

# Good to Know

## Advocating for Your Child



What do you do if you think your son has a disability? Where do you turn if your daughter is bullied during recess? You become your child's advocate by working with the professionals and resources in their lives to create solutions. It is not always easy, but you advocate for your child youth, or family.

Being an advocate for your child is part of being a parent. There will be times that your child will need you to step in and help them deal with an issue or person. This may be at school when they are bullied or when seeking resources to meet their needs. You will find that being and advocate is a lifelong job of a parent and it is a good way to model skills that your child can use in the future.

### What is an Advocate

An “advocate” can be broadly defined as “someone who speaks up to make things better.” Advocates can speak up for themselves or others. Advocacy can include activities that a person does including speaking for another person, writing an editorial, or speaking to an elected official about a needed change. Advocacy can also be for the benefit of a single person or family. It can and most often is about a person, child, youth or other individual. When you tell someone what your child needs, this is a form of advocacy.



### What Does an Effective Advocate Do?

Families bring valuable experience with their child to the table. Families know their children best. They are the experts about their child, their family, and their home. Professionals have knowledge and expertise in a specific area, but they are only a part of your child’s life. Service providers and professionals will pass in and out of your child’s life, but you will always be a part of their family. Professionals deal with many children, but you only have your child, children, or family to think about. A child is served best if families and professionals work together. An effective advocate is a main partner on that team. No one cares about your child as much as you do. Effective advocates:

- Talk to their children about what is happening in their lives.
- Take the needs of their child seriously.
- Make time to problem solve with their child.
- Behave as a team member with those teaching or serving their child.
- Shows respect to all team members, even those they do not agree with.
- Works toward a solution to problems.

# ADVOCACY TIPS

- **Start with the problem** and where the problem began. Do not begin by going over everyone's heads or to the media.
- **Gather information** about what is happening so that you know the facts.
- **Do not threaten** anyone in any way. This include saying you are going to sue, call their boss, or similar threats.
- **Plan and prepare** what your argument is or how you feel the issue can be solved. Always come prepared with a possible solution.
- **Do not judge** the words of others. They have their job and you have your job. Both are important, but they are different. You stay focused on your child.
- **Keep organized** written records of who you talk to, when you spoke, and what you discussed.
- **Ask questions**, listen to answers, and take notes.
- Understand and **keep stating the problems** so that the focus can move the team from problem to solution.
- **Take a friend** or another advocate with you to meetings. They can help you stay focused and may hear things you missed.

## MORE RESOURCES

### The Child Advocate

The Child Advocate and Child Mental Health are devoted to children and the parents and professionals that work with them and advocate for them. It is a resource for families on ways to advocate and includes information on state and national resources and several different topics important to families and their children.

<http://childadvocate.net/>

### Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy

This presentation is to empower parents so they can become effective advocates for their children and receive the services their child needs by providing information and activities to practice skills.

<https://www.globaldisabilityrightsnow.org/sites/default/files/related-files/338/Skills%20for%20Effective%20Parent%20Advocacy%20Trainer%27s%20Manual.pdf>

### Momma in the Mix: Empowering overwhelmed parents to tackle behavioral challenges with ease!

A blog to help parents struggling with their children's special needs with a focus is on behavior, improving behavior, and tackling behavioral challenges.

<https://mamainthemix.com/become-an-effective-advocate-for-your-children/>