

15 Steps for Advocating for Your Child

"They say that time changes all things, but actually, you have to change them yourself!"

Andy Warhol

1. Trust Yourself. You are your child's first and best teacher, and you know him/her better than anyone. You love your child. You are a consistent lifelong influence. Trust your gut and intuition.

2. Dig Deeper to Learn the Reason for Concern or Issue. If your child is not yet receiving special education services through an IEP and is struggling in school, figure out the reason why. Is it because he/she is not turning in homework? Or is it because he/she cannot read? Or does your child not even know homework was assigned? These are different issues. Before you can solve one or the other, you have to find out which it is.

3. Talk to Your Child's Teacher(s). This is a critical first step when your child is struggling in school. Call, email or text your child's teacher to set up a time to visit. You do not have to wait until parent teacher conferences or the annual IEP to have this discussion. Ask the teacher(s) if he/she is seeing the same issue you are. Find out how you can support your child's learning at home. Ask what the next unit or lesson is going to be so you can talk about it with your child. If it is a behavior issue, talk about different positive strategies to work on together. Problem solve as partners.

4. Become familiar with WY Content Standards. Go online to Wyoming Department of Education website and find the grade level standard for each subject. Then you will know what your child is expected to learn and know for that particular year. Arm yourself with that information when you are having the discussion with the school.

5. Gather Information about Services. Learn about the services and programs at school. Inform yourself about your child's area of weakness or need. Make a list of these areas of concern and be very specific. Clarify the concern so everyone understands why you are looking for support or extra services for your child. Foster your child's strengths while defining those areas of need.

6. Tackle Your Own Obstacles. Learn to control your emotions and use them as a source of energy. When working with the school, try to stay positive and not get defensive or take their suggestions as blame. Recognize the spirit in which they are meant, which is to help your child succeed.

7. If Your Child is Not on an IEP, Ask for an Initial Evaluation. If your child is already on an IEP, ask for another meeting to address any new concerns. See PIC's disability brochure on initial evaluations at http://www.wpic.org/images/PDF/Disability_Brochures/25InitialEvaluations0718.pdf.

8. Know Who the Players Are. Learn what role every teacher and related service plays in your child's plan and visit with all of them. Find out who is the special education

director and school or program administrator so you are aware of who is in charge of big decisions. Spend time getting to know the school secretary since she/he is the one, besides your child's case manager, that you are likely to communicate with the most.

10. Learn the Rules and Regulations. (or where to find them when you need them!) Gather school policies and procedures, and handbooks and familiarize yourself with them. Know your child's rights as stated in the special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

11. Create a Master Plan and Set Realistic Goals. Review your child's IEP regularly and monitor it to see if you have the needed reports or documentation to determine if progress has been made. Dig deeper to understand any evaluations on district or statewide assessments and what those scores mean for your child. Build a chart of at least two years of the data (scores) to see progress, or lack thereof.

12. Plan and Prepare for the Next Step or Meeting. Decide on the most important priority for your child. Pick one or two issues to address, and write them down. Choosing too many can muddy the water and then focus is lost on what you have decided is most important. If there is a meeting or IEP scheduled, develop an agenda. If the school sends you one, be sure your priority is added to it towards the beginning of meeting so it will be addressed while the majority of the team is still present. Stay on target.

13. Follow Up and Follow Through. Reset Goals if Needed. If the school brings data or reports that surprise you, ask for explanations and definition of what that data might mean for your child's program. Follow up on any further information or research needed. Be open to feedback, acknowledge progress and maintain flexibility.

14. Support the People Who Educate and Care for Your Child. Stay in touch with the team. Thank them regularly and provide constructive feedback without making them defensive. If you have an opposing view, discuss it thoroughly and provide reasons for your perspective. Define clearly what you are looking for.

15. Empower Your Child to Advocate for Him/Herself. Help your child learn to make decisions on his/her own. This builds self-confidence and provides ownership in the outcomes that effect your child.

**Always Remember:
You are Your Child's Best Advocate!**

Tips for Handling Tough Conversations

- Begin with agreement
- Try to Make it a Win-Win for all
- Say "and", not "but"
- Use lots of "I" Statements
- Avoid negatives and absolutes

**For more info on
advocating for your child,
contact:**



**Parent
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**HOW TO ADVOCATE
FOR YOUR CHILD**

Disability Brochure #37



**How to Advocate for
Your Child on an IEP**

Parent Information Center
1 (307) 684-2277

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