

How To Be Your Child's Best Advocate

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Introduction

Emotional Investment of Parents

- ◆ Validate Parents. Be an expert on your own child. Stress importance of Dads.
- ◆ Guilt trip – Parents. It's nearly impossible to advocate for your own child.
- ◆ Bring a friend for extra eyes and ears.
- ◆ Bring a tape recorder and listen to the tape later and write up your own meeting minutes
- ◆ Develop a Vision Statement (parents and, if appropriate, the student too)
- ◆ KNOW WHAT YOU WANT
- ◆ Who is on the team?
- ◆ Understand the importance of regular educators. "It's just special ed's problem."
- ◆ Bury ancient history. It wastes time and energy and blocks forward progress.
- ◆ Guilt trip – School. Schools may say they don't have enough funding, no staff, no room, no time, problems with staff absences, unavailability of training. You can sympathize, but it's not your problem.

Organization Strategies

- ◆ Develop a paper trail in reverse chronological order.
- ◆ Separate emotion from facts.
- ◆ Document all conversations and phone calls. E-mail is a wonderful strategy.

Tactics and Strategies

- ◆ Develop a written statement of parental concerns for each meeting.
- ◆ F.E.R.P.A. – your right to educational records and inspection of files.
- ◆ Bring a tape recorder, extra batteries and cassettes.
- ◆ Invite people who support your viewpoint (out vote the school 😊)
- ◆ KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.
- ◆ Bring your own draft language – or not? Differing opinions.
- ◆ Document everything.
- ◆ I.E.E. (Independent Educational Eval) – when and how to use it.
- ◆ The power of a letter – parents should understand how much power they have.

What's in a Good IEP?

- ◆ Discuss the relationship among vision, goals and intermediate objectives or benchmarks.
- ◆ Parents can focus the team on what is valuable to the child in life – the vision.
- ◆ Transition – life after school
 - ◆ Grows from family's vision and only family can advocate for this
 - ◆ Start transition planning at age 14 or before
 - ◆ Transition has to be individualized – don't just put kids in "Options Class."
- ◆ To be your child's best advocate, stop doing everything for them.
- ◆ Include self-advocacy and independence goals.
- ◆ Involve outside agencies – how to let go.
- ◆ What decisions are made in PETS and what can be done outside of PETS
- ◆ Prior Written Notice – what is it, and when is it necessary.
- ◆ Staffings – how to use effectively.

When Things Break Down

- ◆ Conflict – not a bad thing
- ◆ Retaliation in school
- ◆ Referrals to DHS
- ◆ Outright lies, flagrant misrepresentation of the law
- ◆ Value of outside observers
- ◆ Complaints and hearings – descriptions
- ◆ Mediation – yes, no or it depends. How to evaluate the wisdom of mediation.
- ◆ Filing a complaint or a hearing?
- ◆ What if you can't afford a lawyer; getting legal assistance or advocates
- ◆ Writing a good complaint
- ◆ Where to get forms
- ◆ Driving up the school's costs.
- ◆ Life after Conflict – is it better to stay in an abusive environment or leave it?

Resources

Questions