

Skills for Effective Parent 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



What is Advocacy?

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

Be organized

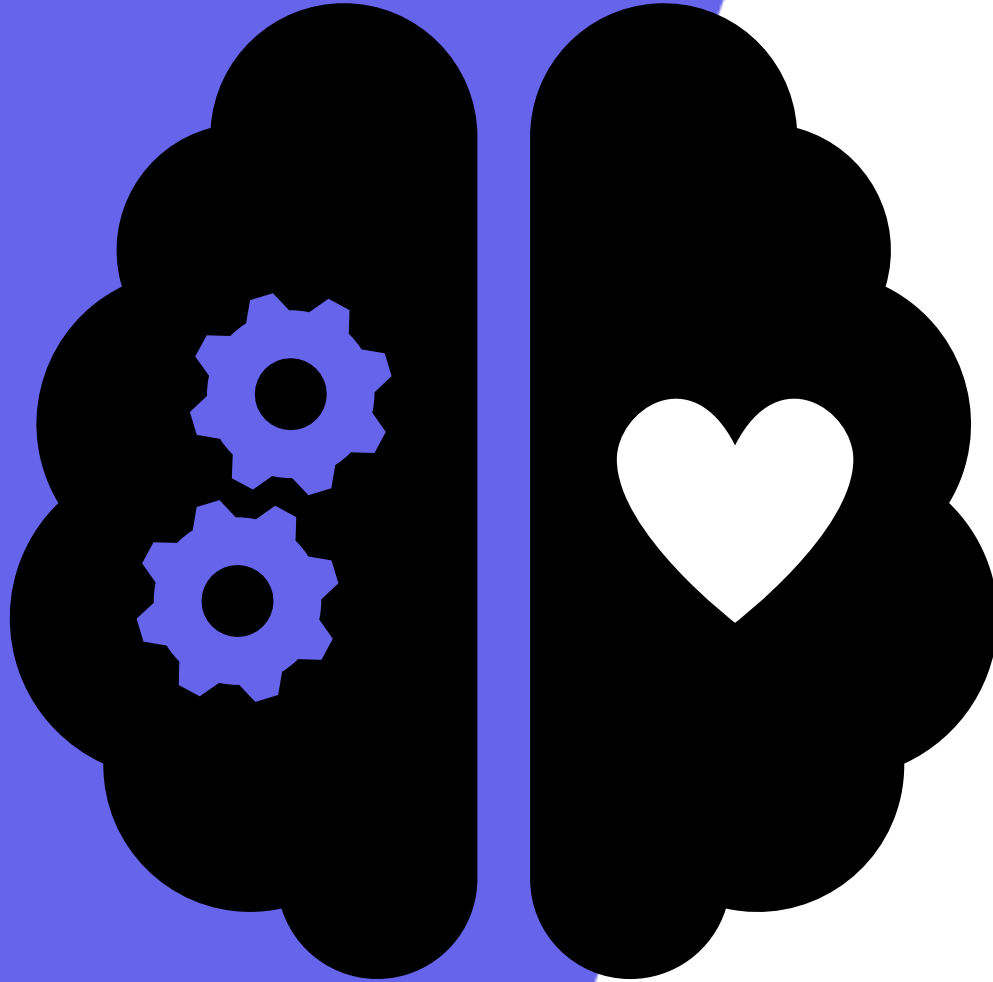
5

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 Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team



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



Understanding Your Child's Disability

Establish high expectations



Understanding Your Child's Disability

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Assistive Technology (AT)





Skill #2

Know the Key Players



ISD Special Education Director

District Superintendent

District Special Education Director

District Special Education Supervisor

Building Principal

IEP Case Manager

Teacher

School: Knowing the Key Players



Decision Makers/Supervisors



Contact Information

School District

ISD/RESA

Supervisor

Phone number and email



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

Early On[®]: Knowing 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?

