

Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy

A curriculum created by the
National Family Advocacy Support and Training (FAST) Project, a
project of PACER Center: fastfamilysupport.org

Skills for Effective Parent Advocacy

**A curriculum created by the National Family Advocacy Support and
Training (*FAST*) Project**

**WISCONSIN FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER
FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING & SUPPORT**

WI FACETS

600 W. VIRGINIA STREET

SUITE 501

MILWAUKEE, WI 53204

www.wifacets.org

Agenda

You will learn:

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

Use Your Power

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

—Alice Walker

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?

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

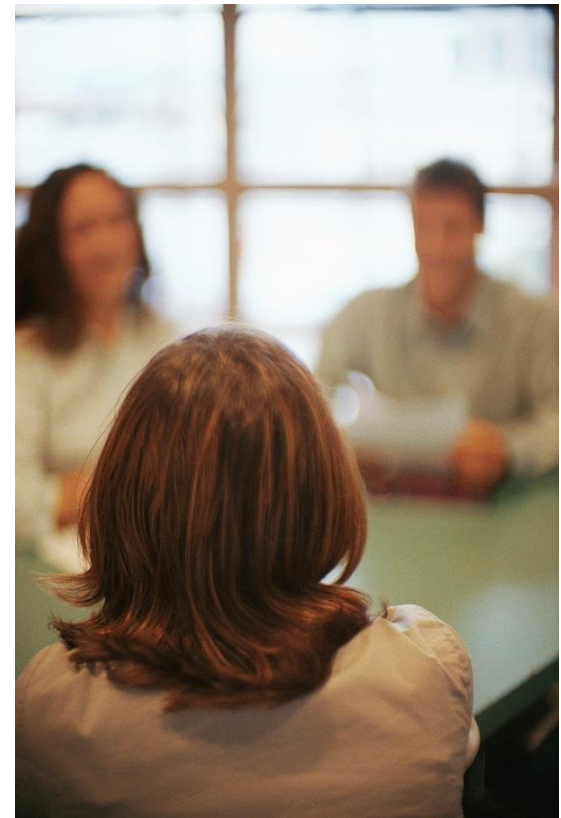
Six Skills

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

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?



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!

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?



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

Parents as Partners

Parents and professionals can be partners and:

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

Skill #4: Become Well Organized



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

Skill #5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

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



Skill #5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

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



Skill # 5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

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



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

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!

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

Skill #6: Know How to Resolve Disagreements

Informal Processes:

- Talk to people first



Skill #6: Know How to Resolve Disagreements

Formal Processes:

- Mediation
- Complaints
- Appeals



Skills Checklist

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

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