

Promoting and Protecting Your Child's Academic and Social Successes: Parents As Advocates

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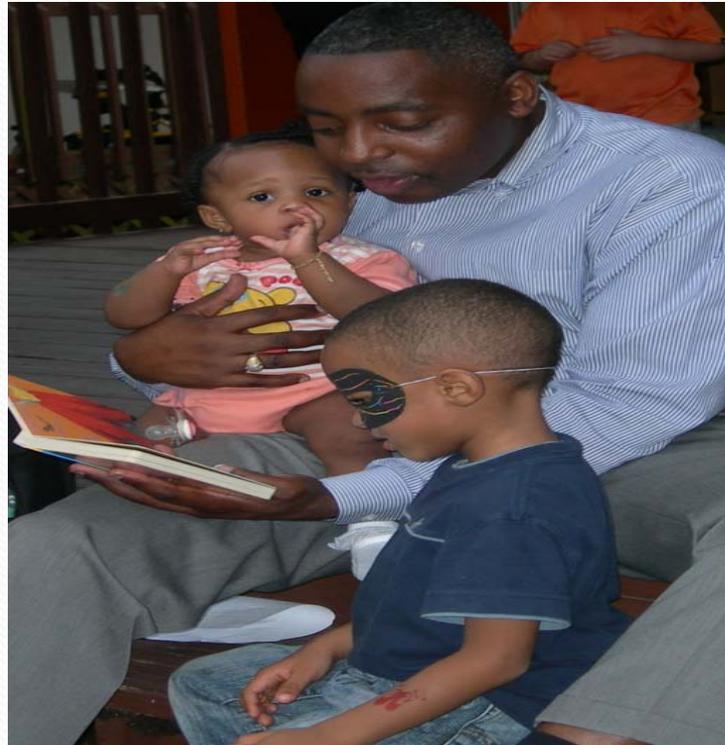
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As a parent, you have many hopes for your children and make many decisions on their behalf.



- From choosing a doctor, a childcare provider, or deciding which school your child will attend, you are always thinking of what is best for your child.



Parents:

- are their children's first and best teachers, but they are also their children's most powerful advocate.



Advocate:

- When you hear the word "advocate" or "advocacy," you may think it is about supporting politics and legal issues. But, advocacy is speaking on behalf of someone else.



Advocacy....

- It means taking an active role in the decisions made in your child's life. Parents have always done that for their children.
- Your child won't be able to make his or her own best interests known in many cases to anyone other than you.
- This is what parenting and having a close bond with children is all about.

Advocacy

- Parents advocate or stand up for the needs and rights of their children naturally.
- Of course, parents are the most in tune with how their children feel, their moods, and how they will react to different things.
- But, when it comes to the school setting, we may assume that teachers and other staff will know what is best for our children.

Today's program

- We will provide you with ideas about how you can best advocate for your child within the school and the community.
- We will discuss specific areas where advocating for your child is most important.
- We will answer questions you may have about your child or your parenting.

Know Your Child's Strengths and Interests

- The first step in speaking up for your child is to know your child's strengths, interests, and needs.
- Finding these out happens naturally. Think about what you see your child do, or not do, through your interactions with him or her everyday.
- Strengths, interests, and needs will also change as your child grows and develops.

What Does Advocating Look Like?

- You do not have to know everything about your child or always worry about your child's development.
- Just being aware of your main goals and knowing what you want is a good start.
- Advocacy does not have to be hard. Parents do it all the time.

Two Frequent Areas where advocacy is necessary

- Educational needs: Most special education experts define "exceptional children" to be those kids whose performance deviates from the norm, either below or above, to such a degree that individualized special education and related services are necessary for them to benefit fully from education.
- The term is broad: it includes children with learning, emotional, and physical disabilities as well as those whose intellectual gifts or special talents are so superior that they, too, need to have their curriculum and instruction modified to fulfill their potential.

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- Social and emotional needs: Even children who are learning at the same pace as their peers can have needs for which the school and community can be of assistance.
 - When children are having problems developing and maintaining friendships with other children or are having problems related to their mood (e.g., extreme sadness, nervousness), getting help at the first signs of a problem is very important.

Example

- Imagine that your child is attending Kindergarten and you begin to notice that while she was excited about school at the start of the school year, she now gets very nervous when you drop her off in the morning.
- As the expert on your child, you may know that your child is not usually nervous about leaving you or playing with other children. You know this because on the weekend when she plays with her cousins, she is very calm and even excited to be with them.

What might be some reasons your daughter is nervous about school?

- Conflicts with other children at school (e.g., she is being teased)
- Feeling isolated from other children
- Worried about something happening at home and doesn't want to be away from her family

To advocate on behalf of your child, you would:

- Talk to the teacher
 - Ask what observations the teacher has of your daughter when she is in the classroom.
 - Ask how she is getting along with other children in the class.
 - Ask for advice about how you and the teacher can work together to help her be less nervous.
 - Ask what help is available to you and to her if the problem does not improve.

