

Parents as Advocates: You're the Expert

A parent should always act in the best interest of their child, thus making you an advocate. When dealing with educators about a special needs child is to easy to feel intimidated. There seems to be an endless tangle of titles that read like scary alphabet soup. This fact sheet will offer some suggestions to help guide you through the transition process.

Parents Empowered

The most important fact for you to realize is you are the expert. You spend the most time with your child and you know the abilities of your child. It is your observations that will help shape the educational goals for that child. ***That makes you the expert.*** Studies have demonstrated many times that family involvement encourages achievement and increases success.

There are two important principles that any parent needs to understand about their child's education. The first is the need for adequate information. You need to know the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the situation before you make the best decision for your child. Secondly, you have the right to ask questions about anything that you don't understand.

Getting Your Questions Answered

Using a method developed by The Right Question Project, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, parents can identify concerns about their child's education.

- Step 1** **BRAINSTORM** – write down as many questions as you can think of.
- Step 2** **IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE** – any closed ended question. These can usually be answered with a “yes” or “no” response
- Step 3** **PRIORITIZE** – choose the three most important questions and mark them.
- Step 4** **DETERMINE** - the most important questions from Step 3 and use it to brainstorm more questions.
- Step 5** **PRIORITIZE AGAIN** – Choose the three most important questions from Step 4 and use these during the interaction with the educators to formulate a plan of action.

This method was designed to develop a parent's critical thinking skills and to increase understanding and monitoring of their child's education. In this way YOU can truly be an advocate for your child.