



TIPS ON ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD

Spring means warmer weather, buds on the trees, and the approaching end of another school year. If you are the parent of a child receiving special education services, you probably have a Pupil Evaluation Team (PET) meeting coming up to review your child's progress for the year and to plan an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for the coming year. Advocating for your child can feel like an overwhelming task, but some of the following strategies may help you with the process.

Record-keeping:

Collect as much information as possible. Be sure to keep copies of all reports and paperwork. Keep a log of all the people you speak to, their phone numbers and other pertinent information, as well as the time and date of your call and the details of the conversation. After making a call, you can send a follow-up letter reminding the person of the important points, such as any information they promised to provide you or information you think should be in that person's file. Learn as much as possible about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and other laws that could help your child.

Communicate:

Talk to your child about school. Find out what he/she likes and dislikes and what kind of frustrations he/she may be experiencing. Understanding what your child is going through is an essential part of being an advocate.

Ask:

Don't be afraid to ask questions or say no. It is important to work together with the school to plan your child's education, so make sure you know what you are agreeing to. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification, request further testing, or challenge the school's decision regarding services.

Keep Calm:

Stay level headed. Being involved in a process where lots of people are talking about your child can be very emotional. Remember that the people involved are there to help, even if you disagree with them. You will be most helpful to your child if you hear everyone out and express yourself calmly and specifically.

Support:

Get support from others. Talking to other parents with children who have similar needs may give you ideas and tips you can benefit from. It's also good to team up with other parents to bring your concerns to the school system or agencies.