



# 10 Ways to Be an Effective Advocate for Your Child at School

By Amanda Morin

As a parent, you are your child's best education advocate—until he's old enough and informed enough to speak up for himself. You know your child's strengths and challenges, and you can help identify and push for the resources your child needs to succeed. Here are some tips to help you advocate for your child at school.

## 1. Be informed.

Read more about your child's learning and attention issues, watch videos or attend workshops. It can help you be familiar with your child's specific challenges. Explore your child's strengths, too, so you can work with the school to find ways that best support how he learns.

## 2. Keep and organize paperwork.

Make sure to keep copies of all report cards, progress reports, [multidisciplinary evaluations](#), [IEPs](#), medical records, helpful homework samples and other documents. They can provide insights into your child's learning issues and how much progress he's making. If your child has an IEP, you can create an IEP binder to keep all your paperwork in one place.

## 3. Build relationships.

Get to know your child's teachers as well as the school psychologist, speech therapist and any other providers who are working with your child. Building relationships with the whole team can help keep the lines of communication open. There's less chance of misunderstanding if everyone knows and talks to each other.

## 4. Ask questions.

It's important to make sure you fully understand your child's program and [accommodations](#) before you give your consent to services. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification, request further evaluations, or express your disagreement with the school's recommendations regarding services. It's a good idea to get any requests in writing. Keep copies of these requests and use a communication log to keep track of who you spoke to and when.

## 5. Stay calm and collected.

Remember that the teachers and other school staff members involved are there to help, even if you disagree with them. Make a list of the topics you want to cover in important meetings. Learn phrases you can use to redirect conversation and defuse tense situations. And consider bringing a friend or relative who can take notes for you and help you stay organized and on track.

## **6. Remember that you're part of the team.**

Parents shouldn't feel pressured by school staff to make a decision. Keep in mind that you're an equal member of the decision-making team. So, while it's important to be receptive to the school staff's thoughts, you don't have to agree to something you think goes against what's best for your child.

## **7. Know your child's rights.**

Learn about your child's rights to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) under the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#). Your child might have the right to extra time on tests and other accommodations or modifications. Stay informed about your school's legal obligations to provide your child an evaluation and other services. You can also speak with your local Parent Training and Information Center about finding a parent advocate to help you during important meetings.

## **8. Talk to your child.**

Touch base with your child about how school is going. It's important to know if he's using the accommodations on his IEP or [504 plan](#) or if he's spent time with the speech therapist as planned. This helps you make sure the plan is being implemented. And you can teach your child phrases he can use to self-advocate when you're not there with him.

## **9. Learn the lingo.**

Learn terms you may hear from educators, health-care providers and other professionals. It can help you to understand, for example, whether the speech therapist and other service providers are "pushing in" (working with your child in the classroom) or "pulling out" (taking your child to a separate location). This information can guide questions to ask your child. For instance if he says he didn't go to speech class one day, you might ask, "Did the speech therapist come into the classroom?"

## **10. Communicate regularly.**

IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences are good opportunities to get an update on your child's progress. But there are also other times and ways to get updates. You can email his teacher with questions. PTA meetings may provide insight into curriculum changes and other resources that could affect your child. It's helpful to fill out a contact list, too. Keep it handy so you know who at school to reach out to about various topics.

Watch as an expert talks about who can support you when you hit roadblocks in advocating for your child.

## About the Author



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