PARTICIPATION SUPPORT GUIDE

What does this person need to understand, participate and be heard?

1 WHAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN?

- What is the meeting, decision or process?
- Who needs to understand it and have a meaningful opportunity to influence it?
- Is there enough time to prepare?

2 CHECK: CAN THIS PERSON PARTICIPATE MEANINGFULLY?

Use all five Participation Test prompts.

YES to all five: continue good participation practice.

NO or **UNSURE** to any: move to Stage 3.

UNDERSTAND	COMMUNICATE	CONSIDER	INFLUENCE	CHALLENGE
What is happening, why, key information and possible outcomes?	Can they tell us what matters, including questions or disagreement?	Can they engage with relevant information, choices and consequences?	Will their views reach the decision-maker and be genuinely considered?	Can they correct information, disagree, ask questions or seek review?

3 UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY

Identify the participation barrier - do not start with diagnosis or service eligibility.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE	WHAT THIS SHOULD PROMPT YOU TO CONSIDER
They do not understand the information/process	Accessible information • explanation • preparation • interpreter/communication support • more time
They struggle to communicate what matters	Preferred communication method • communication aid/support • trusted person • accessible environment
They are overwhelmed, anxious or intimidated	Preparation • pacing • different setting • trusted support • whether independence would help
Their view is not reaching or influencing decision-makers	How it reaches the decision-maker • feedback • whether independent advocacy is needed
High-stakes decision / significant power imbalance	Whether independence is needed because of the context, not simply the person's abilities
They cannot instruct someone in the usual way	Adapt communication first • consider specialist/non-instructed advocacy where relevant
They want somebody independent	Explain independent advocacy and enable the appropriate route; do not require other support first

4 RESPOND: WHAT WILL ENABLE PARTICIPATION?

Choose one or combine approaches. These are not steps to exhaust in order.

GOOD PARTICIPATION PRACTICE	SOMEONE THEY TRUST	SPECIALIST SUPPORT	INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY
Clear information • preparation • time • adjustments • accessible communication	Family • friend • carer • another trusted person, where appropriate	Communication • interpretation • advice/navigation • practical or specialist support	Where wanted, required, or independence is needed because of the barrier, context, stakes or power imbalance

CHILD PROTECTION	NO SERVICE FITS?
Age 8–18: use the commissioned opt-out advocacy pathway; do not wait for the child to ask. Age 0–7: advocacy can be accessed by referral where appropriate. Arrange support early enough to influence the process.	Do not stop at 'not eligible'. Return to the participation need, discuss with your manager, consider an individual solution and escalate/record unmet advocacy need through the agreed route.

5 REVIEW: DID IT WORK?

The endpoint is meaningful participation - not a referral.

CHECK THE OUTCOME	RECORD PROPORTIONATELY
Can they now understand and communicate? Did their views reach the decision-maker? Can we see how they were considered? Do they understand the decision, why it was made and what happens next?	Need/barrier → adjustments/support considered → advocacy considered/offered → person's choice → action/support provided → outcome → unmet need/escalation where applicable.

The question is not 'Does this person qualify for advocacy?' It is 'Can they participate meaningfully - and, if not, what do we need to do differently?'