



SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT ADVOCACY

Getting involved in your child's education is among the most important things you can do to make sure that your child gets the support he or she needs throughout their school career.

- Your child has the right to a free and appropriate public school education.
- You have a right to be a part of every decision regarding your child's education, including the process of finding out if your child needs special services.
- You should familiarize yourself with your child's rights. These rights are federally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- You know your child best, and your input should be considered at every opportunity.

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting

- Focus on your goal
- Show respect and expect it from others
- Manage your emotions
- Ask questions
- Rephrase for clarification
- Say "thank you"

When you Disagree

- Disagree without being disagreeable
- Apologize if needed
- Separate the person from the problem
- Realize NO ONE has all the answers
- Make sure your facts are correct
- Choose your battles

Tips for Written Communication

Letters should:

- Be sent to the person who can make a change
- Be dated and signed
- Focus on one or two issues
- Be no longer than one page
- Set a deadline if a reply is requested
- Give your contact information

**Remember to keep a copy for yourself*

DID YOU KNOW?

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

What is an Advocate?
Advocates speak up for themselves or others to make things better.

Parents can bring someone else with them to most meetings. All participants are working together to help the child.

Involving the student in the meeting when appropriate is a great example for them to see parents and professionals working together for their benefit.

Children need as much practice in self-advocacy as possible before they reach the age of 18. Self-advocacy skills prepare students for the world and their future beyond high school.



SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT ADVOCACY

Six Skills to be an Effective Advocate

1. Understand your child's disability.
2. Know the key players: Who's on the committee?
3. Know your rights and responsibilities: What are the rules?
4. Become well organized: What is my plan of action?
5. Use clear and effective communication: What do I say when it's my turn?
6. Know how to resolve disagreements: What do we do when we disagree?

Skill 1 - Understand your Child's Disability

Understanding helps you:

- Know which services are appropriate for your child
- Have high expectations
- Find the right assistive technology (AT) and accommodations

Skill 2 - Know the Key Players

- Who is the decision maker?
- Are staff people public, non-profit, or private employees?
- How can you find a person's name?

Skill 3 - Know your Rights and Responsibilities

Learn about them by:

- Read web sites
- Asking how the service is funded
- Asking to see laws and policies
- Asking questions
- Joining a group

Skills 4 - Become Well Organized

- Keep records
- Put it in writing
- Keep a phone log
- Have a meeting notebook

Skills 5 - Use Clear and Effective Communication

- Keep your eyes on the "prize" – the right service for your child.
- Listen and ask questions
- Focus on needs of the child
- Problem solve together to find solutions
- Speak clearly
- Avoid making people feel defensive
- Turn negatives into positives
- Summarize

Skill 6 - Know How to Resolve Disagreements

Informal Processes:

- Talk to people first

Formal Processes:

- Mediation
- Complaints
- Appeals