

family

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Abstract

A checklist of nine tried and true strategies for parent advocates who wish to affect changes in the system for their son or daughter. While the article comes from a book relating to parents and schools, it is relevant for broader advocacy efforts. **Keyword: Advocacy**

ADVOCACY

*The Canadian Association
for Children and Adults
with Learning Disabilities*

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Ask an experienced educator how to create change in education and he will tell you to get a needs assessment, write a report, set up an evaluation system, develop a pilot project, and maybe, in fifty years you will see change. If you ask an experienced parent advocate how to create change, he will tell you that changes in the system can sometimes be effected in fifty days. So say the authors of the book *Between Parent and School*.

1. **Believe in yourself.** One person can do a lot, either alone or by mobilizing others to the cause.
2. **Don't be discouraged or side-tracked.** The job may seem monumental and hopeless. Or officials may give you the run-around, or down-play the problem, or say their hands are tied. Or you might be labelled a trouble-maker or even co-opted onto some busy-work committee. Maintain perspective and keep your focus straight.
3. **Be systematic.** You are a detective in the cause of your child or a group of children. Build your case irrefutably:
 - a) narrow down the problem - be specific
 - b) do your homework - compare/contrast how your situation is similar/different from others
 - c) get facts, figures, compelling statements
 - d) organize your approach - prepare a brief, a strategy
 - e) specify the action desired - some options can be described
 - f) indicate some time frame for results before taking your case further.
4. **Present your case assertively.** Know who's who. While it is best, in the name of co-operation, to start with the lowest in the chain of command, there will be instances where you may need to go to the top first. Judge your strategy well. Keep others informed. Send your copies of your

submissions to those interested and those who should be kept informed.

5. **Keep a log.** Stalls, points of dispute, passing-the-buck may occur. You may forget why you started in the first place. Your log and file can help keep you on track and act as a mobilizing tool to bring others along to your cause or to inform the media.
6. **Follow-through.** You may need to monitor any change, or build on it. You may wish to write it up to give courage and hope to others.
7. **Be reasonable.** Come judgement day, will you be able to show to other including your children, that what you did was sensible and right for the circumstances? The ethics of advocacy prescribe that you don't gain at the expense of others. Make sure your gain does not cause grief to other children.
8. **Learn from others.** Join an advocacy group. Help others.
9. **Read good material on the subject.**

Source: The Canadian Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, *Education Advisory*, No. 9, Dec. '79.

From the Editor

Although this is ten years old the message is just as appropriate today and well worth putting into practice.

