



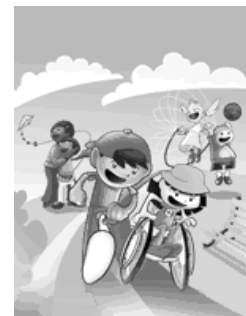
First Steps

#1

You are Your Child's First-Lifelong Advocate!

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the families who have asked questions and found successful ways to advocate for their child for providing the inspiration for these fact sheets.

Highly involved parents and other family members are fundamental to a child's successful journey. Families are the most productive, when they focus on the issues and the actions needed for success, not on personalities.



Who is an Advocate!

Often families hear that they are their child's first advocate. Does this mean that parents need some sort of special training to become an advocate? Do parents have to talk a certain way or dress a certain way to be an advocate? No, they only need to be confident in their knowledge that they know their child better than anyone else.

An advocate is a person who is knowledgeable about the person or cause he or she is supporting and often speaks or writes in support of the person or cause. You are your child's best advocate because you know your child well and you are uniquely qualified.

Dreams

Always remember to dream for your child. Your vision for the future is how you will develop the path to achieving those dreams. Bring your dreams to all meetings and be prepared to share them with the team. Success is achieved when everyone is reaching for the same goal!

Parents —

A Child's First Advocate!

There are certain **strategies** that can be of assistance as you move along your path. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Share your child and family's strengths and needs with everyone involved.
- Take part in every step of the process. Ask questions! Speak out if you have a suggestion or disagree.
- Keep copies of all reports, documentation and information you receive, as well as any letters or notes that you make.
- Express your concerns as they surface. Don't wait! Progress and change cannot happen without discussion.
- Ask about parent groups in your community or nearby town.
- Find out information by attending trainings, conferences, and by using the internet or your local library.



Do I need to know everything about the law to be an effective Advocate?

No, but becoming familiar with the law can help and it is certainly best to become informed about your family's rights and responsibilities.

The Successful, Lifelong Advocate:

- Represents the best interests of their children and family.
- Knows that service is about what the family and child need.
- Knows about the different service options and are familiar with the types of services offered by different providers.
- Knows their community and where to go for other resources, services or supports.
- Feels comfortable talking with professionals or asking questions. Asks "what if...?" questions. It is always useful to explore the possibilities.
- Communicates the need for services they feel are important. Rephrases the information they have just heard to make sure they understand it. Speaks up when the things important to them are not being addressed.
- Are able to participate as full



partners in team meetings to plan goals and services. Asks for time, if he/she needs it. If the meeting begins to feel out of hand. A little break can help everybody regroup

- Makes informed decisions meaning they understand all the options and make the best decision for their family. Knows how to use a variety of sources for information.

Partner
Advocate
Responsible
Enthusiastic
Nurturing
Terrific

- **What “technical words” do I need to know before I take part in advocating for my child?**

None. All meetings must be conducted and written **in a language you can understand** and speak or a translator should be provided.

Call Parents Reaching Out (PRO) today to receive a list of acronyms, words and terms with definitions.

For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.