

How to be a Strong Voice in Support of Your Child!

By: Cheli Cerra, M. Ed.

As a parent, we must always fight for what is best for our children. In this way, we are their advocates, or representatives, and it is our job to see that all of their needs are being met. At the same time, being an advocate does not necessarily mean that you have to put on your boxing gloves. Instead, it dictates that with a little planning and preparation, your voice can go a long way toward making a difference.

Tips on being a great advocate:

Tip #1: BE INFORMED

Information is the key to your success. If you are well-informed, your opinions will be respected. Learn all there is to know. Talk to your child's teachers, get copies of your child's records, etc. It is especially important to have all of the facts and figures in writing so that you have physical evidence in support of your point of view. This preparation puts power behind your perspective!

Tip #2: BE PREPARED

Know where you want to go and how you're going to get there. Basically, as your child's advocate, have a plan and know what you want to accomplish. Often, parents go into conferences with school staff members knowing what the problem is but not having taken the time to consider a possible solution. It is very important that as your child's advocate you do your homework on both ends of a conflict. It is not the teacher's job to have all of the answers. Be prepared--it will save you, and your child's educators, time and frustration in the long run, and hopefully enable you to work as a team.

Tip #3: BE HONEST

Remember the childhood saying "cheaters never prosper"? In the same way, honesty will get you far and dishonesty will get you nowhere in the field of education. Be prepared to be honest with yourself about your child. For example, it is very hard to come to terms with a child that has a disability, a behavior problem, or some other sort of difficulty. As hard as this type of situation is, it is even harder to handle when we try to deny the fact that the child needs help. However, on the flip side, if you feel that your child has been unfairly labeled as a problem student, it is your responsibility to resolve this problem with the school staff. In these ways, being an effective advocate means being honest with the school so that the scope of the problem can be realized and assistance can be provided.

Tip #4: BE PERSISTENT

As your child's advocate, go with your gut. If you are not comfortable with the way the school is working with you, say it. Do not feel pressured by the "experts" into doing something with your child that you feel is not right. Along the same lines, if you feel your child has a problem, and the school is not addressing it, say so. As a parent, you have valid insight into your child,

and if you do not agree with the school's strategy, chances are that it is not the correct solution for your child.

Tip #5: BE DIPLOMATIC

Diplomacy does not come easy for many. To be your child's best possible advocate, put aside your anger, if you have some, and focus on the outcome of the situation: your child's well-being. Working together with the school, in a positive way, will help build a strong educational foundation for your child.

Is your child having difficulty in school? Do you feel that your child has a learning problem that has not been identified? Are you getting the run around from the school?

For information on your rights and options to help your child, check out the [**Special Report "Parents Who Want Successful Children."**](#)

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