

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

PARENTS AS VOICES FOR THEIR CHILDREN Advocating for Your Child

Parents advocate or stand up for the needs and rights of their children naturally. Of course, parents are the most in tune with how their children feel, their moods, and how they will react to different things. This is what parenting and having a close bond with children is all about.

When you hear the word “advocate” or “advocacy,” you may think it is only about supporting politics and legal issues. But, advocacy just means speaking on behalf of someone else. It means taking an active role in the decisions made in your child’s life. And parents have always done that for their children.

As a parent, you have many hopes for and make many decisions for your child. From choosing a doctor, to choosing a child care provider, or school your child will attend, you are always thinking of what is best for your child.

Parents are their children’s first and best teachers, but they are also their children’s most powerful advocate. Your child won’t be able to make her own best interests known in many cases. This issue of the *Daily Parent* is all about how you can be your child’s most effective “squeaky wheel”.



Know Your Child’s Strengths and Interests

The first step in speaking up for your child is to know your child’s strengths, interests, and needs.

Finding these out takes time, but it happens naturally. Think about what you see your child do, or not do, through your interactions with him everyday. Strengths, interests, and needs will also all change as your child grows and develops. No one ever stays the same.

The more you know your child, the more you will know what you want for him. Make sure you write down the issues and concerns you have about your child. Keep a notebook of your child’s progress and changes. You will also be able to let other people that are in your child’s life know about your child’s strengths and interests as well.

In the chart that follows are **examples** of some of the types of strengths and needs you may want to know about your child.

MY BABY...	MY TODDLER...	MY SCHOOL-AGER...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is able to point and say the word “juice” when she is thirsty.• does not react to loud noises.• likes to be held upright.• cannot grip a spoon in his hand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• does not sit still when I read to her.• does not seem interested in other children.• likes to move to music.• likes to self-feed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• likes to climb and jump.• is sometimes impulsive.• makes friends easily.• has trouble with making certain speech sounds.

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THE FIRST STEP IN SPEAKING UP FOR YOUR CHILD IS TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS, INTERESTS, AND NEEDS.

What Does Advocating Look Like?

You do not have to know everything about your child or always have questions on your child's development. Just being aware of your main goals and knowing what you want is a good start.

Advocacy does not have to be hard. Parents do it all the time.

- **Know what you want:** Make sure you are clear on what it is you need – information, assistance, financial assistance, and so on.

- **Let others know your needs/concerns:** Be able to say or write what you are looking for and what you want. The more specific and clear you are, the better you will be able to get what you need.



- **Have a positive attitude:** When it comes to getting answers or help for your children, it can be hard for parents. But if you approach people openly and seek help knowing that they most likely want to help you, you are likely to get the help you need.

Find Others Who Share Your Goals

Meeting others who share your goals or who have gone down the path you are now going is always helpful.

- **Parents:** The kinds of things you want for your child is most likely similar to what other parents want for their children as well. Get to know other parents in your child's situation, child care, school, or neighborhood. Parents are the most resourceful people around.
- **Community Groups:** Look into groups in your local area that support children's issues. Here are some

examples: Parent Teacher Association (PTA), School Board, City Council, Professional Child Care Organizations, and Parent Training and Information Centers

- **National Organizations:** Join national organizations that support children and families. Check out their websites to see what they have to offer, the types of activities they hold, and how you may want to participate in them. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA), National Education Association (NEA), Zero to Three, Parents as Teachers (PAT), Families and Work Institute, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

Supporting Your Child

In Child Care

Of course, you want to make sure your child is getting the best care possible in child care.

- When choosing child care, have a checklist and list of questions prepared so that you can gather as much information as necessary.
- Ask how your child is doing daily in the child care setting.
- Make sure you visit on a regular basis to let the program know you are interested in your child's care.



In School

Research shows that children whose parents are involved in their school are more likely to be successful in school.

- Talk to your child's teachers on a regular basis; keep up with how your child is doing compared to his classmates.

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AS A PARENT, YOU ARE ALWAYS ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY

- Volunteer to be a room helper when you can.
- If you think your child has special education needs, talk to his teachers about it. Ask for an educational evaluation from your local school system.

In the Community

- **Find out what kinds of local resources are available to you.** Most communities have park and recreation facilities, free public library programs, local sports, etc. Take advantage of them.
- **Seek out your local Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC or PICs).** Parent Training and Information Centers are funded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and are located in each state to provide training and information to parents of infants, toddlers, school-aged children, and young adults with disabilities and the professionals who work with these children and their families. They help parents work more effectively with professionals in meeting the educational needs of children and youth with disabilities. Parent Training and Information Centers also have good information on advocating for your children and information on laws and regulations that apply to your local education system.



- Writing or calling your elected officials;
- Becoming involved in organized local, state, or national campaigns;
- Asking candidates about their views on children's issues;
- Participating in marches that support a cause;
- Getting petitions started and signed for issues; and
- Voting and getting your friends to vote for candidates who put children first.

As a parent, you are always advocating for your child and family. Know that there are always more options and other people to support you in getting what you need. Working with others or joining a larger group of people who have the same concerns as you can help bring about positive changes for so many.

Join Parent Central

Parent Central provides current information on children's issues and the most recent parenting resources through the Internet. When you sign up, you will receive regular emails on child development, child care choices, parenting tips, and a host of

other topics that affect you and your family. Check out this great resource and sign up to receive emails today! (*Parent Central is a project of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies*). You can get into the website at: <http://naccrra.parentsaction.org/naccrra/home.html>.



Looking Out for All Children

As you speak up for your child, you are speaking for other children who are like your child. Being part of a larger group to bring about positive change for all children is very powerful. When you work to bring about changes in local, state, or even federal policies, you are advocating for all children and their families. This can be done by:

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For More Information

- **Child Care Aware: www.childcareaware.org.** Child Care Aware is committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their community. They connect parents with the local agencies best equipped to serve their needs. They also have resources for parents on finding child care, getting tax breaks, and other timely family issues. Their toll-free number is 1-800-424-2246.
- **NAEYC: www.naeyc.org.** The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) focuses on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8. Check out the many articles and resources for parents on child development and other early childhood issues.
- **ZERO TO THREE: www.zerotothree.org.** ZERO TO THREE promotes the healthy development of our nation's infants and toddlers by supporting and



strengthening families, communities, and those who work on their behalf. For current research and best practices for young children, their website has a wide variety of resources. They also have a special section on their website for parents.

- **PBS: www.pbs.org/parents.** The Public Broadcasting System website has a parent section with articles, activities, video clips, and an issues and advice area which answers commonly asked questions and concerns of today's parents.

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