



## Advocacy Tips

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*Advocacy is speaking out on an issue that concerns you. This can mean talking to a policymaker about a law, talking to your teachers about your IEP or talking with your parents about something you want to do.*

### How to Talk To Someone

Have a very good idea of what you want and why you want it.

- Rehearse what you will say...maybe with a friend or parent.
- Speak clearly.
- Maintain eye contact (as much as possible).
- Take your time when talking, and ask for time to think if you need it.
- Rephrase (repeat) what you hear to be sure you really understand.
- Be respectful.
- Be careful of your body language (do you look or act angry, impatient, etc.?).
- Be flexible and ready to compromise.
- Make it very clear what will happen in return for getting what you need. For example, if in a class you need an accommodation, the accommodation will help you get assignments done on time, pay more attention in class, improve effort, etc.

### Some Terms Used in Advocacy

- **Accommodation** - something to make learning, communicating or moving easier
- **Anticipate** - thinking about what might happen
- **Right** - what the law says you should get
- **Rehearse** - doing something over and over
- **Responsibility** - what you are supposed to do
- **Compromise** - "giving in" a little to make a "deal"
- **Support** - someone to help you

*From: <http://www.ldpride.net/chapter10.htm>*



## Supporting Your Issue

In order to advocate for yourself (**being a self advocate**) or your community (**being a community advocate**), you will need information (facts, research) to show why your ideas are good and how they have worked for others.

Some places to find good information are:

- **Other people** – Friends, teachers or family members might have experience with what you are trying to find out. Ask them questions. Ask them for ideas about where to find more information. Sometimes stories from other youth with disabilities or youth who share your experience or concern can be really powerful in helping others understand.
- **Phone Book** – This is a good place to find the government programs and agencies that might have good information or people to help answer questions.
- **Library** – You can ask a librarian to help you find local disability organizations or national organizations that might have information or people to help answer questions. You can find helpful books and magazines for facts you might need. Libraries also have computers that have access to the internet.
- **Internet** – This can be a good way to find organizations and information by typing in keywords in a search engine (try [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)).
- **Hospitals, health providers, or assistive equipment provider** – These organizations and people can be good at helping you find local groups working on what you need to learn more about.
- **Schools** – School counselors, staff and teachers can help you find information about laws that deal with school and education, like Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504, etc.
- **Independent Living Centers (ILC)** – There are ILCs in most major cities. They are run by people with disabilities and work on disability community issues. They know about good information and good local disability advocate groups.



## Keep Track of Information

It's important as an advocate to keep track of what steps you take (Step 1: talk to person. Step 2: do research and talk to those with knowledge, find out facts and ideas for what you want. Step 3: write a letter explaining the issue and what you need).

### Some things to track:

- Dates you talk to people
- The names of people you talk to
- What you both decided or what could not be agreed upon
- The steps you take to advocate

## Follow Up

Now that you have identified (chosen) your issue, done your research, made your contacts and have tracked what happened, you may feel like you have done all you can do. NOT YET! Following up is critical. Many times, the people you are trying to reach are very busy. They need to be reminded to act upon your request and to be reminded about how much you care about this subject. Some ways you can follow up:

- **Phone call**—leaving a quick message or having a brief conversation on the phone can remind the person you are reaching of your passion and commitment about the issue. It usually won't be a long conversation – just long enough to make a positive impression.
- **Email or note**—A note of thanks following your meeting, with another reminder of your desired action, is a great way to follow up with your advocacy efforts.
- **Thank you**—If the person(s) have already done what you asked them to do, a personal, handwritten (if possible) note of thanks will keep the road open for future requests.

## RESOURCES

**WrightLaw** provides parents, advocates, educators, and attorneys with accurate, up-to-date information about special education law and advocacy so they can make change. See more advocacy tips and links on their website, [www.wrightslaw.com/advocacy.htm](http://www.wrightslaw.com/advocacy.htm).



**Protection & Advocacy, Inc.** works to advance the human and legal rights for people with disabilities. Their advocacy tip sheet was written for parents, but the tips can apply to anyone. See their tip sheet at [www.pai-ca.org/pubs/503201.htm](http://www.pai-ca.org/pubs/503201.htm).