



HOW TO ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF YOUR CHILD

Some children have difficulty with certain aspects of their school life, whether that be with academic or social skills.

This can range from low level disruption to anger management or impulsivity or even social awkwardness. In these cases, fitting into the school's expectations can prove difficult for some children.

Our newly appointed Parent Coordinator, who is also a parent, has put together these tips and tricks so you can always feel empowered to be the advocate for your child's needs.

As we enter a new academic year, and young people move from one year group to the next or in many cases from one place of education to another, see below for pointers that we believe will help you to support your child through their schooling experience:

- 1.** Trust your child. Find out from your child what support they feel they need to do well at school and be happy
- 2.** Introduce yourself to the school and to your child's teachers, particularly at Secondary School. Let teachers know that you appreciate how hard they work and that you want to help them to address any difficulties your child may be having and work together to find a solution. If you are already familiar with what is necessary, share that information with all the teachers involved with your child when transitioning into secondary school or starting a new school year. A card with a child profile describing what works best for them can be helpful.
- 3.** Pro-actively contact the school throughout the school year and find out how your child is getting on, and whether there are any concerns. All too often, parents do not know when there is a problem until the end of the school year during parents evening. This can iron out any issues early to stop them becoming a bigger problem further on down the line.
- 4.** When invited to attend a meeting at your child's school, do the following:
 - Always ensure that you are on time.
 - You want to come away having covered all relevant points so, know exactly what you wish to speak about, make a note of 3 intended outcomes from the meeting and have these written down before you enter the meeting.



- Keep calm and stick to the issues you wish to raise. it can be an emotional experience, particularly if you are hearing lots of negative comments about your child, but it's important to remain calm .
 - Ask questions to ensure clarity, particularly about what you don't understand
 - Make a note of the names of all those who are present and following the meeting, email all attendees and share your understanding of all agreed actions and timelines. If meetings are held remotely, email the contents of all telephone, virtual and face to face meetings to all person's present. If the notes are taken by the school staff and sent to you, check that they a true reflection of the actual meeting and send a corrective email if this is not the case.
5. Try and have someone attend meetings with you, preferably someone that both yourself and the child trusts. Ensure that they take lots of notes at the meeting which is best done by someone who isn't the parent, as emotions can sometimes run high, and this can sometimes mean that vital information isn't recorded. Following the meeting, send a written confirmation of all that was discussed, and the conclusions drawn.
 6. If you hear something that you are uncomfortable with, or that you think is wrong and unhelpful, politely say *'I'm sorry I didn't quite hear what you said, can you repeat it please'*. This will either reveal their position to their colleagues and any unhelpful comments will be highlighted, or they will handle the situation differently, and correct themselves.
 7. Be actively involved in school life. Join the PTA as well as the parent group. Opt to be a parent governor or actively campaign to support a parent governor who can offer ethnic, economic, and neurotypical diverse perspective amongst the governing body. If there isn't a parent group, think about joining forces with other parents to forming one. Make it a priority to attend school parents evenings, and if you really can't attend, ask the parent rep to take minutes and send them to you.
 8. Character traits such as persistent disruption, impulsive behaviour, low self-esteem, poor working memory may lead to inconsistent behaviour. Inconsistent traits can sometimes make it difficult to comprehend neurodiversity. Teachers sometimes have very little understanding of the neurodiverse range. Understanding your child and their needs is a major step towards helping them to do well and to be happy. Listen to your child, and tap into the free resources on the internet to gain an understanding of



the possible factors that may be affecting your child's ability to reach their full potential.

- 9.** Keep an open mind when choosing your child's school. Knowing your child's needs helps to address whether the school is capable of meeting them. Finding a suitable school is easier once you're clear on what it is you are looking for.
- 10.** Notice changes in your child's behaviour, sleep/eating patterns. Don't just put it down to puberty, hormones etc. Children are often able to perceive more than we think they can and if something has happened at home or within the family, they can often be aware - even if we try to hide it from them - and will possibly react to it in their own way which may be hidden from view at home. If something is happening within the family, a bereavement, separation, long term illness, etc., do make the school aware and ask someone to look out for your child.

