

Effective Parent Advocacy

“I wouldn’t change
you for the world.
But I would change
the world for you.

–Author Unknown



Goals for Presentation



Understand what
advocacy means



Learn how to improve
your advocacy skills



Learn how to work
together!

Parents as Partners



Parents and professionals can be partners by:

- Working together
- Sharing goals
- Having different skills
- Solving problems
- Advocating together

What is an Advocate?

- Name a time when you advocated for yourself or someone else.
- Who or what do you picture when you think of an advocate?



Why be an Advocate?



- Your experiences are valuable and can be used to improve things
- You know when something is or isn't working
- You have ideas to make things better and emphasize things that are working
- You have the most long-term connection to **your** child

Six Skills

To be an effective advocate:

1. Understand your child's disability
2. Know the key players
3. Know your rights and responsibilities
4. Become well organized
5. Use clear and effective communication
6. Know how to resolve disagreements



Think...and plan...



WHO IS THE
"STAR"?



WHO ARE THE
PLAYERS?



WHAT ARE THE
RULES?



WHAT IS MY
PLAN OF
ACTION?



WHAT DO I SAY
WHEN IT'S MY
TURN?



WHAT DO WE
DO WHEN WE
DISAGREE



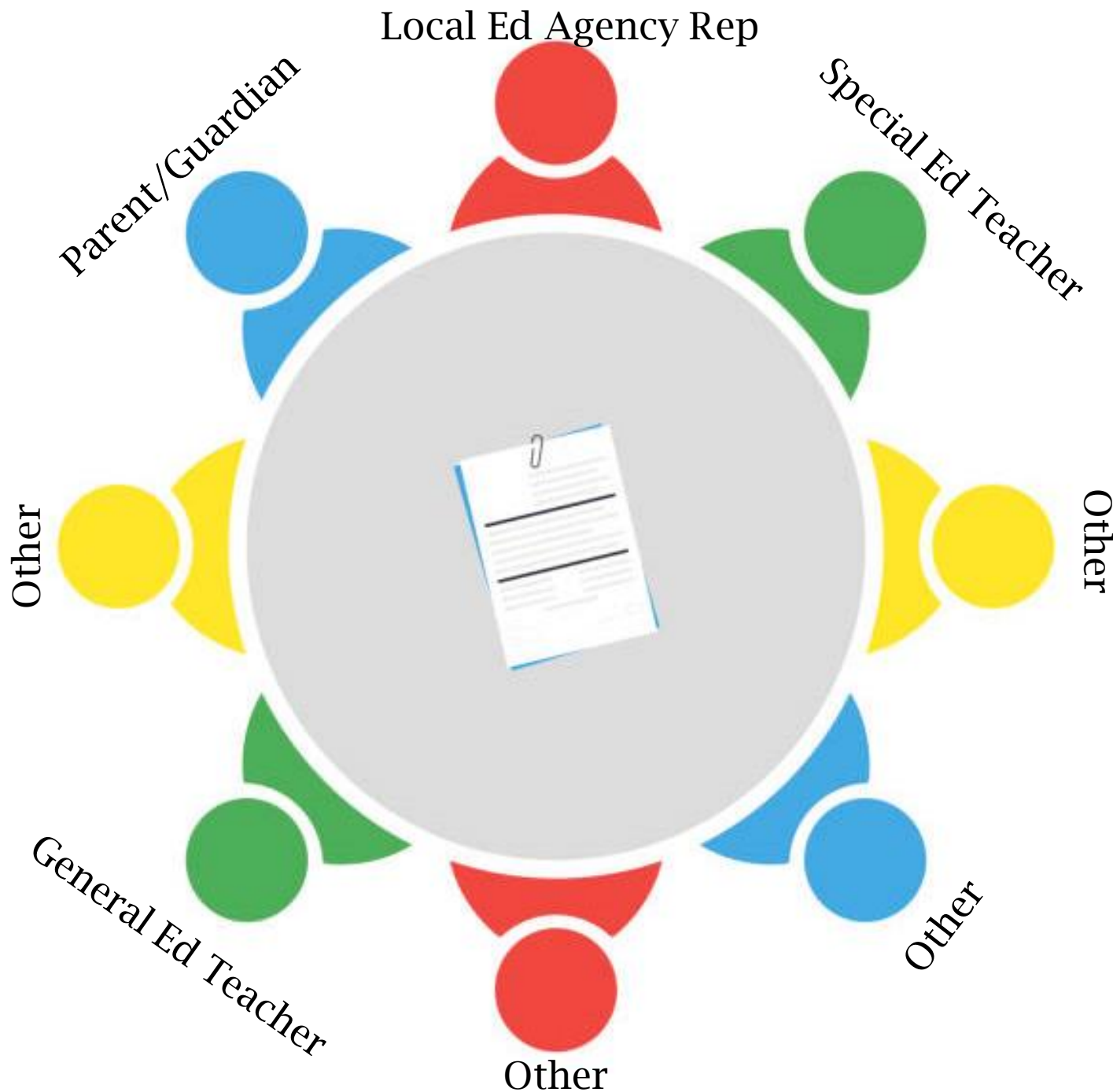
Skill #1: Understand Your Child's Disability

Do research, ask questions, read reports because...

