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Advocating for Your Child with LD

By Sandy Gauvin

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Advocate: you've probably heard the term before. But what does it mean to you?

Advocating happens when you speak on behalf of someone else. You say for them what they can't say for themselves.

When you have a child who has been diagnosed with a learning disability, this is exactly what you must do for them. You must speak on their behalf. You know your child the best of anybody, and you are the best person to speak for them.

It sounds like a tall order, and it is. It is not always an easy thing to do. I know. I've been there. Even with a college degree and a special education classroom of my own, I often felt "less than" the other members of the PET (Pupil Evaluation Team), the group of teachers and administrators that we met with to determine Michele's program. Sometimes, I felt as if I was being punished for not doing enough for my daughter, since she didn't learn the same way as the other children. Granted, it wasn't the professionals who made me feel that way, it was my own perspective. But, right or wrong, that's the way I felt.

As a teacher of students with LD, I sat through many PET meetings in which parents sat quietly looking down at their hands, feeling painfully inadequate. They didn't feel qualified enough to realize they had anything to add to the proceedings. After all, they were sitting with people who had college degrees and years of experience and training in teaching. Many felt that, for some reason, they were to blame because their child had a learning disability. Others felt that because they had little or no college education, they weren't as smart as the teachers.

That's not true. Parents can add more to the PET meeting than anyone else.

You know your child better than anyone else. You know what works best with them. You are their parent and you know how they think. Those things qualify you to be able to speak on equal footing with

anyone else in the PET. If the PET recommends that your child begin his homework right when he gets home from school, but you know that he needs a break to relax, then speak up. If he is really tired by the end of the school day, then the teachers need to know that. If they recommend that your child do homework in total silence, but you know that listening to music helps your child to shut out the rest of the world so they can concentrate better, then tell the team. All of that information helps them to work with your child in school as well. Don't be shy about letting them know what works.

Don't be afraid to stand up for your child. Sometimes, because the child's progress needs to be discussed at the PET, things can sound somewhat negative. It's vital to ask for the good things that are going on with the child as well, and when you disagree with something a PET member says, express your feelings. Your child can't do that for himself - he needs you for you to do that for him.

Your child may not be able to tell others what they need. They may not know, themselves. Or they may not have the language to express their needs. Or, they may feel intimidated to tell adults what is going on with them even if they do know how to express themselves. It is up to you to help the PET understand the needs of your child and to speak up for him or her.

Remember, your child's education affects the rest of his life, and it's in your hands. It is a great responsibility, there's no doubt about it. But you know your child better than anyone else. You are your child's best advocate. You can do it!

For more up-to-date plain talk about learning disabilities, please visit us at www.LDperspectives.com.

Sandy Gauvin is a retired educator who has seen learning disabilities from many perspectives - as the parent of a daughter with learning disabilities, as the teacher of children with learning disabilities, and as an advocate for others who have diagnosed and unrecognized learning disabilities. Sandy shares her wisdom and her resources at www.LDPerspectives.com

Mommy & Baby: Styles Of Parenting
By Kirsten Hawkins

As a parent, you have the opportunity to set the tone in your home based on the style of parenting you choose. You can choose child-centered parenting or family-centered parenting—the differences will be discussed here.

v Child-centered Parenting o Intensely pursue the child's happiness, taking great strains to avoid discomfort or emotional stress for the child. o The child receives what she wants when she wants it: no delay, no waiting.

These concepts might not sound too bad, but what happens when Mom is sick? Or when Mom & Dad want to leave the baby with a sitter? There is little-to-no freedom in this parenting plan—and the baby will not grow in to a child who understands delayed gratification or how the world works. Additionally, this sets a child up for a bad case of “me-ism”—other people will not matter to her. Her goals and needs are paramount to everyone else's goals and needs, and the ability to look outward and understand being part of a team will be compromised.

v Family-centered Parenting o Keeps the baby's needs met, but within the appropriate context of the family unit. o The child enters in to a team-setting; she is not the center of the universe, but part of the family-team.

These concepts might not seem very different from the child-centered approach to parenting, but the results of the two methods are starkly different. Parents have the freedom to meet their child's needs and look ahead to developing skills and abilities, as they aren't catering to every fleeting whim or fancy a child might express. Sitters are okay for the family, as the parents will take time out to “date” and be intentional with each other. Because a baby raised in a family-centered plan understands that she is part of a team, she will learn “we-ism,” not “me-ism.” She will consider others as she grows and how her goals and needs can be met within the framework of a team—without compromising the others on the team.

You may know people on either side of these parenting styles who go overboard. That's not what I'm advocating here; a balance must be achieved. Remember these things:

Ø Life doesn't stop because you have a baby Ø Date your spouse Ø Continue those loving gestures you enjoyed before your baby came along Ø Invite some friends over for food and fellowship Ø At the end of each day, spend 15 minutes sitting with your spouse, discussing the day's events

Kirsten Hawkins is a baby and parenting expert specializing new mothers and single parent issues. Visit <http://www.babyhelp411.com/> for more information on how to raising healthy, happy children.

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