

Guidelines for Parents/Carers looking for support with Tribunal/dispute

Unlike other jurisdictions such as the Immigration Tribunal there is no regulation in the field of SEND (special educational needs and/ or disabilities) representation. This means, in effect, that anyone can set themselves up as a 'SEND Advocate' and can charge for, often unregulated, services.

The recent rise in cases to the SEND Tribunal (SENDIST) has also seen a rise in individuals setting themselves up as advocates in this way. While parents and young people are free to use whoever they wish to support them, this guidance is to help inform and support that choice.

Please remember you have a right to **free** impartial information, advice and support from trained, [SEND specialists](#). You can of course choose to pay for additional support and services if you choose.

Things to consider when looking for support with Tribunal or Dispute:

1. What **qualifications** and **training** does the organisation or individual have and how relevant/recent are they/ is it? Are they a specialist in the SEND field? Do they have extensive knowledge about relevant law?
2. What **experience** do they have? Ideally the person supporting you will have lots of different experience of Tribunal and the tribunal process, and if not, will be supported by others who have. Be wary of those claiming high success rates - some will present marginal impact as success
3. Do they have **references** and are these easily available, positive and recent? Ideally any reference would talk about the quality of the support given and not just 'winning'.
4. Are you **paying**? If so, make sure you know exactly what you're paying for and how much. Before you pay, it is worth fully exploring all the [free local and national options](#).
5. Do they have **liability insurance**? If things go wrong and you wish to take action against your advocate for poor advice, or if the Tribunal seeks costs (rare but not impossible) do they have adequate insurance to cover this?
6. What is their **reputation**? It may be tempting to use someone who is aggressive and promises to win but this is not something that generally come across well at a Tribunal hearing and can damage ongoing relationships with the LA/CCG. Looking at social media, doing an internet search and asking people who have used them is always a good idea.

For further thought, thanks to Matt Kerr and Special Needs Jungle who wrote this article a while back.

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/getting-help-with-ehcps-be-careful-out-there/>

The SEND Information Organisations Group is a network of national organisations who provide free information, advice and support to children and young people with SEND and/or their families. SENDIOG members: ACE; Civil Legal Advice; Contact; Down's Syndrome Association; Information, Advice and Support Services; IPSEA; National Autistic Society; National Deaf Children's Society; Sense and SOS-SEN.