

“You Don’t Have to Like Me”

Lessons Learned About Successful Advocacy

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Purpose and Take-Aways

Share lessons learned from decades of advocacy

- Help develop personal confidence and give “permission” to advocate for themselves or others

Share workable and successful advocacy strategies

- A tried-and-tested “advocacy blueprint” and tools for action
- Tips to channel energy into successful action
- Successful advocacy can be done
 - Need to be a little strategic
 - Know the law, procedure, rights, and policy

Same Approach Gets Same Results

Lessons Learned by Trial and Error

Education Battles Revisited

Same issues today as there were 30+ years ago

- Free and Appropriate Public Education meaning
- Restraint, Seclusion, and Isolation
- Compliance and discipline
 - Not that she won't comply, it is that she can't (neurodivergent)
Can't discipline out the disability
 - She gets her supports, accommodations, or benefits only after compliance
Child must earn what she/he are entitled to

Same Approach Gets Same Results

First approach to advocacy was very passive and hesitant

- “Don’t rock the boat”
- “Can’t we all just get along?”
- “I want the school personnel to like me”
- “Nebraska Nice”
- Being nice and passive would benefit my child

The passive approach did not work then and it’s not working now

A New Approach to Advocacy

“You Don’t Have to Like Me”

A New Approach to Advocacy: The Four B's

- 1. Be alert and aware**
- 2. Be assertive not aggressive**
- 3. Be educated about rights, responsibilities, and policy**
- 4. Be charming, helpful, and nice**

State Protection and Advocacy organizations are a great place to start learning about rights, responsibilities, policies, and obligations

- [Disability Rights Nebraska](#) is the Protection and Advocacy organization for Nebraska
- [Law in Brief](#) series and other resources
- [Find others](#) at the National Disability Rights Network [website](#)

“You Don’t Have to Like Me”

“You don’t have to like me, but you will meet your obligations to my child”

Centers the discussion on the child and his/her needs

- *It’s not about the adults*
- *“What works for my child...”*

“You Don’t Have to Like Me”

Is meant as an assertive statement, not aggressive or hostile

- *“They don’t have to like you, you are there to get an education”*

Does not point fingers or blame

- *“Address the problem, not the person”*

Creates space for a discussion about all parties’ rights, responsibilities, and obligations (and how to meet them)

- *Indicates that you are educated about rights, policy, procedure, etc.*

Empowers parents to engage with the school on equal footing, contribute their expertise, and help create solutions

- *Collaboration!*

Aggressive Behavior

Aggressive

- *“Exhibiting aggression”*

Aggression

- *“A forceful action... [or] attack ... to dominate or master”*
- *“Hostile ... or destructive behavior ... especially when caused by frustration”*

Aggression Backfires

- Often perceived as hostile
- Shuts down discussion
- No room for negotiation and diplomacy
- No room for understanding complex issues
- Bad relationship with teachers/school staff
- Burnout

Assertive Behavior

Assertive

“Confident statements and behavior”



Passive



Assertive



Aggressive

Assertive Behavior Works

1. Creates space for meaningful, participatory, and constructive discussion
2. Creates space for diplomacy, understanding, and negotiation
3. Is not the same as aggressive behavior, but can feel that way to some
 - *Be aware, “read the room”, and remind explicitly*

Effective Advocacy is Relationship Building

Principles and Tools

Building a Positive Relationship is Important

Build a positive relationship with schools and get better outcomes

- First build the relationship then make your “ask”
- Your advocacy will be more effective
- Helps prevent families from feeling “railroaded”

A positive relationship is worth the time, effort, and energy

- Does not need to be an overwhelming amount of time, effort, and energy



Tools for Building a Positive Relationship

Ministry by Chocolate

- Brownies, cookies, or chocolate helped to avoid defensive posture and reaction when meeting with the school

Catch Them Being Good

- Praise is as important as accountability -- balance
- Positives snowball
“Good gets more Good”



Tools for Building a Positive Relationship

Seek common ground

- It's a good place to start and you can build from there
- People don't feel threatened and less likely to "go to their separate corners"

Acknowledge the school/staff expertise and your expertise

- Develops a foundation of mutual respect and a place to start thinking about solutions

"I am the expert on my child and schools are the experts on education"

"What works for other children may not work for mine— XYZ is a technique that works for us"

Tools for Building a Positive Relationship

Find out what the school needs and help out

- Parent Volunteers?
- Volunteer Readers?
- Resources?

Engaging schools where/when they need volunteers or resources is a good start for parents and school staff

- Learn about each other (non-adversarial)
- Reduce potential conflict
- Build a good working relationship

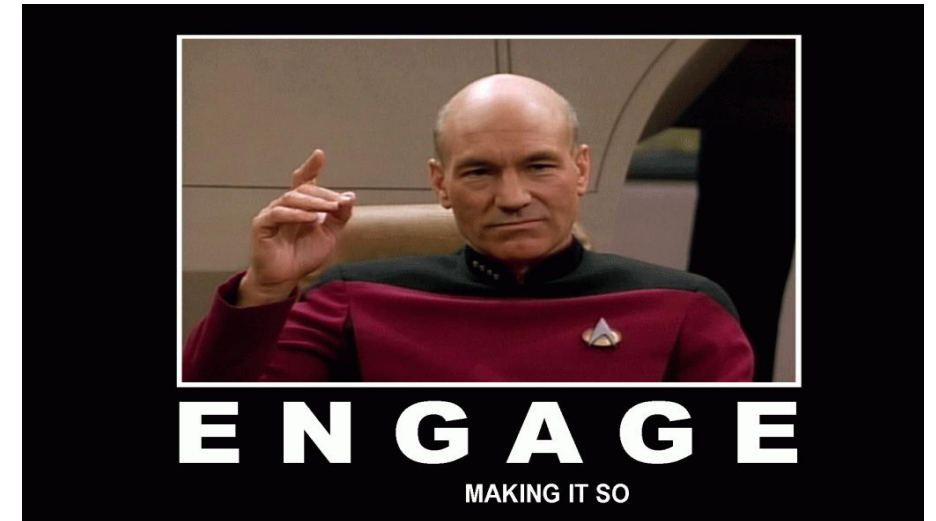
“Support the school’s needs and/or helping with school activities so staff/teachers may be likely to do the same for my children”

Tools for Building a Positive Relationship

It is a Team Effort



Engage



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