

Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy



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What is Advocacy?

Advocates speak up for themselves or others to make things better.

- Your experiences are valuable and can be used to improve things
- You know when something is or isn't working
- You have ideas how to make things better
- You have the only long-term connection to this child


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Advocacy is a Set of Skills to Learn

1. Understand your child's disability
2. Know the key players
3. Know your rights and responsibilities
4. Being organized
5. Use clear and effective communication
6. Know how to resolve disagreements




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Skill #1 Understand Your Child's Disability


Understanding Your Child's Disability

-  Know what your child's needs are based on their disability.
 - Academic Achievement
 - Functional Performance
-  Establish high expectations.
-  Share your knowledge with the IEP Team.
-  Use your experience to tell the IEP Team about your child's strengths and what helps your child learn.
-  Considerations:
 - Assistive Technology
 - Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports


Resources:

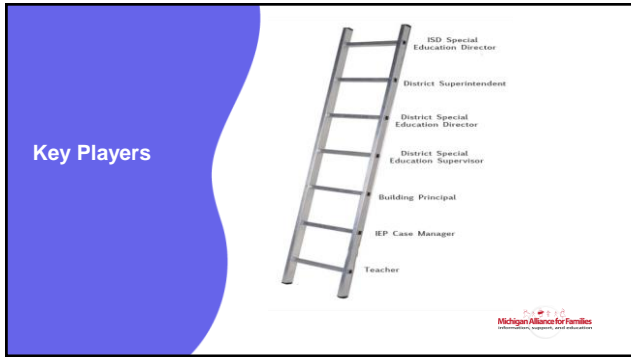
Michigan Alliance for Families Website:

- [Disability Information](#)
- [Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance](#)
- [Individual Family Service Plan](#)
- [Assistive Technology \(AT\)](#)
- [Positive Behavior Interventions and Support \(PBIS\)](#)



Skill #2 Know the Key Players





Know the Key Players

Accurate Information is Key. Contact information: Name, School District, ISD, Contract, Supervisor, phone number, email.

Decision Makers/Supervisors

Best means of communication for you?
 Best means of communication for staff?

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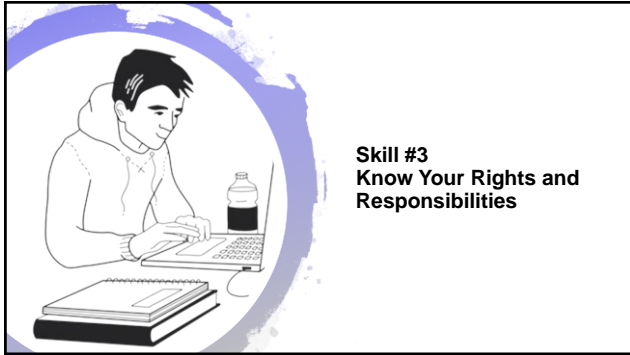
Early On[®]: Know the Key Players

Accurate Information is Key. Contact information: Name, phone number, email.
 Early On Coordinator
 Service Coordinator
 Service Providers

Early On services may be provided by several different Human Service Agencies or organization

Best means of communication for you?
 Best means of communication for staff?

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**Skill #3:
Know Your Rights**

- [Procedural Safeguards](#)
- [Students with Disabilities: An Advocates Guide](#)
- Asking to see the district's policy and special education law
- Asking questions

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Resources

Michigan Alliance for Families Website:

- [Procedural Safeguards](#)
 - Webinars: Special Education Rights
 - Webinars: *Early On Rights*
- [COVID 19 – State & Federal Guidance](#)
 - Webinars – COVID 19
 - [Early On – COVID 19](#)
- [Early On – Know Your Rights](#)
- [Laws – Federal and State](#)
- [E-Newsletter](#)

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Use what works for you

Record Keeping

- IEP: This year, last year and all other years
- Progress Reports
- Outside of school evaluations

