**Webcast (4) The role of the SENCo in supporting children with SEND**

**Some questions/ideas to think about while you listen/read:**

Find out who takes on the role of SENCo in your setting.

How do you think SENCos should keep up to date with current practice?

Have you worked with the SENCo in your setting? How did this help?

Are there any questions that you would like to ask your SENCo, or relevant person?

Hello and welcome to this webcast, one in a series which addresses practice for children in the Early Years with special educational needs and disabilities (abbreviated to SEND). By ‘Early Years’ we mean any child who is covered by the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, that is, from 0-5 years old.

In this webcast, we will look at the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, or SENCo, in Early Years group settings that are not schools; this would mainly mean settings in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector, or PVIs. These group providers are expected to appoint a member of staff to take on the role of SENCo; this person may or may not be a qualified teacher. Being an effective SENCo can be a very rewarding role, but it is not an easy one.

The SENCo is responsible for working closely with the leaders, managers and all of the practitioners in the setting, and they have a core role in supporting colleagues to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (or SEND). It is important that the person identified to take on this role has a wide variety of skills, knowledge and personal attributes in order to undertake the role effectively and professionally. In essence, this role requires excellent communication and relationship skills, combined with the ability to empower and support other practitioners. This means that the role is usually taken on by an experienced member of staff, who is confident in speaking to a range of different people, and who can take a solution-focuses approach to problem solving.

The special educational needs and disabilities code of practice (2015) identifies four core aspects of a SENCo’s role. These are:

1. To ensure all practitioners in their setting understand their responsibilities to children with special educational needs and disabilities and to make sure that all practitioners are aware of the setting’s approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children with SEND.

2. To be available and willing to offer support and advice to colleagues.

3. To ensure that parents are closely involved from the earliest possible opportunity so that they can be partners in offering their views in relation to the support action that the setting can take.

4. This role involves liaison and collaboration with professionals and other agencies such as health and social care beyond the setting, with a focus on removing barriers.

The SENCo is the key to promoting inclusive practice across the whole setting; in fact, this is one of the most important aspects of the role. Being able to work alongside managers to promote high quality inclusive practice and being able to influence each practitioner’s level of awareness, skills and confidence in relation to children with SEND is a big part of the role. In order to do this, it is important to be able to communicate the responsibilities for children with SEND to all staff in the setting on a regular basis. This could include opportunities for individual practitioners or groups of staff to be part of professional development discussions and opportunities for regular reflection. Building the capacity of the whole staff team will enable inclusive practice to become embedded, rather than be seen as just the responsibility of one or two members of the team, including those staff who do not work directly with children in a learning context.

In order to be able to effectively advise and support colleagues, the SENCo will need to be committed to their own professional development and to be able to keep up to date with local and national practice. There are a number of ways to support this. Some local authorities hold regular SENCo network meetings and some employ Area SENCos, whose job it is to support early years settings with SEND (find out if your local authority offers this support). There are also national organisations such as nasen, whose websites provide up to date information. It is important that the SENCo is able to access the relevant information and advice from local sources, and that this information is organised in a way which can easily be shared with other practitioners and parents. Many SENCos find it useful to keep all of this information in one place.

The SENCo is responsible for making sure that parents are involved in discussions around any early concerns about their child. This includes supporting the key person to have well informed, sensitive and professional discussions in relation to the areas of concern which may be emerging, and what action the setting will take. This must incorporate the views, wishes and aspirations of the parents and child. Some practitioners may find that they need support from the SENCo to carry out these discussions. This support may be an opportunity to share and carefully plan the key points that they would like to discuss with parents. The SENCo is responsible for ensuring that the discussion with parents includes identifying and agreeing upon the outcomes that are important for the child; these outcomes may be long or short term. When considering outcomes for the child, the SENCo will need to draw upon their existing knowledge of adaptations, approaches and interventions that are likely to support the child to achieve the agreed-upon identified outcomes. The key person’s knowledge about the child, combined with the parent’s knowledge of the child, should then inform any intervention and support which may be put in place. As part of this discussion, it is important to be clear about what progress and development is expected, and when and how this will be reviewed. This discussion should be noted and form part of the information to support next steps for the individual child.

It could be that the SENCo helps to facilitate the discussion with the key person and the parent, and that these early discussions build upon the existing relationship between the parent and the key person.

Some children will have needs that mean that professionals from outside your setting will need to be involved. They may already be involved with the child before they come to you, especially if the child had medical or complex needs, or you may find that as you get to know the child, the SENCo needs to go to a specialist for extra advice and support. There is a whole range of professionals that could be involved, from speech and language therapists to paediatricians and social workers; some of these people will be employed by the health service or social services, so will have different ways of working which you may have to get to know. Other specialists may come from your local authority, for example, the Area SENCo, a role which exists in some local authorities but not all. The Area SENCo is an experienced Early Years and SEND professional, usually a teacher, who can advise and support Early Years’ settings with their children with higher levels of need. If you are not sure, find out if there is an Area SENCo in your area and who they are. If there is not an Area SENCo, you should still be able to find some support from within your local authority, so ask.

When you are working with other professionals, remember that the key person and the parents know the child best, and that your views, notes, assessments etc will be really helpful to them so please share whatever information you have. The SENCo is likely to be involved in any meetings with other professionals, but the key worker may also be asked to attend. This will help the professional to give you the most effective advice. Then act on their advice, and monitor the impact that it has, in liaison with the SENCo.

There are lots of resources around to support SENCos. Some of these resources are:

* nasen membership, as you can access individual advice and support as well as resources on the website at [www.nasen.org.uk](http://www.nasen.org.uk)
* nasen’s new online early years training package, which includes these webcasts, miniguides, materials to support you in delivering face-to-face training, and the Focus On SEND CPD course (oln.nasen.org.uk)
* The SEN and Disability in the Early Years Toolkit (from the Council for Disabled Children):

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/import/early-years-toolkit-merged.pdf>

* Local networks and organisations: search for your area
* Continuing Professional Development opportunities locally and nationally; you will be able to find some of these on the SEND Gateway at www.sendgateway.org.uk

**Reflection questions and activities:**

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| **Question/activity** | **Response** |
| Find out who takes on the role of SENCo in your setting |  |
| How do you think SENCos should keep up to date with current practice? |  |
| Have you worked with the SENCo in your setting? How did this help? |  |
| Are there any questions that you would like to ask your SENCo, or relevant person? |  |