
Ten Rules of Advocacy

1. ***Create a Vision***

You, as parent, are the expert on your child. No one knows this child more than you and it is important to share with the team your child's goals. Help the team to see your child as you do. Make a list of her strengths and share what makes her happy.

2. ***Ask Questions***

If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask questions. Ask until you get answers. Ask the team to explain acronyms (like ESY, LRE, IEP). Find out what programs are available in your community and what support or advocacy groups can help you.

3. ***Be Involved***

Volunteer in your child's classroom if possible. This allows you to build a positive relationship with the teacher. It also allows you to informally observe and to know what your child is doing in class and how they are doing in class.

4. ***Document, Document, Document***

Whenever you make a request of the school, put it in writing, date it and keep a copy. Follow up meetings and conversations with a note or email outlining your understanding of items discussed and/or agreed to. IF IT ISN'T IN WRITING, IT NEVER HAPPENED!

5. ***Be Prepared!***

Sit down before the meeting, write down your concerns. Be prepared to share doctor or other outside reports with the team, keep relevant work samples that exemplify your concerns. Research and understand your child's disabilities.

6. ***Stay Focused***

Clarify and define the central issue(s). Don't try to solve everything at once. Keep conversations about the issues. Try not to get personal or accusatory. Keep the focus on the child and his/her needs. Keep questioning for understanding. Restate your understanding of decisions made and the outcome of discussions.

7. ***Write It Down***

Write down key points of discussions while fresh in your mind. Note issues, names of key people, steps taken and a plan of action. You may want to send a copy of your summary to the people involved by email or in writing.

8. ***Know Your Rights***

Read the procedural Safeguards booklet that is offered by the school at your meetings. Attend workshops, read books, search websites like www.wrightslaw.com, www.parentcenterhub.org, and www.pacer.org.

9. ***Keep Your Emotions in Check***

Stay positive, focus on the child and the issues, be a good listener, take notes restate, "Do I understand that...?", respect other opinions, agree to disagree.

10. ***Follow the Rules!***

It is important to understand the process and work within the process as much as possible. For more information please call and talk to a Parent Educator at the Parents' Place of Maryland.