

Advocating for Your Child

Understand the concern. Explore the options. Prepare for the conversation.

What does advocating for your child mean?

Advocacy means communicating about a child's interests, experiences, needs, or concerns and participating in decisions that affect them. Families may advocate in schools, healthcare settings, recreation programs, and community services. Advocacy can include asking questions, requesting information, expressing preferences, and following up on a decision. It does not always involve a disagreement.

Where might families advocate?

Education:

Discussing learning progress, school experiences, classroom supports, evaluations, or educational plans.

Health and development:

Sharing observations with providers, understanding recommendations, asking about referrals or seeking another clinical opinion.

Activities and community programs:

Clarifying participation requirements, accessibility, supervision, accommodations, or communication practices.

A practical approach to a conversation

- 1 **Define the topic**
Identify the specific question, situation, or decision you want to discuss. Include your child's strengths and perspective when appropriate.
- 2 **Gather relevant information**
Organize dates, examples, emails, records, or previous recommendations. Separate what you observed from what others reported.
- 3 **Identify the right contact**
Ask who is responsible for addressing the topic, how to request a conversation, and whether documents should be shared beforehand.
- 4 **Ask and listen**
Explain your observations; invite clarification about options, criteria, responsibilities, and timelines. Record points of agreement and unresolved questions.
- 5 **Confirm next steps**
Summarize decisions, ask who will take each action and when, and decide whether follow-up is needed.

Understanding rights and processes

Rights depend on the setting and circumstances.

For example, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) generally gives eligible parents rights concerning their children's education records at covered schools; specific exceptions and the transfer of rights to eligible students apply. Under IDEA, parents of eligible students have specified participation and procedural protections concerning special education. These rules do not apply in exactly the same way to every setting or family circumstance.

Remember: Families may gather information, ask for clarification, or explore available processes before deciding how they wish to proceed. It is reasonable to request explanations in understandable language.



My Family Advocacy Worksheet

Use this printable page to prepare for a conversation and document your own next steps. Keep completed pages private unless you choose to share them.

1 What would I like to discuss?

My child's strengths or perspective:

The question, observation, or concern:

2 What information do I already have?

- ☐ Dates or examples
- ☐ Records, messages, or previous recommendations
- ☐ What I still want to understand

My notes:

3 Questions I may want to ask

- ☐ What options or supports are available?
- ☐ How is the decision made, and who participates?
- ☐ What information or documentation would be useful?
- ☐ What are the next steps and any applicable timelines?
- ☐ Who can explain the process if I have additional questions?

Other questions:

4 My conversation and follow-up

Person/office:

Date:

What we discussed:

Agreed next step / responsible person:

Follow-up date:

Still unresolved:

Learn more from trusted sources

U.S. Department of Education — Family Partnership and Engagement

<https://www.ed.gov/birth-grade-12-education/resources-families/family-partnership-and-engagement>

CDC — How to Talk to the Doctor About Developmental Concerns

<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/families/what-to-say.html>

U.S. Department of Education — IDEA Parents and Families

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/parents-families/>

U.S. Department of Education — IDEA Parent Participation Requirements

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/e/300.501>

Explore further with OH FAMILY

<https://www.ohfamilyinc.org> — [Find Your Way](#) and the [Disability Navigator](#) when relevant. The Disability Navigator uses Ohio county resources.

About this guide

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Disclosure: This guide provides general educational information and does not replace individualized legal, educational, or medical guidance. Rights, procedures, eligibility, timelines, and available supports vary by setting, program, and jurisdiction. Confirm current requirements with the relevant school, agency, organization, or qualified professional. This worksheet is for personal planning and is not a formal complaint, request, or application.