

How to be an Effective Advocate for Your Child

Many of the principles that guide PTA as an organization in advocating for all children can be put to use at the most local, personal level when you advocate for your own child.

Whether you want your child to be allowed into a particular class, believe a discipline consequence or grade was unfair, or have concerns about the level of supervision during recess, consider these steps to become an effective personal advocate:

- **Define your issue:** What is the main thing you are concerned about? Clouding the conversation with every idea, concern, and gripe about the school will distract from your main purpose.
- **Get the facts:** Explore the issue. Read the school handbook. Ask someone other than your child to describe an incident. Do your homework.
- **Go to the right person:** For classroom issues, talk to the teacher. For school-wide issues, talk to the principal. It is not more effective to “go straight to the top.” Only if you get an unsatisfactory response is it appropriate to go up the hierarchy.
- **Be reasonable:** State your case clearly without accusations or hostility. Listen to the other person’s point of view. Don’t expect the whole class or whole school to revolve around your child, but do expect sensible explanations and actions.
- **Come away with something:** Before you finish your conversation, explicitly state your understanding of where things stand. For example, “So Gertrude can retake the test after school on Monday, and the two grades will be averaged. Is that correct?”
- **Persist:** If the problem is not resolved, don’t give up. Try another conversation, with additional ideas for a resolution.
- **Follow up:** Email or write a note to the person with whom you met. Thank her for her time and restate the expected actions. Communicate either your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the results.

By becoming an effective advocate for your child, you accomplish more than resolving difficulties. You also communicate to your child how much you value his or her education, and you provide a role model for appropriate problem solving skills and persistence.