



Advocating for Your Child



Things to Think About

- You are your child's first teacher
- You know your child better than anyone else
- You are your child's best and most important role model
- When we speak for others, our actions are not only about us, but also about them – others are judged on our actions



Things to Think About

- Assure your children that you are their allies. Parents should let their child know that they are advocating for their needs. Also, as a child gets older, help them advocate for themselves
- Ask, listen and answer questions about your child's concerns during the process
- Help create an atmosphere of respect and affection.
- Bring your child or at least a picture to all of the meetings!



Your Primary Goals

1. To ensure your child has a Free and Appropriate Public Education which is individualized for his/her needs.
2. To build positive, working relationships with the schools



How Can You Be a Strong Advocate for Your Child?

I. Plan for the Future

- Have a goal in mind
 - What is your long term goal for your child
 - How will you know if he/she is progressing towards that goal?
- What do you want for your child?
- What does your child want?



How Can You Be a Strong Advocate for Your Child?

2. Gather Information

- ✦ The more you know, the better off you are
- ✦ Make sure this information is well organized, so you can easily access it when necessary
- ✦ If you meet with people from the community/agencies, ask for a business card for your file – you might need it later



How Can You Be a Strong Advocate for Your Child?

3. Learn about the system

- Know about the school district
- Know who makes the decisions
- Know your legal rights
 - Read the parental rights which are given to you each year
 - Ask questions if you don't understand them
- Have an understanding that the school has a list of things they need addressed as well



How Can You Be a Strong Advocate for Your Child?

4. Plan and Prepare

- ✦ Prepare for the meetings
 - Know why you are meeting
 - Bring an agenda for the meeting
 - Jot down questions before you go to the meeting
 - Know your priorities for the meeting – ask if these are not addressed
 - Take a notebook with you to take notes as necessary
 - Bring someone with you – don't go to the meetings alone – you will find that they will pick up on things you don't



How Can You Be a Strong Advocate for Your Child?

5. Identify Problems

- ✦ Be able to describe the problem in multiple ways
 - Express what you observe, how that makes you feel, what you need, and what actions you would like to have taken.
 - When I (see/hear) _____, I feel _____, because I (need/value) _____. Would you be willing to _____?



Communication Involves 3 Components

1. Verbal Messages – words we choose
2. Paraverbal Messages – how we say the words
3. Nonverbal Messages – our body language



These 3 components are used to:

1. Send clear, concise messages
2. Receive and correctly understand messages sent to us



How to Handle a Difficult Conversation

- Begin by finding things everyone agrees upon
- Use “I” statements instead of “You” statements (“You” statements can be construed as critical or judgmental)
- Avoid Negatives because people will feel hostile (instead of saying, “don’t do ____”; say, “Is it possible ____”)



How to Handle a Difficult Conversation (cont)

- Try to see things from the school's point of view, but do not compromise your principles. In some conflicts, both sides can be right. Ask lots of questions, so you can see both points of view.
- Find some positive comments to share.
- Start questions with, “What would it take in order to...” – this allows a brainstorming session rather than a yes/no answer.



How Can You Be a Strong Advocate for Your Child?

- **6. Propose Solutions**
 - Remember, you want to be a problem solver as well – look for ways to make it a Win-Win situation
 - Review your priorities and make sure they have been addressed



