

Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy in Early Childhood

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Parenting: Expectations vs. Reality



What is Advocacy?

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

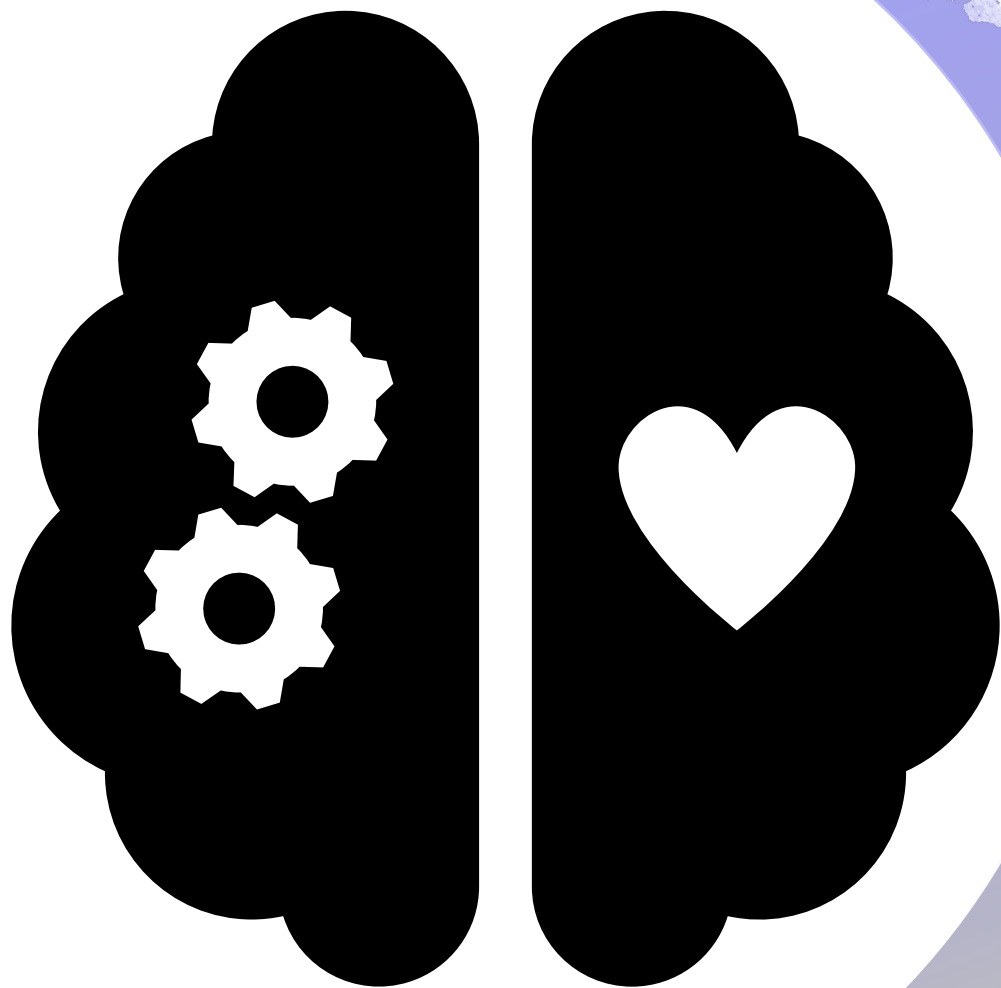
- Your experiences are valuable and can be used to improve things
- You know when something is or isn't working
- You have ideas how to make things better
- You have the only long-term connection to this child



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





Skill #1
Understand Your
Child's Disability

Understanding Your Child's Disability

Learn more about your child's disability

Disability-specific organizations

Books & reputable websites

Parent groups

Write down your questions for professionals



Understanding Your Child's Disability

Know what your child's needs are based on their disability

Share your knowledge with the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) / Individualized Education Program (IEP) team

Communicate your child's strengths and what helps your child learn



Understanding Your Child's Disability

Establish high expectations



Resources:

Michigan Alliance for Families Website:

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



Skill #2
Know the Key Players



Early On ®
Lead agency

https://1800earlyon.org/eo_coordinators.php



Early On[®] Service Coordinator

What do they do?

- Help you understand information given to you;
- Inform you of your rights within the Early On Program;
- Help you get the evaluations and assessments your child needs;
- Let you know what services are available and how to get them;
- Coordinate and assist in the development and review of the IFSP;
- Make sure you receive the services that are on your IFSP;
- Help you access support services, such as parent groups;
- Assist in the development and implementation of a transition plan;
- Refer you to other services, such as childcare, health or family support services; and
- Help you become your child's best advocate

Early On[®]: Know the Key Players



Contact Information: Name,
Email, Phone Number

Early On Coordinator
Service Coordinator
Service Providers



Early On services may be provided by several
agencies/organizations



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

School: Know the Key Players



Decision Makers/Supervisors

Teachers and Therapists
Early Childhood Special Education Director
District Special Education Director
District Superintendent
ISD/RESA Special Education Director



Contact Information

Name
School District
ISD/RESA
Supervisor
Phone number and email



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



Skill #3
Know Your Rights and
Responsibilities

Examples of Your Family's Rights in *Early On*

- **Fully understand** each step in the *Early On* process
- Have your child and family **information protected**
- **Consent to or decline** services
- **Review records**
- Help **resolve disagreements**
- Submit a **complaint**

Call: **800-327-5966** (1-800-Early On)
to reach *Early On*
or **800-552-4821** to reach your
Regional Parent Mentor at
Michigan Alliance for Families

