

TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

#11

4/06

BASIC TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

An advocate is someone who stands up for the interests of another person. No special training or formal status is required. There is no single way to be a good advocate. For an education advocate, the following are keys to helping a student succeed.

1. Create positive relationships with school staff and others who can help

Schools, families and communities need to work together to provide the best for each student. This is not always the reality. Relationships can go sour when difficult issues arise. Try to maintain a positive, helpful approach in dealing with school staff. This means working with teachers and aides to supervisors and managers. This includes principals and superintendents.

It is important to attend parent teacher conferences and other meetings regarding the child. School events can also be helpful. Check in with teachers regularly, not just when there's a problem. When problems arise, follow up and respond to all school communications promptly. Ask the child or young person how things are going. Suggest ways to help the child to communicate effectively with teachers and staff.

When problems arise, always ask and listen carefully to the school's side of the issue.

2. Be persistent, yet flexible

An advocate should rarely accept 'no' for an answer. Yet the advocate must also recognize that in some situations a change in the goal for a child may be necessary. Knowing when to compromise, and when to shift goals for a child is difficult. Find other grandparents, aunts or uncles with advocacy experience. They can provide advice and counsel, and be very helpful in making these decisions. A case manager or therapist involved with a child can also be an ally.

3. Be Prepared

The grandparent or relative as guardian has the right to inspect and review a complete copy of the child's educational records. It is important to review the entire record carefully. If there are parts of the record that are unclear, ask school staff for an explanation. The school records may be incomplete or inaccurate if the child has moved many times. The school should make an effort to locate records and have them transferred from other schools. Inaccurate parts of a school record should be corrected.

Keeping Records and Making a Record

Don't throw away anything, including your child's schoolwork. Keep homework, tests, and other schoolwork that a child brings home. Organize everything into files or a three ring binder. It is also useful to keep a log of all contacts with school staff. This includes reports received on a child.

Pull all requests in writing, and confirm telephone requests or oral requests made at meetings with a letter. Always keep a copy of letters you send to the school. One useful strategy is to hand deliver a letter to the school. Then ask school personnel to sign and date your copy, acknowledging your receipt.

4. Keep Looking For Allies

Some of the best allies can be sympathetic school staff. This could be a teacher or an administrator. Other important allies can be other grandparents or relatives who have gone through a similar experience. They may offer practical advice and moral support. Disability organizations offer a wealth of technical information; the national groups have web sites with links to state and local affiliates. Listed below are some of these websites:

Wrights law has practical and technical information geared to parents advocating for their children: .

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD), is a national organization representing children and adults with attention hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Learning Disability Association of America is a national non-profit organization. Its web site includes links to state and local associations and materials regarding learning disabilities on the Internet: _

Library books and videos available at the FACT library related to education include the following. Call us to send a book or video to you.

Overcoming Underachieving – An Action Guide to Helping Your Child in School. Dr. Sam Goldstein and Dr. Nancy Mather.

Video – *How to Help Your Child Succeed in School.* Sandra Reif.

Solve Your Child's School Related Problems by Michael Martin, PhD. Cynthia Waftman-Greenwood, PhD.

How to Help Your Child With Homework. (Kids ages 6-13) Marguerite Radencich, PhD. and Jeanne Shay Schumm, PhD.

Source: O'Connor, M., Barbell, K., A Guide to Special Education Advocacy for Resource Families. Publishers: Seattle: Casey Family Services.