



Effective Advocacy Tips for Parents

Parents and advocates can do many things to prepare for school meetings and ensure their opinions are heard. Here are some suggestions:

- ***Voice your opinion to school staff.*** You can provide important information about your child that school staff might not be aware of. Share information with school staff about what your child needs to be successful in school. Tell them about your child's strengths, interests, and what supports you think your child needs to be successful in school.
- ***Keep the focus on the child.*** Make sure the focus of any school meeting is on your child's needs and how to help your child make educational progress. If disagreements arise between you and school staff, explain your position in terms of what your child needs to succeed in school.
- ***Bring others and/or others' insight to meetings.*** Take a friend, advocate, service provider and/or someone who can share valuable knowledge/insight about your child to your child's school meetings. School meetings often involve a team of school personnel which can be intimidating. It is always great to bring people who know the child and can support you in advocacy. If there is someone who has insight or cannot make it, have them write a letter that can be provided to the school. This input can be put into a child's IEP as provider's input.
- ***Come prepared for a meeting.*** Before going to a school meeting, prepare for it. Write a list of issues to talk about at the meeting. If it is an IEP meeting, prepare your own Parent Input and Parental Education Concerns for IEP meetings. Bring them to meetings and ask them to be typed into your child's IEP. If it is a school meeting, come with a list of questions or concerns and ensure that all are addressed before you leave the meeting. If the meeting will be centered on a document/report like the IEP, feel free to ask for a draft of the document prior to the meeting. Read any relevant documents that will be discussed during the meeting and put comments/questions in the margins. At the meeting, ask for a written draft so that you can follow along and take notes as well. Use these notes to ensure changes are made in the document.

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- ***Get information on school staff working with your child.*** When attending school meetings, ask each person at the meeting to state their name, position, and what type of work they do with the child. Keep a record of that information for future use. Find out the best way to get a hold of staff members if you need to follow up with them.
- ***Ask for copies of any cited policies.*** When a school staff member states a policy or procedure that you are concerned about, ask the school staff member for a copy of the written policy, law, or regulation to which they are referring to.
- ***Get clarification.*** Don't agree to anything or sign anything you don't understand. Make sure to ask questions and ask for clarification if you need more information to make a decision. Ensure you fully understand the services your child is receiving. Feel free to take papers home and read them before signing. You do not have to sign any document immediately if you are not comfortable with it.
- ***Hold school staff accountable for promises.*** If a school official or teacher has agreed to do something, identify a timeframe for the action to take place and follow up with the official to ensure it gets done.
- ***Write a follow up email/note after a meeting.*** Thank the staff for taking the time to meet with you and talk about your concerns. Also, outline any actions that you all decided on and who will be involved in those actions. The purpose of sending an email/note is two-fold. First of all, it shows that you appreciate the staff's effort. Secondly, it helps solidify that actions will take place and who is responsible for what parts of the actions.
- ***Keep records.*** Try to use email or written correspondence when working with schools. Keep copies of letters, reports or other materials you receive from or provide to your child's school. Make notes of any phone, email, or in person conversations with school officials. Include the date the conversation took place and the person's name and position in your notes. Keep all papers in one place.

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