Understanding helps you:

- ❖ Know which services are appropriate for your child
- ❖ Have high expectations
- ❖ Find the right fit for accommodations and support
- ❖ Be able to use resources to know more!

Skill #2: Know the Key Players



They are:

- You
- LEA
- Special Ed Teacher
- General Ed Teacher

Others:

- Can be related service providers (OT, PT, Speech, etc.)
- Parent can invite someone for support or knowledge of the child (TCFEF)

Learn the player's roles and contact information

Skill #3: Know Your Rights and Procedural Safeguards

Learn about them by...

- Reviewing the school policy handbook
- Joining a disability org/group
- Calling TCFEF to help you understand this information

The school should provide a link or upon request, a paper copy of the Parent's Rights under IDEA.

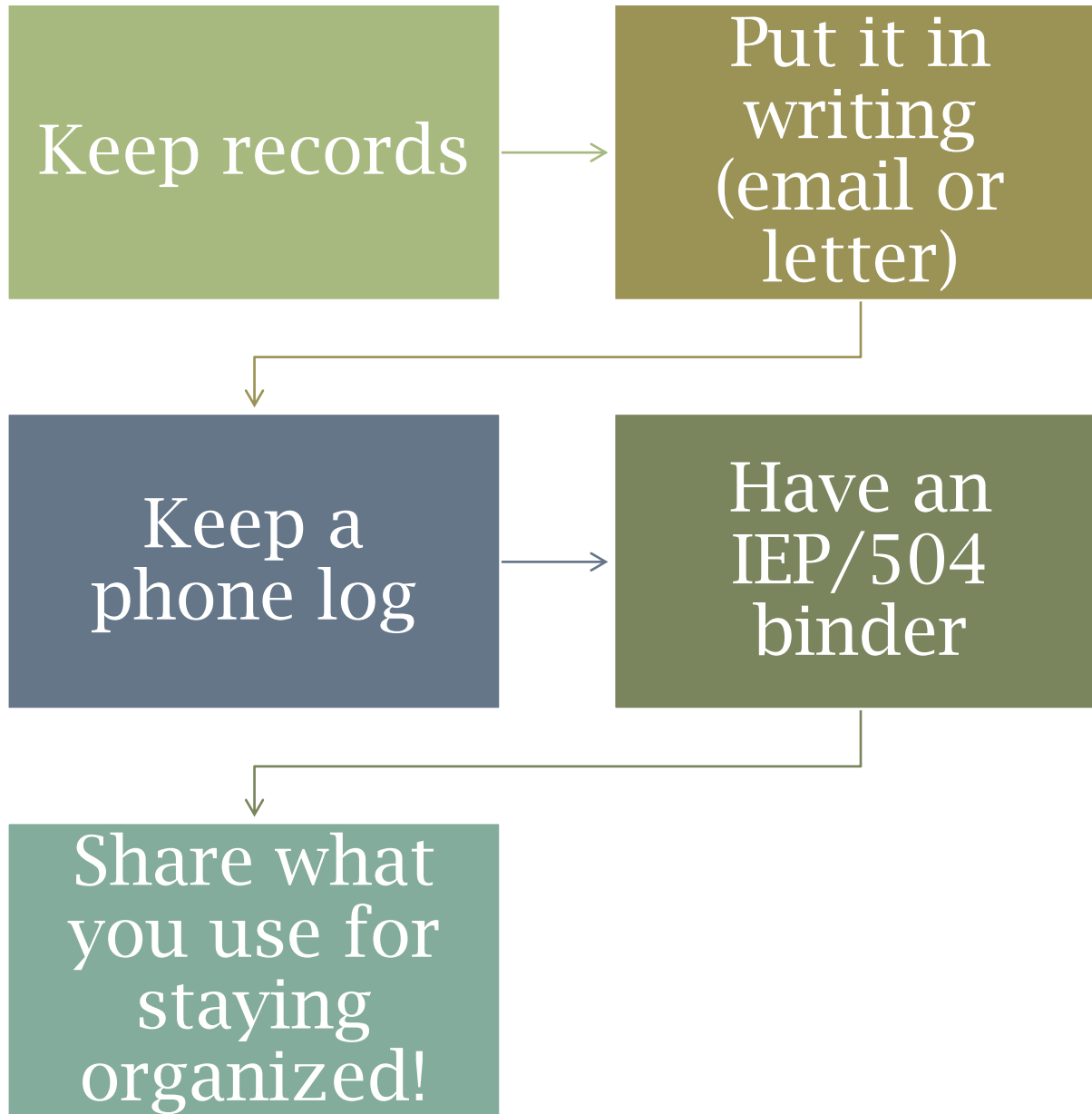
[IDEA 2004 Model Forms: Guidance on Required Content of Forms Under Part B of The Idea \(MS Word\) \(arkansas.gov\)](#)

