



Information Bites...

**Bite sized chunks of information for families
that include a member with a disability**

Seven Steps to Being a Good Advocate

Here are seven key things that can help you be an effective advocate for your child.

1. Be organized

- gather the information you need and store it in a file
- keep copies of all correspondence, including e-mails and letters you send, as well as e-mails, letters and reports that you receive
- keep a log of phone calls about your child
- keeping these records will help you be prepared if a concern or problem comes up

2. Know how to write effective letters and e-mails

- think of advocacy letters as business letters that need to be professional
- write a draft or two before sending (this is especially true with e-mails) and wait at least 24 hours before sending something written if you were angry or upset when you wrote it
- ask for a trusted friend or supporter to read over your letter and suggest changes – you want to be assertive without being confrontational
- be clear about why you are writing a letter – explain the problem and if possible suggest a possible solution
- when you can, explain what is working, as well as what needs changes
- keep letters brief, to the point, clear and accurate
- request a written response from the person you're sending the letter or e-mail to – include a time or date you would like to receive a reply by

3. Know the facts

- know about your rights and your child's rights – the NWT Education Act is where you will learn what these rights are (www.justice.gov.nt.ca/PDF/ACTS/Education.pdf)
- find out about funding policies and policies about student placements and Individual Education Plans – ask your school, and if not satisfied, the district or divisional office

4. Identify the problem

- in order to effectively share what you are thinking, you need to identify the key issue or problem
- know that sometimes problems are because of policies or funding and sometimes problems are because of people and attitudes

- a problem because of attitude may be because people haven't had the opportunity to learn about the benefits of inclusive schooling
- or it may be because they haven't had the chance to learn about your child
- it's important to build good working relationships with people even under these circumstances – this is a good time to share what you know
- enlist staff at the school to help you problem solve or find a solution
- when looking for a solution, know what you want and what you're willing to accept

5. Identify key decision makers

- know who is making decisions and be informed about roles and responsibilities
- know the protocol or rules and the how the system works – this will help you know who to talk to first or next
- follow the steps in the system one at a time
- know that sometimes you need to direct your requests to different people

6. Use respectful and assertive communication

- remember that your communication style can affect your chances of succeeding
- be assertive and clear but try not to be too forceful, and use a cooperative approach
- remember to tell people when things are working, not just when they're not working
- be patient and supportive
- offer opportunities for people to get to know you and your child – have your child attend meetings if you think it's appropriate
- share your hopes, dreams and stories

7. Get support when you need it and know your limits

- being a good advocate also means knowing when you need help
- connect with other parents, friends family or supportive organizations to help you throughout your journey
- remember that you are not alone and that there are many other parents having similar experiences
- being an effective advocate sometimes means taking a break
- sometimes you have to pick your battles and take on the pieces that you have the time and energy for - you are in this for the long haul, so you need to balance your load and keep yourself healthy



Yellowknife Association for Community Living - Family Project

4908 - 49th Street, Box 981, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N7

Phone: (867) 766-4295 Fax: (867) 669-7826 E-mail: inclusion@ykacl.ca Website: www.ykacl.ca

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