



When it comes to advocating for your school aged child - **You're the BEST!**

By: Bebe Bode

As we all know children do not come with an instruction manual. We've all picked up parenting magazines and books to learn basic information on parenting. Some of us even look for helpful parenting tips and advice from those we admire as parents.

Parenting is a continual and lifelong process where age comes into play, not just for our children, but for us as parents too. We are continually growing, learning and evolving as parents. Each parent and child relationship is different and unique. Parenting styles that work for one child may not work for another. Triumphs and tragedies will present themselves across the ages. It is the same with advocacy!

It is important for you to remember that you are your child's first and best advocate. An advocate is a person who is knowledgeable about the person or cause he or she is supporting. No one has more knowledge about your child

than you.

When you discover your child has a disability you will learn quite quickly about the world of

advocacy. Highly involved parents are key to a child's success. Parents are the most productive, when they focus on the issues and the actions needed for success, not on personalities. Here are some helpful strategies to keep you on your toes and organized:

- Educate - attend training, workshops and conferences in the community that can help empower your knowledge about education and disability related services
- Record Keeping - keep copies of all evaluations, documents and correspondence in a binder in date order including any communication

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you may have with professionals via mail or email. Create a call log and outline the date, time and outcome of the call.

- Parent Groups - get connected and find out about any parent or support groups in your area.
- Don't be a bystander - take part in every step of the process, ask questions, and make suggestion. If you disagree, say so... your input is valuable
- Share - your child's strengths, likes and dislikes. Families Helping Families has a great tool called, "[All About Me](#)" You can use this tool , or use it as a guide to assist you
- Speak Up - express your concerns when they appear and don't wait. Change and progression cannot happen without discussion.

You DO NOT need to know everything about the law to become an effective advocate. Becoming familiar with the law will give you an understanding of your family's rights and responsibilities.

Don't stop dreaming for your child! Maintain a positive outlook for your child's future. Be aware that in some ways your perceptions of their potential will shape that potential. Don't assume your child will never be independent. Share your visions and dreams when you attend meetings for your child. Success is attained when everyone is reaching for the same goals.

Once you've become a more seasoned advocate you will be able to:

- Represent your child's and family's best interests
- Access the community resources, supports and services
- Feel comfortable talking with professionals and asking them questions
- Understand that services are about what your family needs
- Participate as a full partner in IEP meetings and in other service support systems by communicating your child's and your family's needs effectively
- Make informed decisions about what is best for you and your family (research best practices)
- Speak up when things that are important are not being addressed
- Rephrase information you've heard to make sure that you fully understand it

As with anything, it takes time to educate yourself and build up your confidence. If you are reading this you want to begin your journey towards becoming the most effective advocate you can be for your child and your family.

Knowing that you already have the best knowledge about you child and family's needs means you're already on your way!

