



Advocating for
disability civil rights
since 1979

FIVE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

Adapted from: Wright's Law www.wrightslaw.com

1. ATTITUDE AND EMOTIONS

- Don't yell. Drop your voice when you feel anger.
- If the other party seems to be acting in good faith, respond in-kind.
- Focus on how to get your partner(s) to do what you think they need to do.
- Never threaten anything you are not fully prepared to carry out successfully.
- Imagine yourself as the advocate for someone else's child.

2. FLEXIBILITY

- Keep an open mind
- Locking down invites resistance.
- Dialogue invites creativity.
- "Model" what partnership looks like.
- You can set a time limit on trying new ideas and then review for success.
- Ask the student what he or she thinks may work.

3. DETERMINATION

- Flexibility in HOW a problem gets solved is not the same as WHETHER it gets solved.
- Not everything is worth going to war on.
- Ask: is this my issue or my child's?
- What if you hear: "We'd love to but we don't have that service."

Response: "Then WE agree then that the service is needed. Tell me how we are going to go about getting it."

4. CREATING A PAPER TRAIL

- Even if you remember what people said, you need to be able to PROVE it.
- Maintain records, letters, correspondence, and notes written at the time events occurred that show what transpired.
- Get organized. Create a workable filing system—one you can keep up.
- Best Practice: You may never need it, but paper provides evidence if needed.
- Document (IN WRITING): important things that happened, requests to the district, your responses and district responses phone calls and replies.
- Send a positive, reasonable, factual written note summarizing phone calls and that creates a record of what transpired.
- Demonstrate: 1) appreciation 2) reason for call 3) disability-related 4) a history of problem

5. KNOWLEDGE

- Help educators understand your child's disability.
- Keep it SHORT. Keep it SIMPLE.
- Create an outline that includes symptoms and the strategies that work.
- Include your expert to help you.
- ASK: what will we do to support the team's understanding so that my child's needs are met?
- Learn about rights and responsibilities in the law: Study. Attend workshops. Use good books.
- Call your local Parent Training and Information Center for assistance and resources.

A directory of parent centers nationwide is available at:

http://www.taalliance.org/ptidirectory/pti_list.pdf