

# 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

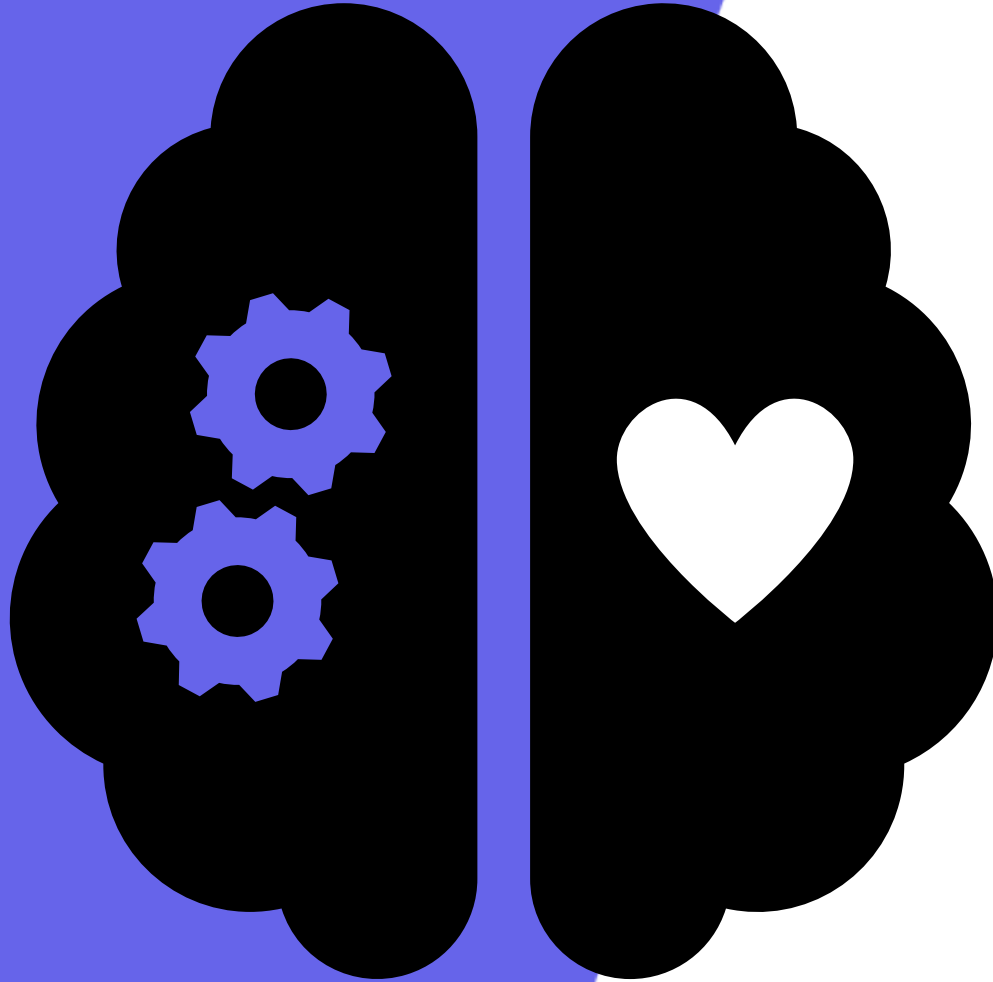
5

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*<sup>®</sup>: 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**



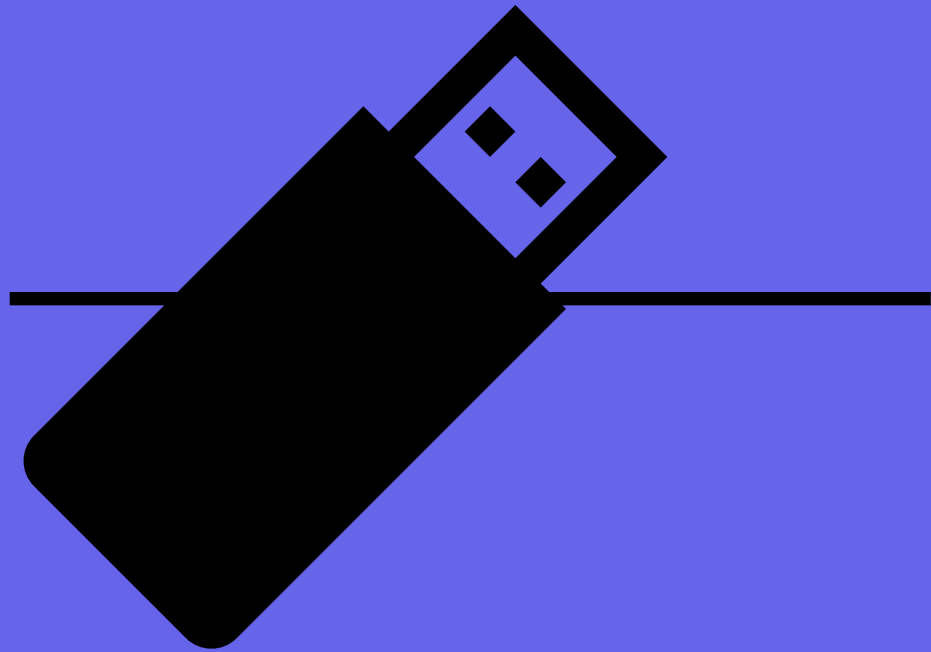
# Know Your Rights and Responsibilities



- 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**

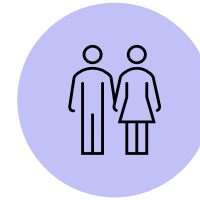
# When you're talking...



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



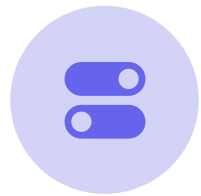
Making a request



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



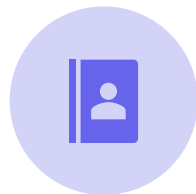
Focus on one or two issues



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



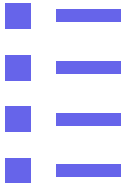
**Informal Meeting**



**Facilitated Meeting**



**Mediation**



**State Complaint**



**Due Process Complaint/Hearing**



# 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



# We are here to support you!

 @MichiganAllianceForFamilies

 @michiganallianceforfamilies

 /MichiganAlliance

**For more information visit**

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

Call 800-552-4821

En Español 313-217-1060

248-963-0607 للغة العربية

[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)



# Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

1-800-552-4821

[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

