

*Parents are
their children's
best advocates.*

Advocating For Your Child

As a parent, you are your child's best advocate for his or her health care, education and overall development. Here are several suggestions that may help you to most effectively advocate for your child or for yourself.

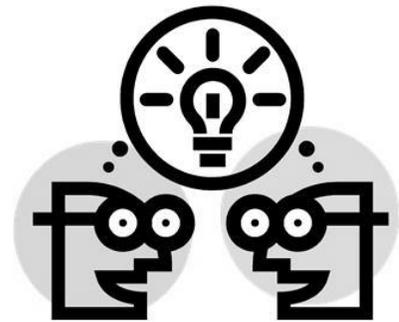
Identify the issue

The first step in advocating for your child is to identify the problems and concerns you want to resolve. You can identify a problem in a variety of ways, including:

- As a statement describing your views, such as "I think that my son isn't getting the help and supports he needs in order to succeed in math class."
- As a statement describing your child's individual problem, such as "Jill is struggling in class and with her homework, and I am concerned that she may have a reading disability and/or some kind of attentional issue, like ADHD."
- As a statement describing a larger problem, such as "There do not seem to be enough sign language interpreters to accommodate all of the children who need this service."
- Note areas of concern such as procedural errors, contradictions, inappropriate goals and objectives, or the need for additional or different services.

Request a meeting and bring a support person if you choose

When you ask that a meeting be held, be sure to put that request in writing. It may be helpful to invite someone to come with you. This person can take notes, brainstorm, strategize with you before and after the meeting, ask questions, and provide moral support. This person can be a friend, family member, or professional.



Gather supporting information

It's important to gather facts to support your opinion that a problem exists. Become familiar with school and/or medical records, test scores, assessments, and reports, as well as shared observations.



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1 800-800-4005

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Sharing this information with the school or agency you're dealing with can be very helpful. While you have a great deal of knowledge and expertise about your child, it's helpful to present whatever evidence exists when making your case. You may offer information and recommendations based on your own knowledge of your child or you may ask for input from sources outside of your family such as your pediatrician, a psychologist, or other professionals. This information can help support your description of the problem and the changes you would like to see. Even if there is little data on record to support your view, you have every right to advocate on behalf of your child both verbally and in writing.

Know who is responsible

Identify the person or agency with the power to help you resolve the problem. It is also important to understand the chain of command within an organization, agency, or school. If you are not satisfied with the response you are getting from one staff person, contact someone higher in the organization who does have the authority to better address your concerns.

Putting things in writing and asking for things in writing is vitally important, both for clarity and record keeping. Using email can be an excellent way to contact and copy all relevant parties. If you don't have computer access, writing a note or letter is fine. Asking for confirmation of receipt can be helpful.

Identify solutions and suggest time limits

It's helpful to go to a meeting prepared with solutions. Discuss with the appropriate professionals and administrators a reasonable time limit for them to act on your recommendations, or to explain why they won't, if they refuse. Ask them to explain what they intend to do to address the problem, and why.

It's helpful to point out the laws that protect your child's and your family's rights.

Remember that you and your child have rights

As a parent, you have rights when it comes to your child's development, health and well-being. You have the right:

- To discuss your concerns without being intimidated.
- To ask questions about information you don't understand until you do understand it.
- To request services without being made to feel guilty or selfish because you are "demanding too much."
- To seek professional advice and second opinions.
- To expect your child to reach his or her full potential.
- To expect help and encouragement in your role as parents.

Resources

[The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education \(CADRE\)](#)
Resources and tools for using mediation and other collaborative strategies to resolve disagreements about special education and early intervention programs.
541-686-5060

[Wrightslaw](#)

Information about special education law, education law and advocacy for children with disabilities.
877-529-4332