to the point where in some areas they have virtually disappeared. However, there is still a statutory requirement to provide Connexions support to young people with statements of SEN, and so, even if the service as a whole no longer exists, a skeleton staff will remain to do this. Do be aware, though, that they might now work for another organisation and may not even use the name 'Connexions'. Some areas have re-introduced careers services, and, for the time being, they may be delivering transition support to young people with statements. If you are unsure who is responsible in your area, ask your son or daughter's school, or parent-partnership service.

The Role of Personal Advisers

Connexions work through their team of Personal Advisers (PAs). Some PAs offer general information and advice to a wide range of young people on issues such as further education and careers. Others specialise in working with young people with particular types of need, including SEN. These specialist PAs often work quite intensively with their clients and may carry out a detailed assessment of their needs under either the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or Connexions' own APIR framework. APIR stands for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review.

In most cases, every school is assigned a specific link PA. Special schools and, perhaps, units will be allocated PAs who specialise in SEN. Mainstream schools tend to be assigned a general PA, who will be the first point of contact. The PA might involve a specialist PA if they consider it necessary but do not assume that they will automatically do so in your son or daughter's case. Remember that general PAs might not know very much about speech and language impairments, so you might need to work quite hard to convince them your son or daughter needs specialist support. See below for further guidance on how to ensure your son or daughter is allocated an appropriately qualified PA.

Understanding the System

For young people with statements the process starts in year 9. At the beginning of the school year, local authorities are required to provide Connexions with a list of all young people who are due to have their Transition Review that year. Connexions will then refer each of those young people to their allocated PA so that they can get to know them and begin to discuss post-16 options ahead of their annual review. The outcomes of these discussions may, together with evidence from the school, form the basis of an 'action plan', which, following the annual review, will be further developed into the Transition Plan. For more information about Transition Reviews and Plans, see the factsheet on *The Transition Process*.

In areas where Connexions still offer a comprehensive service, head teachers have a duty to refer young people in need of support to the PA, whether or not they have a statement. As Connexions work with young people from the age of 13, this could mean your son or daughter being referred in year 8. You or your son or daughter might also choose to contact the PA as early as this if, for example, you would like their help to access social skills support or a place in a youth club.

Making the system work for you

It is important that your son or daughter is allocated a PA who is able to give him or her appropriate advice and support, especially if he or she is at high risk of struggling to obtain or retain employment or live independently. But this will not necessarily happen unless Connexions are made fully aware of the extent and nature of his or her difficulties. So it is essential that your son or daughter's school passes on accurate and detailed information about his or her needs. If necessary, contact Connexions yourself and explain why you feel it is necessary for your son or daughter to have a full assessment and intensive support from a PA with the appropriate specialist knowledge.

PAs tend to work directly with young people themselves. If you feel that your son or daughter's speech and language difficulties would make it hard for any sensible discussion to take place, you should speak directly to their PA, or perhaps raise the matter with your son or daughter's school beforehand. It may be possible for an advocate to support your son or daughter. Alternatively, you should insist on attending any meetings yourself.

If your son or daughter does not have a statement and you think he or she would benefit from Connexions support, the best thing in the first instance is to discuss this with his or her school. They will be able to tell you if there is still a service in your area for young people without statements and, if so, make a referral.

If, for whatever reason, they will not refer your son or daughter, then try contacting Connexions directly. It is probably best to approach the school's own PA first, but if that is not successful, try speaking to the manager of the service. Remember that you will probably need to explain in some detail what your son or daughter's difficulties are, and why he or she needs help.

For more information about these or any other related matters, see the factsheet *Education: Sources of Further Information* or contact the **Afasic Helpline** on **0300 666 9410** or **0207 490 9420**.

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