

## **Tips for Advocacy Assistance: An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure.....**

**Keep** lines of communication open all the time. Pick up the phone, compliment, write thank you notes, recommend a new strategy, visit, offer options, help and become a team player.

**Write, email or tape record** to yourself an objective and positive statement(s) regarding outcomes you desire.

**Define** the issue. Write it out for your own benefit. It doesn't help to re-play negative "tapes" in your head!

**Think and plan** for what you feel is the next appropriate step toward resolution of an issue.

**Call or write** the person with whom you are in disagreement. Take a deep breath and make sure that you are calm and poised. Role play the situation out with a trusted friend or write a letter...but sleep on it and re-read it before sending it out.

**Connect** where possible with others including those who are in your position, family members and friends; read related articles in magazines, books or internet; chat with a third non partisan or uninvolved party to get a new angle on your perspective.

**Use** the chain of command as needed. Politely inform the person that you would like to have his/her supervisor also review the situation to see if everyone can come to a third alternative.

**Obtain** a copy of the organization's appeals or dispute resolution process. Follow it to the next level if needed.

**Ask** someone to come with you to a meeting. This can be a friend, neighbor, co-worker, pastor, buddy etc. It is amazing sometimes to check after a meeting or staffing and see how his/her impressions of what was said can be different than yours. Or, perhaps you can validate your impressions.

**Apply** random acts of kindness (without bribery).

**Call** well in advance, when possible, of a specific staffing or meeting when requesting advocacy assistance. Provide as much background information and/or records as appropriate to your request. If the advocate has not met the person who is in discussion, it is helpful to provide a photograph or a picture that the person has made and/or the like. It helps personalize the process.

**Provide** the organization you want to meet with and the advocate with an objective account of your agenda items well in advance of the meeting, much like what you would like of them to do for you. (remember the Golden Rule?)

**Prepare** yourself to speak in the present...talk about things in the present, here and now where changes can be made in the here and now. Avoid bringing up issues of past history where providers, etc. are no longer in the picture.

**Advise** the advocate what you desire his/her role to be i.e., to be a third set of ears...to restate your position if you become emotionally upset in the meeting? etc.

**Remember** that the advocate is not your spokesperson. No one can speak as directly as you can to your issues or concerns. YOU indeed are your own best advocate! Take the opportunity to speak up.

Your advocate may not be there in years to come. Your advocate is there to guide you through the maze and to help you or the other party to better understand a situation for a specific time and/or place.

Too often I have heard schools or agencies state that they heard from the advocate, but not the consumer or student/parents themselves. Step into their shoes for a minute and "see" how hard it is for them to feel that you have an issue if they haven't heard from you directly.

Schools and agencies WANT to know what they are doing well and where they can improve services. Advise them as such! Consider yourself a partner in the process.

And your advocate is a partner in the process too.