Skill #3: Know Your Rights

- Students with Disabilities: An Advocates Guide
 - Chapter 9 Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Programs
- Ask questions

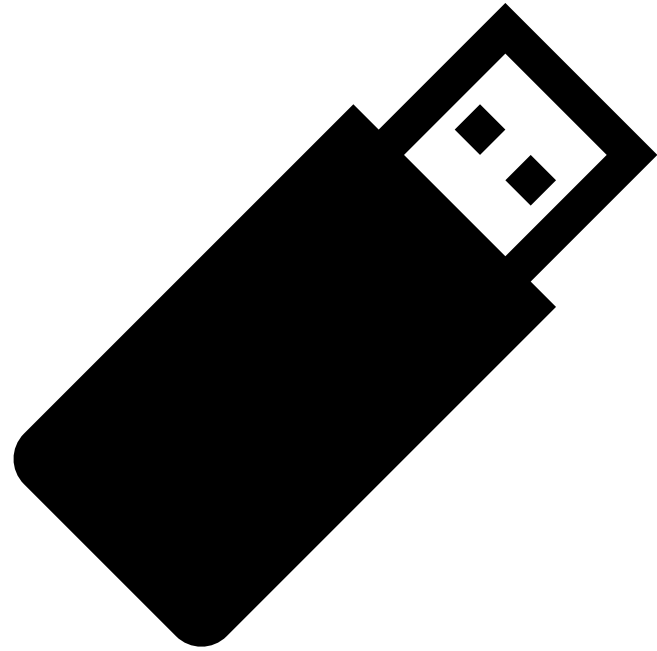


Resources

Michigan Alliance for Families Website:

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





#4. Being Organized



Use what works for you



Record Keeping

IFSP / IEP: This year, last year and all other years
Progress Reports
Evaluations



Log Notebook

Meeting notes
Casual conversations
Phone call notes



Emails and Text

Separate email or email folders
Documenting informal conversations
Keeping text messages

What works for you?



Resources:

Michigan Alliance for Families Website:

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





**Skill #5:
Use Clear & Effective
Communication**

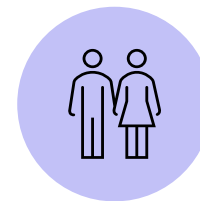
When you're talking...



Stay focused on your child and their needs



Have concerns and questions written down beforehand as a reminder



Have someone with you who can help you stay on track. Don't go alone.



Direct concerns to the person who can best address the issue



Restate your concerns if you feel you weren't heard the first time

When others are talking...



Listen – is the speaker expressing opinions or is data being shared?



Take notes



Wait to ask questions

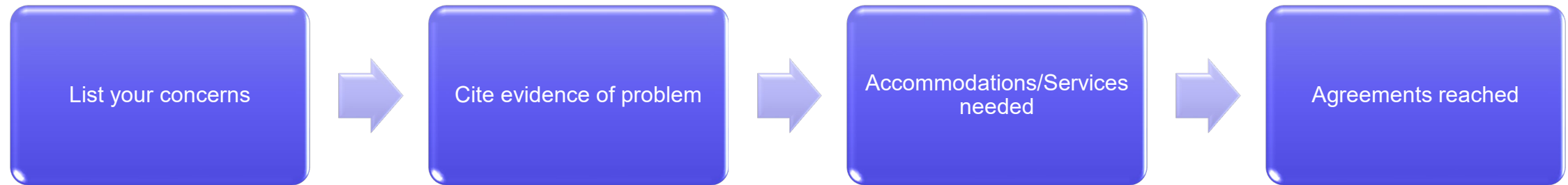


Ask clarifying questions or restate what you heard to confirm understanding



Summarize action steps and confirm timeframe

Use an action plan



Effective written communication

When to put it in writing?

Making a request

Asking for clarification

Clarifying what you want to say

Asking for a decision

Documenting a verbal discussion

Details to remember when writing

Send to the person who can make the change

Focus on one or two issues

Limit length – be brief

Set a deadline, if a reply is requested

Include the date, your name and contact information

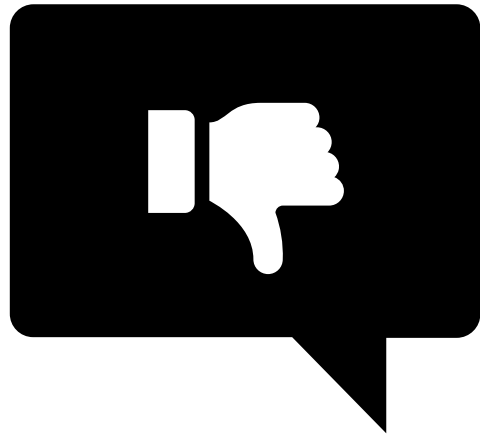
Keep a copy of letters written on paper



Resources

- [Early On: Effectively Communicate](#)
- [Documenting and writing letters](#) - with sample letters
- [Sample action plan](#)





**#6. Know how to
resolve disagreements**

5 Tools for Resolving Disagreements



Informal Meeting /
Review of IFSP /
IEP



Facilitated IFSP /
IEP



Mediation



State Complaint



Due Process
Complaint/Hearing



**Special Education
Mediation Services**

1-833-KIDS-1ST

Resources:

Michigan Alliance for Families Website

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



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

833-KIDS-1ST

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We are here to support you!

 @MichiganAllianceForFamilies

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 /MichiganAlliance

For more information visit:

<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org>

Call: 800-552-4821

En Español 313-217-1060

Statewide Email: info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org



Michigan Alliance for Families

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www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org

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EVALUATION

