

Autism Explorers Tribunal Handbook



SEND Tribunal Parent Handbook

A Practical Guide for Parents and Carers: Before, During, and After Tribunal

This handbook is designed to support parents and carers attending a Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Tribunal for the first time. The process can feel intimidating, but it is designed to listen to families and review evidence about what support a child needs.

This guide explains the process step by step and includes useful phrases and 'trigger words' that help clearly demonstrate a child's needs.

Section 1: Understanding the Purpose of the Tribunal

- The tribunal is independent from the Local Authority.
- The panel usually includes a judge and specialist members with education or disability expertise.
- The tribunal reviews evidence to decide what support your child requires.
- It focuses on whether the Education, Health and Care Plan accurately reflects needs and provision.

The panel relies heavily on clear examples from parents. Real life descriptions of what your child experiences daily are often some of the most powerful evidence.

Section 2: Preparing Before the Hearing

- Read the full evidence bundle carefully.
- Highlight key professional reports describing your child's needs.
- Use sticky tabs to mark important pages.
- Write a short list of the most important points you want the tribunal to understand.

Evidence That Strengthens Cases

- Educational psychologist reports.
- Speech and language therapy assessments.
- Occupational therapy assessments.
- School reports and SEN support plans.
- Communication records with school or Local Authority.

Write a Parent Statement

A parent statement helps the tribunal understand how your child functions in everyday life. This may include challenges that are not fully visible in school reports.

- Describe a typical school morning or evening.
- Explain what happens when your child becomes overwhelmed.
- Explain the impact on learning and wellbeing.
- Describe the support that genuinely helps your child succeed.

Section 3: Powerful Trigger Words for Tribunal

Certain phrases help the tribunal understand the seriousness of a child's needs. These phrases link directly to legal tests used in SEND decisions. Using clear, specific language helps ensure the panel fully understands the impact on your child.

These include but are not limited to:

- Unable to access learning without support
- Significant barrier to education
- Requires consistent adult support
- Needs structured and predictable environment
- Experiences high levels of anxiety
- Communication difficulties impact learning
- Difficulty processing instructions
- Requires specialist teaching strategies
- Needs regular sensory regulation
- Unable to generalise skills without support
- Needs explicit instruction and repetition
- Risk of emotional distress or shutdown
- Requires individualised support to remain engaged
- Needs provision specified and quantified
- Lacks sense of danger and without support is at risk to harm.

When explaining your child's experiences, combine these phrases with real examples.

Example: 'Without individual support, my child is unable to access learning and becomes overwhelmed in busy classroom environments.'

Section 4: During the Hearing

Hearings are usually several hours long. The judge will introduce everyone and explain the structure of the hearing.

- The tribunal may ask about your child's daily school experience.
- The Local Authority will explain their position.
- You may be asked to explain examples from home and school.
- You can refer directly to evidence in the bundle.

Helpful Tips for Parents

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Give specific examples rather than general descriptions.
- Take your time answering questions.
- It is okay to pause if you feel emotional.
- Refer to professional evidence when possible.

Bringing a Support Person

- You are allowed to bring a supporter to the hearing.
- They can take notes and help organise documents.
- They can remind you of important points.

Section 5: After the Hearing

After the hearing, the tribunal panel considers the evidence and makes a decision. The written decision is normally sent within a few days.

- If the tribunal rules in your favour, the Local Authority must implement the decision.
- The decision may require changes to the Education Health and Care Plan.
- If you have questions about the outcome, seek advice from SEND support services.

Looking After Yourself

- Tribunal hearings can be emotionally exhausting.
- Give yourself time to rest afterwards.
- Speak to other parents or support groups if you need reassurance.

Parents know their children best. Your experiences and observations are valuable evidence. By preparing clearly and explaining your child's needs with real examples, you help the tribunal understand the support your child truly requires.