

7 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE PARENT ADVOCACY

School is stressful for most kids with disabilities. Parents feel the stress too. By spring, many parents and children are counting the days - and hours – until school ends. School-related pressure is off! Maybe things will be better next year. Whoa – not yet!

Read our new article, “7 Steps to Effective Parent Advocacy.” When you take these steps – which include planning and preparation – you’ll increase your power with your child’s IEP team and your school district.

STEP 1. Join Disabilities Organizations

In our workshops and seminars about "How Advocate for Your Child," we tell parents they need to join three disabilities organizations for one year. Why do we make this recommendation?

The national disabilities groups - the International Dyslexia Association, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (Ch.A.D.D.), National Attention Deficit Disorder Association, the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDAA), the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf, the National Tourette Syndrome Association, the Autism Society, and others publish newsletters for their members.

These newsletters are an excellent source of information about advocacy, educational, medical, and legal issues. When parents join these groups - and read these newsletters - they learn new ways to help their child.

STEP 2. Organize Your Child’s File

Do you have a complete copy of your child's entire file? Are all documents filed in reverse chronological order? Because special education generates so much paper, many parents throw documents away, or toss them away in boxes. If you don’t have a system to manage paper, how will you find important information when you need it?

To organize your child’s file, you need to get copies of all evaluations, IEPs, correspondence, medical reports, and other information about your child from all sources.

TIP: You are entitled to a complete copy of your child's file from the school. The school may charge a "reasonable" photocopying fee.

STEP 3. Learn to Measure Educational Progress

Is your child is benefiting from special education? Is your child progressing? What objective evidence do you have that supports your position?

STEP 4. Chart Out Your Child’s Test Scores

When you measure your child’s educational progress, it’s helpful to chart the test scores. It’s easy to do this with a spreadsheet program like MS Excel. When you plug in your child's test scores, you can make charts of your child's progress or lack of progress.

STEP 5. Learn About Your Rights and Responsibilities

Parents need to read the special education statute and regulations.

TIP: Use a highlighter when you read the law. Expect to read and re-read the law several times.

STEP 6. Learn About Assistive Technology (and How to Touch-Type)

If your child has a disability, the child needs to learn to touch type. Handwriting is incredibly difficult for many children with disabilities. One neurologist said, "Writing is the most complicated neurological process that a human being must perform."

Children learn from their parents and model their parent's actions. If you "hunt and peck," do you think your child will want to learn to touch type? No way!

If you "hunt and peck," get a typing software program like "Mavis Beacon Teaching Typing." If you use Mavis Beacon for 5 - 10 minutes, two or three times a day, you'll be touch typing at a rate of 30-40 words a minute in three months or less.

When YOU learn to touch type, you can require your children to learn too. After a week or two, your children will begin to compete with you - and try to increase their speed over yours. Your children will thank you for being such a great role model - in about 10 years!

STEP 7. Become an Educated Consumer

During the summer, visit web sites that provide good quality educational and legal information. We suggest that you begin with the LD Online site at

<http://www.ldonline.org>

Psychologist Margaret Kay's site is a good source of information about language learning disabilities:

<http://www.margaretkay.com>

Check out the EdLaw site at <http://www.edlaw.net>

Explore your state's Department of Education website. You may be surprised at the interesting information you can pick up.

You can get a printer-friendly copy of "7 Steps to Effective Parent Advocacy" at:

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/seven_steps.htm