



**Skills for Effective
Parent Advocacy 101**

© 2010, FACER Center



**PEAK
PARENT
CENTER**

Helping Families Helping Children

1-800-284-0251
719-531-9400
www.peakparent.org

Agenda

You will learn:

- What advocacy means
- How to improve your advocacy skills
- How you can make a difference!

Page 3

Use Your Power

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”
—Alice Walker

Page 4

We need to participate, not merely be involved. It is, after all, the parent who knew the child first and who knows the child best. Our relationship with our sons and daughters is personal and spans a lifetime.

Cory Moore

5

Why is Family Engagement Important?

- Children do better in school, and schools get better.
- Children stay in school longer.
- Students are more motivated to do well.
- Families gain an understanding of how schools work.
- Families support schools and hold them accountable.
- Children and youths’ lives change for the better.

6

Why Do Families Get Engaged?

- Believe issue is important
- Believe they have something to contribute
- Believe they will be listened to and their contributions respected
- Believe their participation will make a difference

7

What is an Advocate?

Advocates speak up for themselves or others to make things better.

Have you ever?

- Met with your child's teacher about any issue?
- Spoke at a local gathering about a project you care about?
- Told a cashier that an item was not ringing up correctly?

Page 8

Why be an Advocate?



- Your experiences are valuable and can be used to improve things
- You know when something is or isn't working
- You have ideas how to make things better
- You have the only long-term connection to this child

Page 9

Where Can I Advocate For My Child?

- IFSP or IEP meetings
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Medical appointments
- Conversations with relatives & friends

10

Six Skills

To be an effective advocate:

1. Understand your child's disability
2. Know the key players
3. Know your rights and responsibilities
4. Become well organized
5. Use clear and effective communication
6. Know how to resolve disagreements

Page 11

In Other Words:

1. Who is the "star"?
2. Who are the players?
3. What are the rules?
4. What is my plan of action?
5. What do I say when it's my turn?
6. What do we do when we disagree?



Page 12

Skill #1: Understand Your Child's Disability



Understanding helps you:

- Know which services are appropriate for your child
- Have high expectations
- Find the right assistive technology and accommodations

Use resources to learn more!

Page 13

Skill #2: Know the Key Players

- Who is the director or decision maker?
- Are staff people public, non-profit, or private employees?
- How can you find a person's name?



Page 14

Skill #3: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

Learn about them by:

- Reading Web sites
- Asking how service is funded
- Asking to see laws and policies
- Asking questions
- Joining a group

Page 15

Parents as Partners

Parents and professionals can be partners and:

- Work together
- Share goals
- Have individual roles
- Share authority
- Have different skills
- Solve problems

Page 16

Skill #4: Become Well Organized



- Keep records
- Put it in writing
- Keep a phone log
- Have a meeting notebook

Page 17

Skill #5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

- Keep your eyes on the “prize” – the right service for your child!
- Listen and ask questions



Page 18

Skill #5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

- Focus on needs of the child
- Problem solve together to find solutions



Page 19

Skill # 5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

- Speak clearly
- Avoid making people feel defensive
- Turn negatives into positives
- Summarize



Page 20

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting

- Focus on your goal
- Show respect and expect it from others
- Manage your emotions
- Ask questions
- Rephrase for clarification
- Say thanks

Page 21

Tips for Written Communication

Letters should:

- Be sent to person who can make a change
- Be dated and signed
- Focus on one or two issues
- Be no longer than one page
- Set a deadline if a reply is requested
- Give your contact information

Remember to keep a copy for yourself!

Page 22

When You Disagree

- Disagree without being disagreeable
- Apologize if needed
- Separate the person from the problem
- Realize NO ONE has all the answers
- Make sure your facts are correct
- Choose your battles

Page 23

Skill #6: Know How to Resolve Disagreements

Informal Processes:

- Talk to people first



Page 24

Skill #6: Know How to Resolve Disagreements

Formal Processes:

- Mediation
- Complaints
- Appeals



Page 25

Skills Checklist

- ✓ What have you learned?
- ✓ Is there a skill you hope to improve?
- ✓ Do you need more resources?
- ✓ Do you need more support?

Page 26

Summary

“I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

—Helen Keller

Page 27

PEAK Parent Center
www.peakparent.org

PEAK Parent Center
Resources

- Webinars
- Parent Advisors (Spanish & English)
- Regional Parent Mentors
- Workshops Across the State
- PEAK's statewide conference

Contact Information




1-800-284-0251
719-531-9400
www.peakparent.org

Page 30
