

Advocating for your child

It is common for parents to act as advocates for their child in many situations, even though you might not recognise it as advocacy.

An advocate is someone who can support, assist or represent another person to achieve a positive outcome in a difficult situation or meeting.

Being a parent advocate

As a parent, you have the most experience and personal knowledge about your child. If you have a strong instinct about what could improve your child's situation, be firm and persistent. Remember that you are your child's best advocate and you do not have to apologise for standing up for your child.

How to advocate for your child

Be clear about what would be an acceptable outcome. Others will find it easier to respond if they understand your perspective and what you are trying to achieve.

Think about what you want to say and how you will say it. Write down the points you want to cover and keep a record of any meetings.

Avoid being pressured into agreeing to something if you feel uncertain. It's okay to say that you need time to think things through before you respond.

Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion. You need to be in an environment where everyone at the meeting has time and space to actively listen without interruption. You may need to make an appointment for this to happen.



If you have a strong instinct about what could improve your child's situation, be firm and persistent. Remember that you are your child's best advocate and you do not have to apologise for standing up for your child.

Remember to keep some notes about any discussion. This will make it easier to follow up on agreed actions. If these are not happening, or the situation changes, you can raise the issue again.

Emotions

It is common to feel strong emotions when advocating for your child. Emotions can overwhelm you when you least want them to. Even if you are not in a situation of conflict, you may find it difficult to contribute to the conversation.

Whatever emotion you experience, you can ask for a few moments to gather your thoughts. If you have someone supporting you in a meeting, talk to them beforehand about how you would like to proceed if you become emotional. Think about what your own coping strategies are and go with what feels right for you.

Be reassured that as a parent advocate you are doing what you believe is best for your child.

Support and advocacy for parents

Sometimes communication issues can arise and you may want to ask a friend or advocate for support. An advocate can be a friend, family member, or a formal advocate.

You can take an advocate with you to any meeting but to comply with Student Support Guidelines the advocate must not be in receipt of a fee. You can also seek information and advice from an advocacy organisation (see page 28).

Think about what you want to say and how you will say it. Write down the points you want to cover and keep a record of any meetings.

Avoid being pressured into agreeing to something if you feel uncertain. It's okay to say that you need time to think things through before you respond.

Tips for advocating for your child

- Be clear about what you want to achieve and what is an acceptable outcome.
- Find out who is responsible for the outcome you seek.
- Don't always expect conflict, as others may agree with you.
- Be firm and persistent.
- Think about what you want to say and how you will say it.
- Write down the points you want to cover.
- Think about points that others may raise and how you might respond.
- Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion.
- Stay focused on getting the best outcome for your child.
- Be open to other solutions that may be just as effective.
- Negotiate and be open to compromise.
- Keep some notes about what was discussed.
- Follow up on agreed actions.
- If emotions overwhelm you, ask for a few minutes to gather your thoughts.
- Try to stay calm.
- If you need support, ask a friend or advocate to help you.
- Seek further information and advice from an advocacy organisation if you need to.