

## **Top Tips from Online Session Chat**

**The following is collated from the real-life examples shared by forums during the online learning session.**

### **1. Use Multiple Communication Channels**

Relying on just one platform limits reach. Forums shared success using a mix of:

- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn)
- Websites and newsletters
- Podcasts
- Email mailing lists
- Printed materials (banners, posters, leaflets)
- Market stalls and community events

**Tip:** Cross-post content across platforms to reach different audiences.

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### **2. Build Engagement Through Face-to-Face Opportunities**

Online promotion works best when combined with in-person engagement.

Ideas shared included:

- School coffee mornings
- Parent evenings
- Market stalls at SEND or community events
- Conferences and roadshows
- Drop-in sessions at health centres
- Family hub events
- SEND workshops and training sessions

**Tip:** Rotate locations across areas to reach families who cannot travel far.

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### **3. Use Events to Grow Membership**

Events are a powerful recruitment tool.

Effective tactics mentioned:

- Membership sign-up during event booking

- QR codes linking directly to membership forms
- Tablets/iPads available at events to sign up on the spot
- Members-only events or early booking priority

**Tip:** Ask attendees to join your mailing list when they register for events.

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#### **4. Develop Strong Partnerships**

Many forums highlighted the value of collaboration.

Partners included:

- Local authorities
- Local Offer teams
- SENDIASS services
- Early years SEND teams
- Schools
- Family hubs
- Social prescribers
- Support groups and charities

**Tip:** Encourage partners to share your communications through their newsletters and social media.

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#### **5. Maintain Regular Communication**

Consistency helps build trust and awareness.

Approaches included:

- Weekly or monthly newsletters
- Engagement posts on social media
- Surveys and quick questions to gather feedback
- Annual surveys and reports

**Tip:** Ensure communication is coordinated if multiple people manage communications.

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#### **6. Use Digital Tools to Improve Communications**

Participants recommended several tools:

- **Canva** for creating graphics and social media posts
- **AI tools** to structure information, simplify language, and analyse survey data
- **Eventbrite** for managing event bookings and collecting contact details
- **Mailchimp** for newsletters

**Tip:** Apply for nonprofit/free versions of tools where available.

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## **7. Consider Dedicated Communications Support**

Some forums improved their reach by assigning communication roles.

Examples:

- Hiring a communications officer
- Paying a virtual assistant
- Employing a social media administrator
- Using skilled volunteers (e.g., through Media Trust or Reach Volunteering)

**Tip:** Even a few hours of dedicated communications support each week can make a significant difference.

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## **8. Use Data to Influence and Improve Services**

Forums shared examples of using feedback strategically.

Approaches included:

- Conducting annual surveys
- Analysing feedback and producing reports
- Creating infographics to share key themes
- Presenting findings to local authorities

**Tip:** Keep surveys short and focused so parents are more likely to respond.

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## **9. Build Positive Relationships with Local Authorities**

Strong relationships help forums influence decisions earlier.

Key advice:

- Maintain a solution-focused approach
- Share evidence and parent feedback

- Work collaboratively in co-production discussions
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## 10. Encourage Word-of-Mouth Promotion

Several participants noted that **recommendations from other parents are one of the most effective ways to grow membership.**

**Tip:** Provide valuable information and support so parents naturally recommend the forum to others.

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### Overall takeaway:

Successful forums combine **consistent communication, community presence, strong partnerships, and effective use of digital tools** to raise awareness and grow engagement.

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