Community: Knowing the Key Players



Other Parents

Volunteer

PTA / PTO

Teacher Appreciation



School Staff

Secretary

Bus Driver

Lunch room



Students / Peers



Skill #3

Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

Know Your Rights and Responsibilities:

Procedural Safeguards

Examples:

- Have your child and family **information protected**
- **Consent to or decline** services
- **Review records**
- Help **resolve disagreements**
- Submit a **complaint**

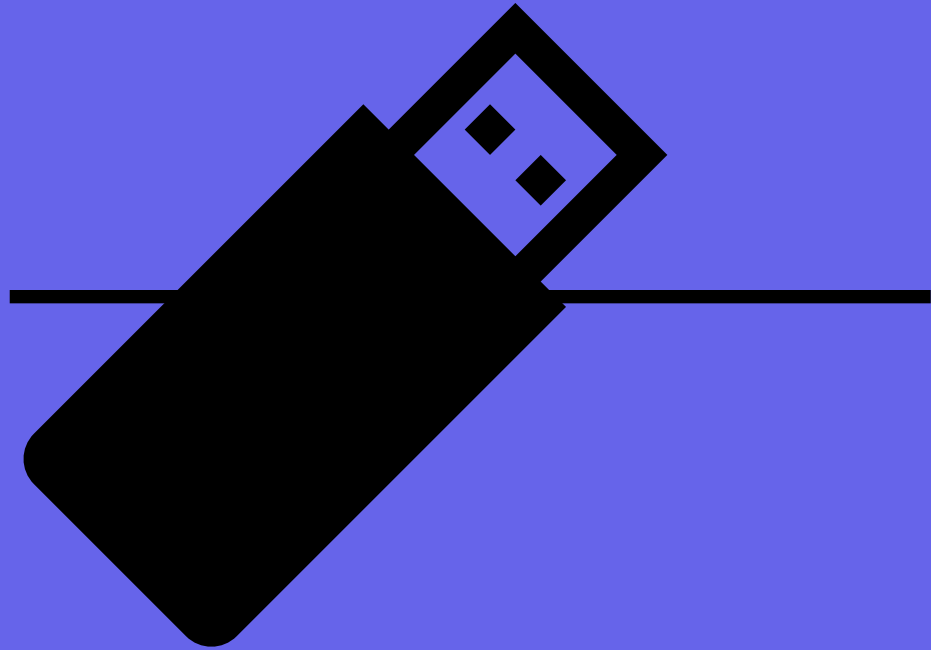


Know Your Rights and Responsibilities



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





#4. Being Organized



Use what works for you



Record Keeping

IEP / IFSP – current and previous
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



Skill #5: Use Clear & Effective Communication

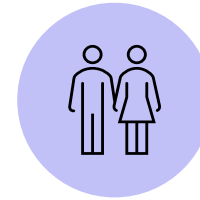
When you're talking...



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

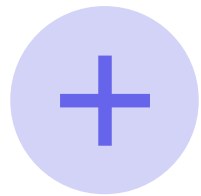


Summarize action steps and confirm timeframe

Use an action plan

Concern	✓	Action	Who is Responsible	Next Update

When to put it in writing



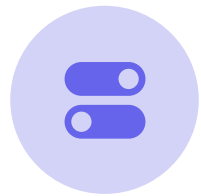
Making a request



Asking for clarification



Clarifying what you want to say



Asking for a decision



Documenting a verbal discussion

Tips for Written Communication



Send to the person who can make the change



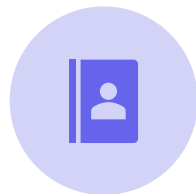
Focus on one or two issues



Limit length
- be brief



Set a deadline if you expect a response



Include the date, your name, and contact info



Keep a copy



#6. Know how to resolve disagreements

Options for Resolving Disagreements



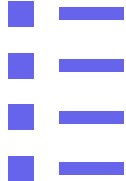
Informal Meeting



Facilitated Meeting



Mediation



State Complaint



Due Process Complaint/Hearing



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We are here to support you!

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For more information visit:
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Michigan Alliance for Families

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