



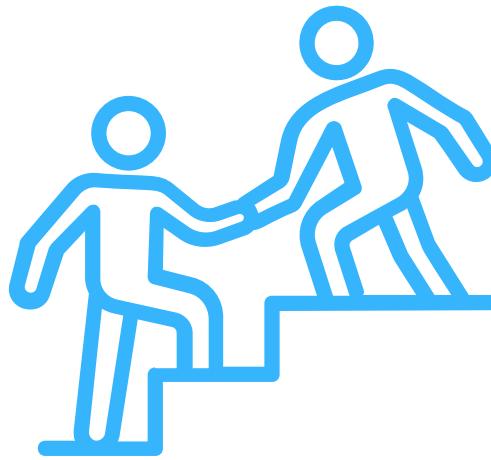
Advocating For Your Child In School

Family Resource

YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S VOICE:

Guide To Advocating For Their School Success

You know your child better than anyone. You are their first and most important advocate, and your voice matters in ensuring they receive the education and support they need to thrive in school. This guide will empower you with the knowledge and tools to effectively advocate for your child's success, reminding you that you are not alone in this journey.



Understanding Your Rights and Your Child's Needs:

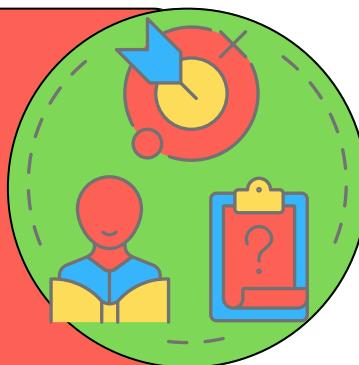
- **Know Your Child's Strengths and Challenges:** Be clear about your child's unique learning style, strengths, areas where they need support (academic, social, emotional, behavioral), and what helps them learn best at home. Document these observations.
- **Review School Policies:** Understand your school district's policies and procedures related to special education, student support services, and communication. These are often available on the school or district website
- **Understand Special Education Laws (IDEA):** Familiarize yourself with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This federal law guarantees your child certain rights, including the right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Key aspects to understand include right to evaluation, individualized education program, parent participation, procedural participation and review school policies.

INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES ACT (IDEA)



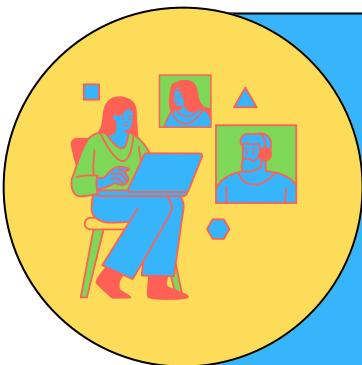
RIGHT TO EVALUATION

Your child has the right to a comprehensive evaluation if you suspect they have a disability impacting their education.



INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

If your child is eligible for special education, they are entitled to an IEP, a legally binding document outlining their specific needs, goals, and the supports and services the school will provide.



PARENT PARTICIPATION

You are a crucial member of the IEP team and have the right to participate fully in all decisions regarding your child's education.



PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS

You have specific rights and protections under IDEA, including the right to dispute school decisions. Your school district must provide you with a copy of these safeguards annually.

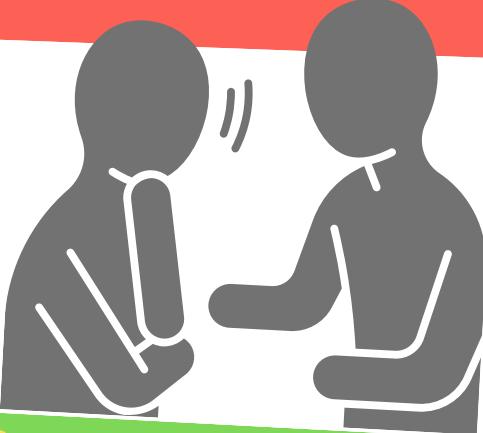
BUILDING YOUR

ADVOCACY

TOOLKIT



Document Everything: Keep detailed records of your child's progress (or lack thereof), communication with the school, IEP meetings, evaluations, and any concerns you have. Dates, names, and specific details are crucial.



Be Clear And Specific: When communicating with the school, clearly articulate your concerns and what you are requesting.

Request Meetings: Don't hesitate to request meetings with teachers, counselors, administrators, or the IEP team to discuss your child's progress and needs.

Be Respectful But Assertive: You can be firm in advocating for your child's needs while maintaining a respectful tone.

Gather Supporting Information: If you have private evaluations, therapist reports, or other relevant documentation, share these with the school (with your consent).

Use Written Communication: Follow up important conversations with emails to create a written record of agreements and discussions.

Know Your Team: Identify the key individuals involved in your child's education (teachers, special education staff, therapists, administrators) and understand their roles.

Where To Find Advocates, Articles, And Information For The Best Support?

RESOURCES:



- Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers:** These federally funded centers provide free support, training, and information to parents of children with disabilities. To find the PTI center serving Roanoke, Virginia, search online for "Virginia Parent Training and Information Center" or "PEATC" (Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center). PEATC is Virginia's designated PTI.
- The Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR):** This national hub provides a wealth of information and resources on disabilities, IDEA, and parent advocacy. Visit their website at parentcenterhub.org. They also have a tool to "Find Your Parent Center" by state.
- Disability-Specific Organizations:** Many organizations focus on particular disabilities (e.g., autism, learning disabilities, ADHD). Search online for organizations related to your child's specific needs (e.g., "Autism Society Virginia," "Learning Disabilities Association of Virginia").
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA):** This national non-profit organization works to protect the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families. Their website, copaa.org, has a directory to help you find special education attorneys and advocates.
- Wrights Law:** This website, wrightslaw.com, provides extensive information on special education law, regulations, and advocacy. It's a valuable resource for understanding your rights and how to navigate the special education process.

- Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)** - Special Education for Families: The VDOE website has a dedicated section for families with information on special education in Virginia, including procedural safeguards, dispute resolution, and resources. Search for "Virginia Department of Education Special Education for Families."
- **Local Advocacy Groups:** Search online for local disability advocacy organizations or parent support groups in the Roanoke, Virginia area. You can use search terms like "disability advocacy Roanoke VA" or "special education parent support group Roanoke VA."
- **Online Articles and Resources:** Use search engines to find articles and information on specific advocacy topics (e.g., "how to prepare for an IEP meeting," "understanding FAPE," "effective communication with schools"). Look for information from reputable organizations and legal resources.
- **The Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) in Virginia:** PEATC offers various workshops, webinars, and resources specifically for Virginia families navigating special education. Check their website at PEATC.org. They often have regional family support specialists who can provide direct assistance.
- **Don't Stand for Lack of Support:** Your child deserves a quality education tailored to their needs. If you believe your child is not receiving the necessary support, you have the right and responsibility to advocate for those needs to be met. Be persistent, informed, and utilize the resources available to you.



Practice Assignment: Your Advocacy Skills

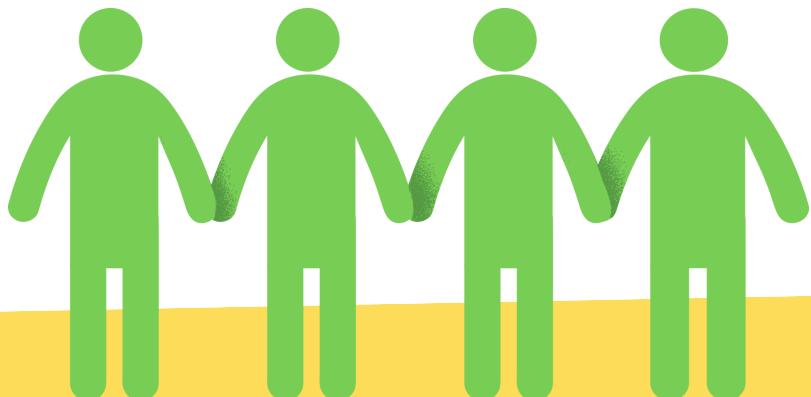
This week, let's put some of these advocacy strategies into practice. Choose one or two specific areas related to your child's education or support in school that you'd like to focus on.

- **Short-Term Goal:** Parents will gain a basic understanding of their child's rights under IDEA and key components of the IEP process within one training session.
- **Long-Term Goal:** Parents will effectively advocate for their child's educational needs by actively participating in IEP meetings and communicating confidently with school staff within one school year.

Part 1: Choose Your Focus

Think about what feels most important to you right now regarding your child's schooling. It could be:

- Understanding a specific part of their IEP (goals, accommodations, services).
- Improving communication with a particular teacher or staff member.
- Gathering more information about a specific support your child might need (e.g., social skills group, assistive technology).
- Addressing a concern you have about their progress or well-being at school.



Practice Assignment: Continued

Here's what to do:

Part 2: Practice Your Advocacy Skills

Choose one or two activities related to your chosen focus area.

- **Practice Clear Communication:**
 - Action: Draft a specific and clear email to the relevant school staff (e.g., teacher, case manager) with a focused question. Consider sending it.
- **Review Your Child's IEP: Action:**
Reread the "Accommodations" section.
- Action: List any unclear accommodations and prepare 2-3 specific questions about their understanding and implementation.



- **Gather Information: Action:** Spend 15-20 minutes researching relevant websites (PEATC or Virginia Department of Education Special Education for Families).
- Action: Note down 2-3 key pieces of information learned about a specific topic (e.g., related services).
- **Connect with Your Network:** Action: Reach out to another parent of a child with special needs.
 - Action: Ask for their advice or experiences related to advocating for a specific support.
- **Prepare for a Future Conversation:**
 - Action: Jot down 3-4 specific examples of a concern (e.g., social interactions).
 - Action: Think about the desired support or strategies to discuss with the school team.



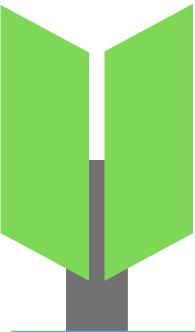
Remember

This homework is about building your confidence and skills as an advocate. There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is to take small, manageable steps towards becoming a more informed and effective voice for your child's educational needs. We can discuss your experiences and any questions you have next time.

SHORT TERM PARENT GOALS

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- 01**
Prompting: "Given a contrived opportunity, the parent will provide the verbal prompt (e.g., 'Train') with 80% accuracy across 3 consecutive sessions."
 - 02**
Reinforcement: "The parent will provide reinforcement (access to item/activity and praise) within 5 seconds of the child's communication attempt (verbalization, pointing, reaching) in 90% of opportunities across 3 consecutive sessions."
 - 03**
Consistency: "Across two training sessions, the parent will correctly implement all steps of FCT (prompting, waiting, reinforcing) in 75% of contrived opportunities."

LONG TERM PARENT GOALS

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- 01**
Opportunity Creation: "The parent will independently create and implement 2-3 FCT opportunities per day for 5 days a week, with 100% data collection on child's responses for 4 consecutive weeks."
 - 02**
Generalization: "In natural settings (e.g., home, park, store), the parent will respond to 80% of the child's spontaneous communication attempts with appropriate FCT procedures across 4 weeks."
 - 03**
Problem-Solving: "Given a novel challenging behavior, the parent will identify a communicative replacement and implement FCT strategies with 70% fidelity across 3 sessions."