



Advocating for Your Child

Maine Parent Federation
Since 1984 . . . because every family matters

Advocating for your child means being a member of a team – the most important member. Professionals on the team may change; you will be the one constant. Your role is very important; the job of advocating falls to you. Your first priority will be to keep the team's focus on your child and what is best for him or her. You will provide information about your child and your family's strengths and needs. This information is as important as the observations and/or evaluations the professionals will do. Learning how to work as an equal team member will help ensure your child receives appropriate services now and in the future.

Keep In Mind

- ★ You and the professionals need each other, neither can do the job alone.
- ★ You all have valuable information to share with one another.
- ★ When the team is meeting to solve a problem or make a plan, no one member should come ready with a solution or plan. Every member should have ideas toward possible solutions and be ready to share them.
- ★ Each member needs the chance to share their ideas in the planning process and decision making.

As An Individual, you can build relationships with the team, if you:

- ★ Make your child's needs known.
- ★ Are willing to compromise.
- ★ Listen to other people's positions.
- ★ Know the laws and your rights.
- ★ Speak up when you agree and when you disagree.
- ★ Are realistic.
- ★ Offer solutions; use your imagination.
- ★ Accentuate the positive; show your appreciation, when appropriate.
- ★ Persist, when you know you're right.
- ★ Recognize others' humanness.
- ★ Remember that the professionals may be unsure at times too; offer support and forgive mistakes.
- ★ Follow the chain of command if a problem arises.

*You are a vital part of the IEP team. Speak for your child. The team needs sufficient information to make proper decisions they need your input. **Remember to stay focused, build relationships, get information, and speak up!***

6-Step Model for Resolving Conflict

Every group of people -- even a group whose membership is defined by common interest -- is made up of individuals with different experiences, outlooks and values. When the group begins working together, difference of opinion is inevitable. Disagreement can be constructive, if it's used to bring the group to a shared solution. The following process can help accomplish consensus, but only if each person takes part as an equal.

1. **Identify the problem.** This may be tricky, because what people appear to be arguing about may have little to do with the real conflict.
2. **Brainstorm for solutions.** This is a time to be creative, not critical, so welcome all suggestions or ideas.
3. **Evaluate the suggestions.** First, eliminate those that just won't work. Then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the others.
4. **Choose the best solution.** It will be the one that can meet the needs of the most number of people involved, and that all can agree on, even if it wasn't their first choice. The solution belongs to everyone.
5. **Implement the solution.** Decide what steps need to be taken, by whom, and when to do them.
6. **Evaluate the solution.** Set a date to talk about how the solution is working. In the instance when the solution is not effective, re-evaluate the problem and brainstorm new solutions.

For more information on Advocacy and other topics of importance to families of children with disabilities and special health care needs, contact Maine Parent Federation by telephone at 1-800-870-7746 (Statewide), 207-588-1933, or by email at parentconnect@mpf.org.

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