Three steps to advocacy

- **Know what you want:** Make sure you are clear on what it is you need--information, assistance, community resources, and so on.
- **Let others know your needs/concerns:** Be able to say or write what you are looking for and what you want. The more specific you are, the better you will be able to get what you need.
- **Have a positive attitude:** When it comes to getting answers or help for your children, it can be hard for parents. But if you approach people openly and seek help knowing that they most likely want to help you, you are likely to get the help you need.

Barriers

- Fears that:
 - People will think there is something wrong with our child (uncomfortable to share concerns).
 - People will think we are bad parents.
 - People will think we are being “pushy” (vs. believing that the “squeaky wheel gets the grease”).
 - Not wanting to burden the teachers or other school staff by having them spend extra time on your child.

The reality...

- Almost all children have some type of problem develop at one point or another:
 - Most problems are temporary.
 - Even longer standing problems are treatable, and early intervention is critical.
 - It is good parents, not bad parents who advocate for the needs of their children.
 - Teachers want to help parents promote success in their children, they work with parents all the time.

Example 2

- You notice that your child is having a hard time pronouncing certain words or sounds, in one or more languages.
 - Your attempts to help your child are not resolving the problem.
 - You know that your child is excelling in other types of learning (e.g., numbers, writing, and drawing)
 - You or your spouse had a hard time with speech development as a child.
 - What would you do to advocate for your child????

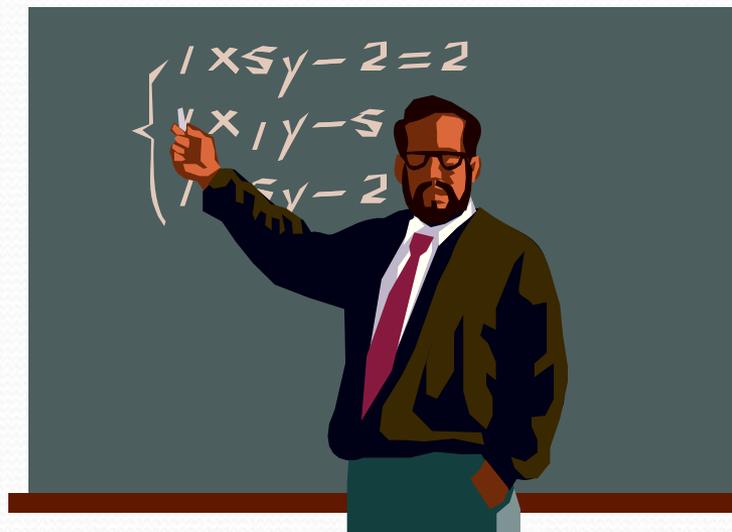
Parents helping Parents

- If you find yourself concerned about your child's social or academic success, it may help to consult with other parents first.
- Get to know other parents in your child's child care, school, or neighborhood. Parents are the most resourceful people around.



Communication with Teachers

- Research shows that children whose parents are involved in their school are more likely to be successful in school.
- Set the stage for advocacy by having a relationship with your child's teacher.



Counselors, psychologists

- If your child has any special educational needs (e.g., any learning difficulties, social-emotional needs), specialists in the school can arrange for evaluations, referrals, individual educational plans, etc.
- If you prefer to find resources outside of school, contact parent centers, pediatricians, or other trusted individuals.



U.S. Laws

- You have a right to get your child tested and evaluated--at the public's expense--for special education and related services even if his teacher or school's principal does not feel it is necessary.
- Once the initial evaluation has been completed, you must be invited in writing to attend a conference concerning the school or district-based assessment team's conclusions and recommendations. Attend this meeting! Bring someone you trust to this meeting. You have the right to have a translator with you, provided by the school.

Looking Out for All Children

- As you speak up for your child, you are speaking for other children who are like your child. Being part of a larger group to bring about positive change for all children is very powerful. When you work to bring about changes in local, state, or even federal policies, you are advocating for all children and their families.
- How can this happen?

Community Activism

- Writing or calling your elected officials;
- Becoming involved in organized local, state, or national campaigns;
- Asking candidates about their views on children's issues;
- Participating in marches that support a cause;
- Getting petitions started and signed for issues; and
- Voting and getting your friends to vote for candidates who put children first.

Golden Rules of Advocacy

- Trust that you know your child best. Never doubt that you have the expertise or experience to find out and do what is best for your child.
- Seek the counsel of other parents who have been down the same road before you.
- Don't fear labels: "special needs" and "gifted and talented" are just terms that will help to get what your child needs.
- Emphasize collaboration over confrontation with teachers, service providers, and school administrators.

Golden Rules

- Know your rights under the law.
- Not every one of your child's needs can be addressed all the time--not at school, and not at home. Pick your battles well and always assess the personal, family, and public resources at your disposal at any given time.
- Talk with your child often! Be honest and straightforward about what you are doing on his or her behalf and listen to your child's desires, fears, and hopes.

Remember....

- Parenting is the most difficult, poorly paid job in the world!
- Parents do not get the credit they deserve, so support one another.
- All parents need help at some point with their children. Seek advice from fellow parents, teachers, school counselors or social workers, or other trusted parties.

Questions?????

- Sources: The Daily Parent , a publication of the NACCRRA, the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

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- The Huffington Post