

Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy



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



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

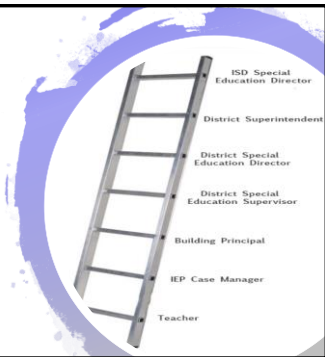
Resources:

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



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



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](#)





#4. Being Organized

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](#)





Skill #5: Use Clear & Effective Communication

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

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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](#)





#6. Know how to resolve disagreements

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



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



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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