

Tips for Being an Effective Advocate for Your Child

Preparation:

Start by knowing *you are an equal partner in your child's development, medical care & education! You are an expert on your child!*

Understand your feelings about yourself as a caregiver of a child with special needs or a disability. Allow yourself to take a break and practice self-care.

Acquire Knowledge. Remember that information is power. Understand the disability and how it affects their growth and learning. Know the laws, your rights and any services to support your child.

Have specific goals you would like to achieve for your child.

Identify the key issues or problems that you and your child are encountering.

Identify some possible solutions that you see as workable.

Identify what you are willing to accept if you cannot get exactly what you want.

Identify support people who may be able to help you.

Develop positive partnerships with professionals and others in your child's life who can help you and your child achieve wanted results.

Communication:

Address any concerns you have as they come up. Remember to tackle problems, not people! Always keep the lines of communication open. Always keep a sense of humor.

Be clear, concrete and assertive so that others understand you have expectations you want to achieve. Assertiveness includes firm (but not harsh) tone of voice with erect but relaxed body posture and eye contact.

Listen carefully to what other people are saying. Ask questions so you can better understand.

Keep the focus on your child. Share your child's strengths/interests with professionals and service providers. Remember to use stories or visual ways to communicate information.

Share your thoughts, ideas and dreams that you have for your child and family.

Documentation:

Keep all of your child's records organized and together in one place, like in a Care Notebook.

Keep a log of phone calls to doctors, service providers and teachers.

Keep a record of your conversations, requests, written responses and other important documents.

Participation:

Participate in all meetings about your child. Connect with participants by addressing them by name.

Involve your child in decision making as early as you can. They will need these skills to be on their own.

The above tips are gleaned from advocacy publications from the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center, the NC Department of Health and Human Services, <https://nbacl.nb.ca/module-pages/tips-for-being-an-effective-advocate/> and <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-parents-can-be-advocates-their-children>