

G. Parent Advocacy Tips for Parents When Dealing With School Personnel

Trust your intuition. Common sense, not a degree, is required for you to effectively advocate for your child.

- 1 Review all of your child's school records and request a copy for your files at home. Keep well organized, accurate records at home. Include school records, important medical data, copies of letters written by you to the school and copies of correspondence and/or reports from other professionals.
- 2 Follow up telephone calls with a short summary letter/email. Example: It is my understanding from our telephone conversation of (date) that points 1, 2 and 3 will happen, etc. Keep a copy for your files.
- 3 Take notes at meetings or while talking with school personnel over the phone. Get names, titles, dates, and a brief summary of what was said and by whom.
- 4 Get your facts straight! Work with the facts, supportive printed literature, and letters from professionals who have dealt with your child.
- 5 Be thorough in your suggestions, thinking, and evidence. Know exactly what you want and why. It may help to make a list of your concerns, suggestions, evidence, etc. so you can cover all points in an organized manner.
- 6 Get names, titles, and phone numbers of persons who attend school-related meetings, such as speech therapists, psychologists, etc. for your files and reference. If minutes from the meeting are going to be sent out, request a copy.
- 7 Use all your resources thoroughly. Check your phone book for community agencies and resources. Consult with someone from your local parent group. You may find another parent who has gone through a similar situation and can lend valuable advice.
- 8 Be specific in your requests and responses. Rather than "My child isn't learning", develop statements such as "My child cannot read his/her 5th grade reader".
- 9 Be realistic about your expectations and requests. Demanding is not negotiating.
- 10 Be prepared for the best and the worst. Come prepared with alternatives and options.
- 11 If you have a tendency to lose your temper, or feel you can no longer deal rationally with the school personnel, bring someone with you for support and guidance. This person may also speak for you.

- 12 When deciding on an appropriate program, review each item being considered, and write down the pros and cons.
- 13 Remember, it is important to be positive and commend professionals when progress is made. Sharing this good news with their supervisor is recommended, too.
- 14 Attend all meetings and conferences dealing with your child's educational needs. Bring your spouse, especially when a major decision is being made.

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