



ADVOCACY TIPS

Advocacy is speaking out on an issue that concerns you. This can mean talking to a policymaker about a law, talking to your teachers about your IEP or talking with your parents about something you want to do.

HOW TO TALK TO SOMEONE:

Have a very good idea of what you want and why you want it.

- Rehearse what you will say... maybe with a friend or parent.
- Speak clearly.
- Maintain eye contact (as much as possible).
- Take your time when talking, and ask for time to think if you need it.
- Rephrase (repeat) what you hear to be sure you really understand.
- Be respectful.
- Be careful of your body language (do you look or sound angry, impatient, etc.)
- Be flexible and ready to compromise.
- Make it very clear what will happen in return for getting what you need. For example, if in a class you need an accommodation, let the teacher know this accommodation will help you get assignments done on time and will allow you to pay more attention in class, etc.

SOME ADVOCACY “TERMS”:

- **Accommodation** - Something to make learning, communicating or moving easier.
- **Anticipate** - Thinking about what might happen.
- **Right** - What the law says you should get.
- **Rehearse** - Doing something over and over.
- **Responsibility** - What you are supposed to do.
- **Compromise** - “Giving in” a little to make a “deal.”
- **Support** - Someone to help you.





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SUPPORTING YOUR ISSUE:

To advocate for yourself (**being a self advocate**) or your community (**being a community advocate**), you will need information (facts, research) to show why your ideas are good and how they have worked for others. Some places to find good information are:

- **Other People** - Friends, teachers or family members may have experience with what you are trying to find out. Ask them questions. Ask them for ideas about where to find more information. Sometimes stories from other youth with disabilities or youth who share your concerns can be really powerful in helping others understand.
- **Internet** - This is a great way to find organizations and information. If you don't have a computer, visit your local library.
- **Phone Book** - A good place to find government programs and agencies.
- **Library** - Ask a librarian to help you locate disability organizations or national organizations that might have information or people who can answer your questions. You might find books and magazines for facts you need.
- **Hospital, Health Providers or Assistive Equipment Provider** - These organizations and people can be good at helping you find local groups working on what you need.
- **Schools** - Counselors, staff and teachers can help you find information about laws that deal with school and education, like the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).
- **Independent Living Centers** - There are ILCs in most major cities, run by people with disabilities who work on disability issues.

KEEP TRACK OF INFORMATION:

It is important as an advocate to keep track of what steps you take, such as:

1. Talk to a person.
2. Do research and talk to those with knowledge (find out facts and ideas).
3. Write a letter explaining the issue and what you need.

SOME THINGS TO TRACK:

- Dates you talk to people.
- Name of people you talk to.
- What you both decided or what could not be agreed upon.
- Steps you take to advocate.

FOLLOW-UP:

Now that you have identified your issue, done your research, made your contacts and have tracked what happened, you may feel like you have done all you can do. NOT YET! Following up is critical. Many times, the people you are trying to reach are very busy. They need to be reminded to act upon your request and to be reminded about how much you care about this subject. Some ways you can follow-up:

- **Phone Call** - Leaving a quick message or having a brief conversation on the phone can remind the person of your passion and commitment about the chosen issue. It usually won't be a long conversation - just long enough to make a positive impression.
- **Email or Note** - A note of "thanks" following your meeting, with another reminder of your desired request, is a great way to follow-up with your advocacy efforts.
- **Thank You** - If the person or persons have already done what you asked them to do, a personal, handwritten (if possible) note of thanks will keep the road open for future requests.

RESOURCES:

Writelaw provides parents, advocates, educators and attorneys with accurate, up-to-date information about special education laws and advocacy so they can make change. See more advocacy tips and links on their website at: www.wrightslaw.com/advocacy.htm.

Protection and Advocacy works to advance human and legal rights for people with disabilities. Visit their website at: www.pandasc.org/.

