

Advocacy is about identifying problems and negotiating solutions.

Learn the rules of the game – knowledge is power:

- Know your rights and responsibilities as well as pertinent laws.
- Know the system policies and procedures of all the systems you are working with.
- Contact a disability/advocacy organization if you have questions or problems regarding your child’s services.
- It can be helpful to talk with and learn from other people who have shared some of your experiences. There are numerous networking groups and support groups in the Twin Cities.
- Focus on why you want what you want for your child.

Plan and prepare – people who are prepared make better decisions:

- Identify what your child’s needs and strengths are, and how your child can be best supported.
- Sit down before meetings and make notes about your goals and any suggestions or ideas you have.
- It can be helpful to bring someone with you to meetings that can take notes for you, help you stay on track and/or provide support

Keep written records:

- Keep a file – include evaluations, medical, educational, service and financial records, and correspondence.
- Take notes during meetings and phone calls with dates, times and full names.
- Put everything in writing—create a paper trail.
- Be proactive in your advocacy—have copies available of documents you want others to read.

Ask questions, listen to answers:

- Write down the answers you get to your questions and concerns.
- Ask for clarification if you don’t fully understand something.
- Remember to be clear and thorough—be specific about what you need and expect.
- Focus on how you say things—use “I” statements and avoid using “but” “never” and “always”.
- Listen to responses—remember not receiving your desired response doesn’t mean you didn’t receive a response.

Identify problems and propose solutions:

- Focus on strengths, concerns and priorities.
- Services must be discussed and agreed upon.
- You may not be able to achieve your ideal solutions so decide ahead of time what you can live with.
- Remember that all plans must be based on your child’s needs.
- If you disagree with anything, state clearly why you disagree and make suggestions of how to change it.
- If you are asked to sign something at a meeting, take your time and read whatever it is carefully before you sign.
- You have no obligation to sign anything at a meeting; you can take plans home to review.
- Don’t sign a blank or partially completed form, and make sure you understand and agree with the entire plan.
- If the plan is not clear or you disagree with any part of it, be sure to refuse the plan in writing to keep the plan from being implemented without your consent.
- You can request additional meetings to resolve any problems.

For further information or advocacy services, contact Arc Greater Twin Cities at 952-920-0855 or visit www.arcgreatertwincities.org. Tell us what you think about this Arc Guide. Please complete a short survey online at <http://arcgreatertwincities.org/resources.aspx>. Thank you!