

# Advocacy Tips for Parents

**Learn as much as possible** about: your child's hearing loss, the kind of loss your child has, the preferred communication mode, related services, supplemental aids and services, educational strategies and tools; state and federal special education laws and regulations.

**Keep everything** you get from the school

- no matter how trivial
- invest in "received" stamp

**Organize** documents

- Chronological Order
- Official Documents (IEPs, consent forms, evaluations, reports, report cards, progress reports, meeting notices, meeting notes, discipline records, official correspondence)
- Student's work
- Communications (notes, e-mails, fliers, etc.)
- Related documents (third party medical, psych, etc.; bills, invoices, cancelled checks, receipts)
- Back-up copies (you can write on these, but not on the originals)
- Public Documents (brochures, policy/procedure statements, newspaper articles, budgets, committee reports, school board minutes, etc.)

**Review files regularly**

- use sticky notes to flag documents
- review in a private room
- make notes about copyrighted material
- get a copy of the log

**Keep a contact log/calendar**

- record participants, date, place and time of all meetings, formal/informal, planned/chance
- log telephone calls, including date, time, initiating party
- include brief summary and memory aids
- log faxes, e-mails

**General guidelines**

- Do not mention third party contacts unless absolutely necessary
- Do not share third party docs unless absolutely necessary
- Do not let school personnel into your home; if you must, have objective witnesses and tape- or video- record the visit.

**Build support systems**

- Network with other parents
- Identify others with similar circumstances and experiences
- Compare notes with others you trust who are in similar circumstances

- Form local support groups
- Become familiar with your state Parent Training Centers
- Become familiar with your state Advocacy and Legal Agencies
- Become familiar with adult deaf organizations, professional organizations, service organizations

### **Document**

- statements made; info given
- requests for clarification
- requests for additional information (who else knows; how; when?)
- requests for service(s)
- complaints
- verbal responses

### **Request** (verbally and in writing)

- a copy of any document referenced
- Evaluations
- Reports
- Policies
- Procedures

### **State things clearly**

- Do not “hint” at what you mean - state things directly. (E.g., My child is not making adequate progress. This strategy is not successful with my child. I am feeling pressured; please stop it.)
- Avoid inflammatory language and remarks
- Verify that others understand what you are saying.

### **Do not react** in kind to offensive statements

- State that you are offended
- Consider stating the reason you are offended
- State that you do not wish to pursue this issue while you are upset
- State that you will pursue this issue later, after you have had time to think about it
- Follow up in writing
- Copy appropriate officials

### **If things get personal**

- Identify personal statements as such
- Request that personal statements be avoided and that business be maintained on a professional level
- Ask why they want to know
- Indicate that parents do not receive state, local and federal funding, and are therefore not accountable to school personnel, but the reverse is true

### **If you become very upset**

- State that you are very upset
- Consider stating the reason
- Ask for an adjournment of the meeting and re-schedule
- Leave quietly and politely

### **Always**

- Cooperate as much as possible
- Consider compromise positions
- Credit and thank others, publicly if possible
- Avoid criticizing others publicly
- Tape IEPT meetings
- Bring a support person(s) with you if you feel the need
- Tell the truth
- Ask questions about things you do not understand
- Keep abreast of the implementation of your child's IEP
- Decline to answer/provide something you are not comfortable doing (ask why the information is needed)
- Tour any proposed placement location, with person(s) of *your* choice
- Revise documents to reflect your position accurately
- Initial every page of anything you sign
- Get a copy of everything you sign

### **Never**

- Allow someone to pressure you into making a decision/commitment before you are ready to do so
- Sign anything that is not 100% true
- Sign anything of which you will not immediately get a copy
- Sign a document on which things will be filled in/added after you sign it
- Do or say anything you are not sure about - you can always respond at a later date
- Wait to modify an IEP that is not working

### **Don't Overlook**

- Asking your child what is working and what is not
- Meaningful reports of progress toward the goals and objectives
- What your child needs to progress in the general curriculum
- Receipt of Procedural Safeguards Notice
- Prior Written Notice

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