

## Assertiveness and Effective Parent Advocacy by Marie Sherrett

I find that parents of children with special education needs come in several categories:

- **Pacifists or those who gets things done;**
- **Clinging vines or parent advocates;**
- **Silent victims or fighters;**
- **Dreamers or crusaders;**
- **Waiters or initiators;**
- **Bombshells or assertive parents;**
- **Appeasing compromisers or action heroes.**

Which are you?

Parents are not assertive if they:

- **Beat around the bush;**
- **Fail to describe problems;**
- **Feel guilty or are afraid to be vocal;**
- **Agree with professionals to keep peace;**
- **Ignore the right to services;**
- **Leave everything to others;**
- **Accept excuses for inappropriate or inadequate services;**
- **Beg for what the law says a child should have;**
- **Abdicate to others the right to advocate for a child;**
- **Depend on others to advocate;**
- **Give up because of red tape;**
- **Are too hasty to act;**
- **Fail to act;**
- **Accept the status quo;**
- **Give in to defeat;**
- **Are uncomfortable with accomplishments;**
- **Discourage your child from having hope for success.**

What do you do?

Assertive parents

- **Express themselves clearly, directly and without guilt;**
- **Are not intimidated;**
- **Prepare for meetings;**
- **Stay together;**
- **Are informed;**



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- **Keep records;**
- **Collaborate;**
- **Effectively communicate;**
- **Demonstrate self-confidence;**
- **Advocate effectively;**
- **Are self-reliant and independent;**
- **Persist;**
- **Analyze problems;**
- **Organize to effect change;**
- **Are positive and strong;**
- **Have pride;**
- **Encourage others and hold people accountable.**

**Does this describe you?**

**Advocacy helps you get services for all special education children in the least restrictive environment. Then you can participate, plan for educational programs, and get legislation passed.**

**Advocacy opens new doors so children may become part of the community. Advocacy knocks down barriers and prepares children for independence.**

**To meet others, you can**

- **Publish a letter or article for your local papers**
- **Pass out flyers at school**
- **Organize public meetings**
- **Encourage volunteers**
- **Plan**
- **Have goals and objectives**
- **Talk to the media (I love to do this!)**

**None of this is easy but the rewards can be fantastic!**

**Remember: Parents put together Public Law 94-142. Parents who vote urged Congress to pass the law that became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.**

**You can make things better for the next generation without filing for due process. How?**

**You must learn the art of persuasion, advocacy-style!**

**There is both safety and strength in numbers.**

**If you can go over a hill and change a classroom, you can go over a mountain and change a state's respite care services, early infant and toddler program, inclusive educational situations and training manuals. There is no end to the positive changes one parent can achieve! Together, we are more powerful!**





**Now these things cannot occur overnight. But if a parent says to me, "What can I do? I'm only one person," I say, "You have no idea the power you have."**

**In five years, our Chapter made local and state changes. None of our parents felt alone.**

**You, too, can change the world for those with special education needs and disabilities.**

**Am I asking a lot? Yes, I am.**

**I am asking you to learn, read and network. You must take these steps for your children and the children who will come along behind your children.**



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