Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy

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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?

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Advocacy is a Set of Skills to Learn

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

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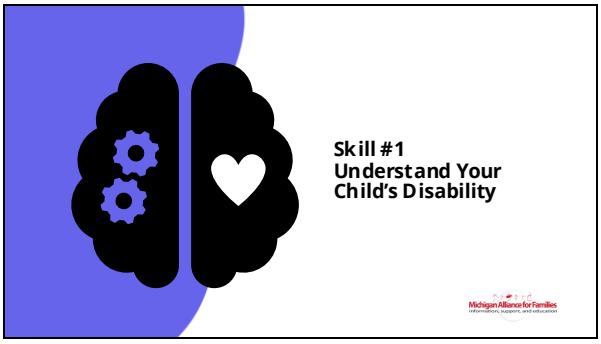

Understanding Your Child's Disability

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

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	Classmates Teammates Friends

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Skill #3
Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

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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**

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Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

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

Disability Rights Michigan

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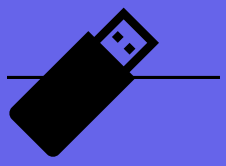

#4. Being Organized

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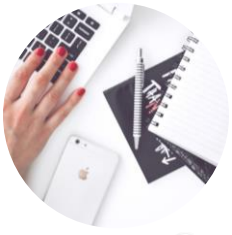

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Use what works for you

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

Special Education Mediation Services
1-833-KIDS-1ST

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

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We are here to support you!

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For more information visit
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In collaboration with The Arc Michigan

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