Log Notebook

- Meeting notes
- Hallway conversations
- Phone call notes

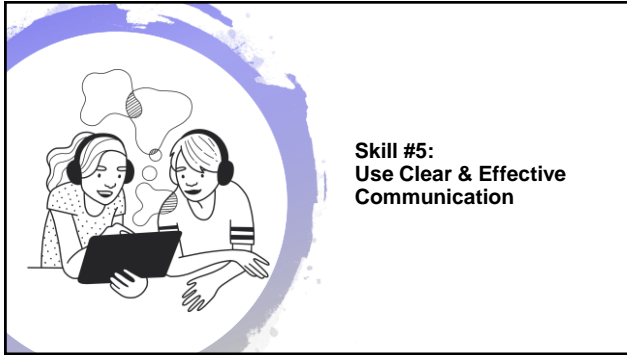
Emails and text messages

- Separate email or email folders
- Documenting informal conversations
- Keeping text messages

Resources:

Michigan Alliance for Families Website:

- [Parent Advocacy](#)
 - [Understood.org: Organizing an IEP Binder](#)



Clear & Effective Communication	
When you are talking...	Stay focused on the child and their needs
	Before the meeting, write your questions and concerns down
	Don't go alone. Take a family member or friend
	Direct concerns to the person who can best address the issue
	Restate your concerns if you think you were not heard the first time
	Ask for draft IEP prior to the meeting – allow yourself time to fully understand the information

Clear & Effective Communication (cont')	
When others are talking...	Listen – is the speaker expressing an opinion or is data being shared
	Take notes
	Allow speaker to finish before asking questions
	Ask Clarifying questions or restate what you heard and ask if your understanding is correct
	Summarize action steps and discuss timeframe

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Tips for Written Communication

Reasons for putting it in writing

- _____ Making a request
- _____ Asking for clarification
- _____ Clarifying what you want to say
- _____ Asking for a decision
- _____ Documenting a verbal discussion



Tips for Written Communication – con't

Details to remember

- _____ Send to the person who can make the change.
- _____ Focus on one or two issue.
- _____ Limit length – be brief
- _____ Set a deadline, if a reply is requested
- _____ Include the date, your name and contact information
- _____ Keep a copy of letters written on paper



Michigan Alliance for Families: Resources

- [Documenting and writing letters](#) - including sample letters
- [Early On: Effectively Communicate](#)





Resolving Disagreements

5 Tools

1. Informal Meeting
2. Review/Revise the IEP or Facilitated IEP
3. Mediation
4. State Complaint
5. Due Process Complaint/Hearing

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Tools for Resolving Conflict

1. Informal Meeting

- Parent and district meet & try to resolve issues
- When appropriate, start with teacher or principal, and move up the chain of command

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Tools for Resolving Conflict (cont'd. 2)



2. Review/Revise IEP/IFSP

- IEP Team meets to review the current IEP and make necessary revisions



Facilitated IEP/IFSP

- IEP meeting led by neutral person
- Helps keep discussion focused on students needs
- Address and defuse conflict



Tools for Resolving Conflict (cont'd. 3)



3. Mediation

- A Mediator helps parents and district talk about the issues & ways the dispute can be resolved
- Written agreement is signed by parent and district if they reach an agreement
- Mediator is neutral, has no connection with parent or district; trained in special education.



Tools for Resolving Conflict (cont'd. 4)



4. State Complaint

- A written complain is submitted to Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education alleging the district has violated state or federal special education rules or regulations.
- Decide if district is compliant or noncompliant



5. Due Process Complaint/Hearing

- Administrative Law Judge conducts a hearing, similar to court hearing (witnesses testify under oath, parties present exhibits & documents)
- Decision made by Administrative Law Judge, enforced by MDE/OSE

Resources:

Michigan Alliance for Families Website

- [Dispute Resolution](#)
- Webinar: Working Together When We Disagree
- Disability Rights Michigan – 800-288-5923



[Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\)](#)

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