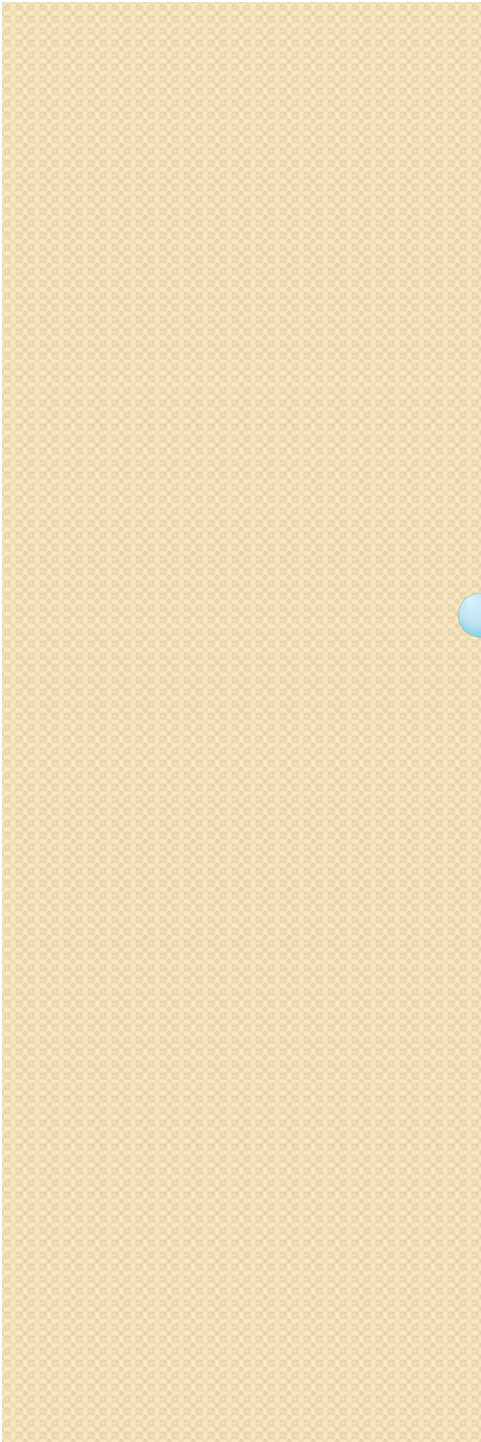
What Should You Do Next?

- Organize all of your information
 - Develop an organizational system
 - I would recommend a 3 ring binder system
 - One binder for the educational documents you will have
 - One binder for all of the other information you will obtain
 - You also need a way to organize who you have talked to and when – a communication log is a great way to accomplish this



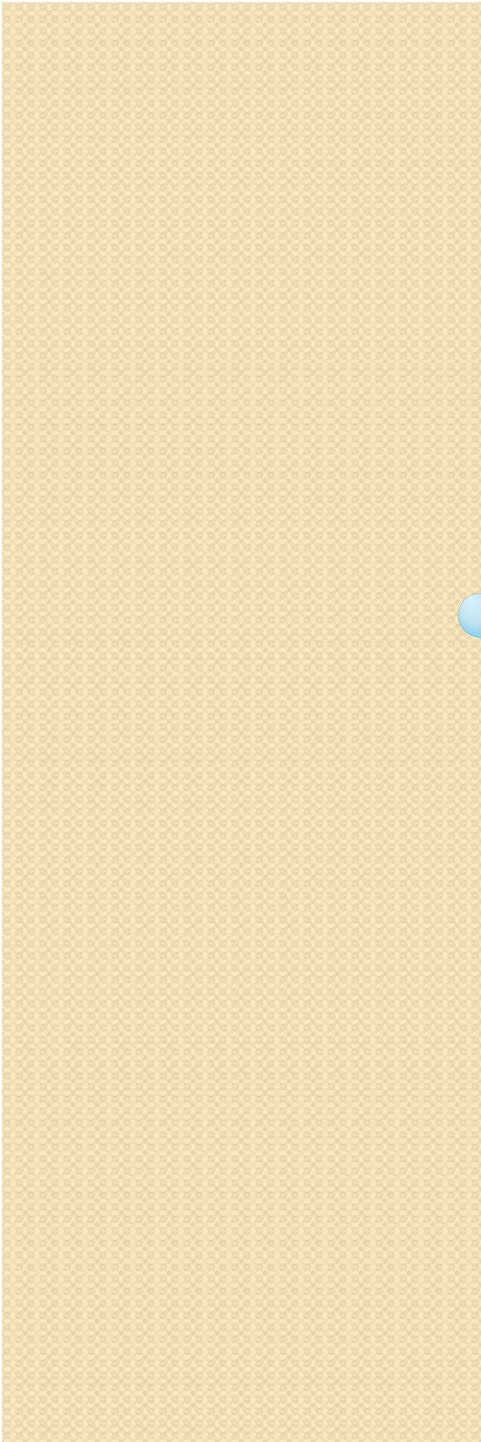
What Cautions Should Parents Take?

- Work towards one goal – the educational needs of your child
- Make sure your child knows that you believe that he/she will benefit from what you are trying to do
- Don't be intimidated by the system
 - You know your child best!
- Always remember to say “thank you” – those two words are very important



Being an effective advocate doesn't require specialized skills or extraordinary capabilities. Nor does it need to involve attempts to influence programs and policies.

It simply means making the case, in a focused and informed way, that something is important and needs to be done for your child.



Remember, you and the school are working towards a common goal – just from different perspectives.