

Introduction

Many parents want to advocate for their child but hold back. If you want to advocate or need to advocate or believe you should advocate for your child but have excuses or reasons why you cannot, this book is for you. We will help you attack obstacles and learn the skills you need to be an effective advocate for your child.

From Emotions to Advocacy

As you read this book, you will experience an array of emotions – from fear, sadness, and anger to excitement, relief, and hope. You will make mental lists of things to do. Write your ideas down on a sheet of paper. Tuck your list into this book and use it as a bookmark. As you learn, your ideas and priorities will change.

You may be tempted to put this book aside and act on your ideas. Try to resist this urge. You have not yet learned what you need to know.

Our advocacy program teaches information and skills, step by step. When you know the information and skills you need to learn, you can make good use of your time. As you complete each step, you will acquire information and polish skills that you will use later.

Skim through the book and the Appendices. When you understand the program, you will know where to focus your energy. You will not allow urgent issues take precedence over important issues.

In the beginning, the process of advocating for your special needs child will feel overwhelming. This is normal. If you follow this program, you will learn how to organize, plan, and use your emotions to become an effective advocate for your child. You will not regret your journey from emotions to advocacy. Because of you, your child's life will change for the better.

Why Advocate?

As the parent of a special needs child, you represent your child's interests. When you negotiate with the school on your child's behalf, you increase the odds that your child will get an appropriate education. You cannot leave this job to others!

Most parents describe the process of negotiating with the school as a frustrating, exhausting ordeal. Some parents throw in the towel. Others prevail. What do effective parent advocates know? What are the secrets of their success?

Effective advocacy comes from research, planning and preparation. Successful advocates know what is important and what is not worth fighting about. When you finish this book, you will have acquired the knowledge and skills you need to be an effective advocate. You will avoid the mistakes that prevent many parents from successfully advocating for their children.

What You Will Learn

On your journey from emotions to advocacy, you will learn about the special education system and issues that make parent-school conflict inevitable. We describe how to learn about your child's disability, how the disability affects your child, and appropriate educational and remediation techniques. You will learn how to measure educational progress, and how to write annual goals and objectives for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

We teach you how to use tactics and strategies to prevent problems or resolve problems early. You will learn how to manage your emotions so you do not burn out or throw in the towel.

What This Book is Not About

Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy—The Special Education Survival Guide does not focus on the needs of children with specific disabilities, nor is this book an in-depth guide to writing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Wrightslaw: Special Education Law (ISBN: 1-8923220-0307) is a legal reference book that includes the full text of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Family Educational Records and Privacy Act (FERPA), implementing regulations, and a casebook of decisions from the United States Supreme Court. You can order *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law* from Harbor House Law Press, Inc. (Toll-free: 877-LAW IDEA) or purchase it online at the Wrightslaw website.

Wrightslaw: SMART IEPs will teach you how to write IEPs that are specific, measurable, use action words, realistic, and are time-limited. Harbor House Law Press will publish SMART IEPs in 2002.

This practical book teaches skills and provides real life examples that make these skills easier to understand and use. Because this book teaches information and skills, we include sample letters, logs, checklists, worksheets, and agendas to make your learning more effective. Even if you have read other books about special education, this book will be an invaluable resource.

Icons

The book includes icons that alert you to Tips, Warnings, Cross-references, and Internet Resources.



Tip



Warning – Be careful!



Cross-reference



Internet Resource

How This Book is Organized

Section One is “Getting Started.”

You will learn:

- Basic advocacy skills
- Supplies you need to get started
- How to develop a master plan for your child’s education
- How to act as your child’s special education project manager

Section Two is “Advocacy 101.”

In this section, you will learn about:

- Schools as bureaucracies and the rules of the game
- Obstacles to success – school culture, myths, gatekeepers, and emotions
- Common causes of conflict
- Steps you can take to prevent or resolve problems
- Events that trigger parent-school crises

Section Three is “The Parent as Expert.”

In this section, you will learn:

- Why you must become an expert about your child’s disability and educational needs
- How to organize your child’s file, step by step
- How to use information from tests to understand your child’s disability
- How to use test scores to monitor and measure your child’s progress
- How to write SMART IEP goals and objectives

Section Four is “Special Education Law.”

In this section, you will learn about:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Findings and purposes of the IDEA
- Definitions in the IDEA
- Extended school year (ESY), child find, least restrictive environment (LRE), private placements, and statewide assessments
- Evaluations, eligibility, IEPs, and placement
- Prior written notice, procedural safeguards, mediation, due process hearings, appeals, discipline, and age of majority
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Family Educational Records and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Section Five is “Tactics and Strategies.”

In this section, you will learn about:

- The “Rules of Adverse Assumptions,” proof and evidence, and image and presentation
- How to use logs, calendars, and journals to create paper trails
- How to write effective letters
- How to write a persuasive “Letter to the Stranger”
- How to use problem worksheets, parent agendas, visual aids, and graphs
- Roles of experts
- Pros and cons of tape recording meetings
- How to use problem resolution worksheets and post-meeting thank you letters

Appendices

The book includes several appendices:

- Appendix A to the special education regulations about IEPs, the parental role, and transition
- Frequently asked questions about special education
- Summary of your rights and responsibilities
- State Departments of Special Education by state
- Parent Training Information Centers by state
- Sources of information about disabilities and special education
- Sources of legal information
- Free publications to help you be a more effective advocate for your child
- Sample letters and worksheets that you can tailor to your needs

The book includes glossaries of assessment terms and special education legal terms.

Companion Website



Visit the companion website for *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy - The Special Education Survival Guide* at:

<http://www.fetaweb.com/>

Fetaweb.com includes articles, checklists, sample letters, charts, and free resources. We encourage you to submit letters, tips and favorite links.

Fetaweb.com will list changes that have occurred since the book was published. We appreciate your comments and suggestions about how we can improve the book.

A Note to Parents of Section 504 Children

If your child has a Section 504 plan and does not receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, you should read Chapter 19 about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Next, read Chapters 10 and 11 to learn about your child's test scores. In many cases, Section 504 children are eligible for services under IDEA. Gatekeepers who limit access to special education services often make decisions about eligibility. If you understand your child's test data, you will be in a position to open the door to better services for your child.

A Note to Special Educators

Many parents bring *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law* to school meetings. If school personnel advise the parent that a request is against the law, the parent can use

the law book to verify this statement. Some parents bring laptops to meetings and use the *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law CD-ROM* to perform quick searches of the law and regulations.

If emotions are under control on both sides, you will find it easier to work with parents who learn the law. These parents want their children to learn. They expect you to teach their children. When parents organize the file, document events and agreements, and help their teams stay on task, they want to build strong working relationships with school personnel. Everyone wins, especially the children.

Are You Ready?_____

You cannot loiter in the introduction forever. It's time to learn about special education advocacy! Get a paper and pen so you can write down your ideas. If you are ready to learn, just turn this page.