

Parent Tipsheet ~ Advocating for Child's Need At School and Building Successful Parent/Professional Partnerships

1. Remember you are the expert about your child and their needs! Share information about the things that make it difficult for your child to be successful at school, as well as, the things that will help.
2. Keep in mind that you and the school have a common goal- which is to find strategies for your child to be successful.
3. Assume good intentions and positive intent!
4. Use the IEP process and follow it's order (especially in the beginning). It will help to keep everyone on track and focused and allow the team to effectively plan services, supports, goals & objectives based on your child's identified needs.
5. Ask the school to help, clarify and assist. Seek for their ideas! Finding creative ways to educate children is their job and area their expertise so allow them the opportunity to share their knowledge and show their stuff:)
6. Listen! You will often find opportunities to find common ground. Listening sounds easy but is challenging - especially when you have a list in your mind of all the things you want to be sure to say and share but it is critically important!
7. Be extremely careful when choosing your approach. You do not want to set a negative tone without meaning to. What you say and do and the battles you choose can affect your relationship with the school and those supporting your child.
8. Choose your words carefully and know people may become defensive even when you do. Educators may take it personally and even become defensive when discussing reasons you child is not successful in their classroom. They may worry it is a reflection on them and their skill level if things are not going well and may feel the need to defend their efforts especially in a room full of their peers.
9. Avoid quoting the law in a meeting- good advocates know the law but understand it is often ineffective and counterproductive to quote it and run the risk of creating a negative or adversarial environment.
10. Help to make connections with all of the people who support your child. Your child's therapist or psychologist can be a great asset to school personnel and vice versa.

Remember your goal is to access the supports and services your child needs to be successful at school and one of the best ways to accomplish that is to build a strong working relationship with your child's teacher and school.