Some Resources to Get Started

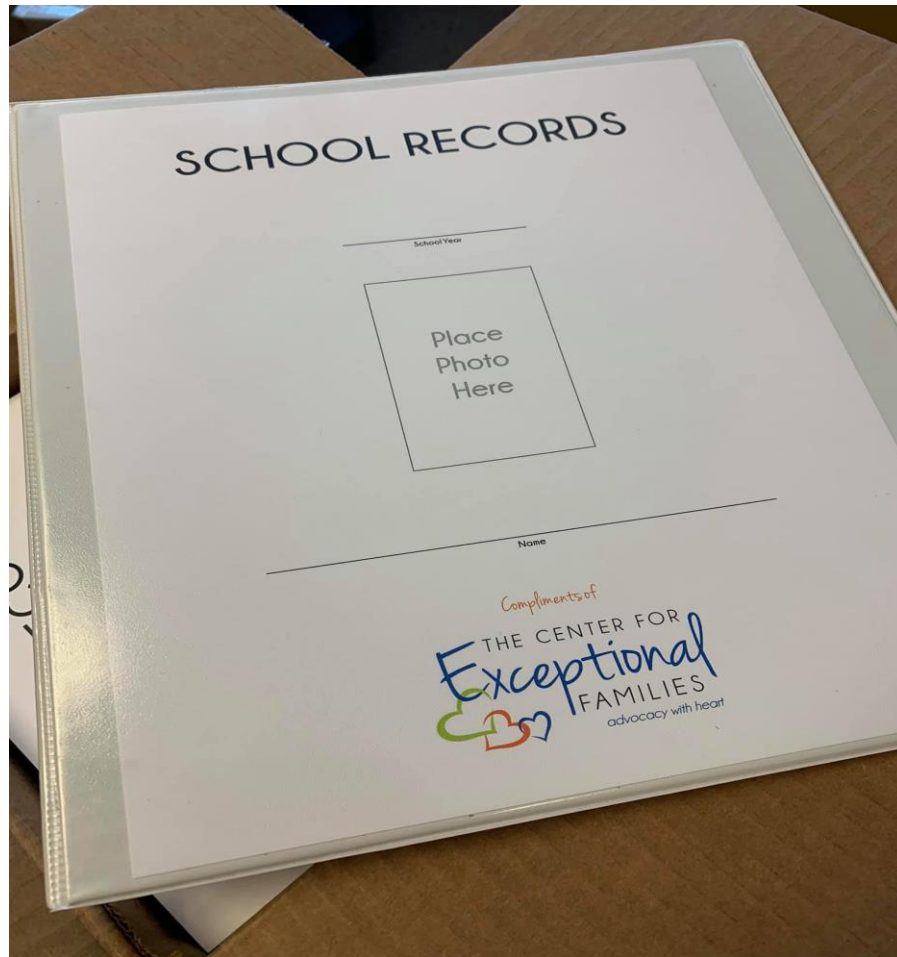
- [Resources - The Center for Exceptional Families](#)
- [Disability Rights Arkansas](#)
- [Arkansas Dept of Education Special Education](#)
- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)
- [Center for Parent Information and Resources | Your Central Hub for Parent Centers Serving Families of Children With Disabilities \(parentcenterhub.org\)](#)



Skill #4: Become Well Organized



The Center for Exceptional Families ©tcfef Example Binder!



Tabs:

- Communication Log
- Conference Notes
- Parents Rights
- Comprehensive Evaluations
- IEP/504
- Speech, OT, PT, Mental Health, etc.
- Behavior Plan
- Progress Reports
- Work Samples

What are some other tabs you think would be helpful in your binder?

Skill #5: Use Clear and Effective Communication

Keep your eyes on the “prize” – the appropriate services for your child!

Listen, ask questions, and speak concisely

Focus on strengths and needs of the child

Problem solve together to find solutions

Turn negatives into positives

Summarize: “What I hear you saying...” or “What I understand is that you are...and I am...”



Tips for Verbal Communication

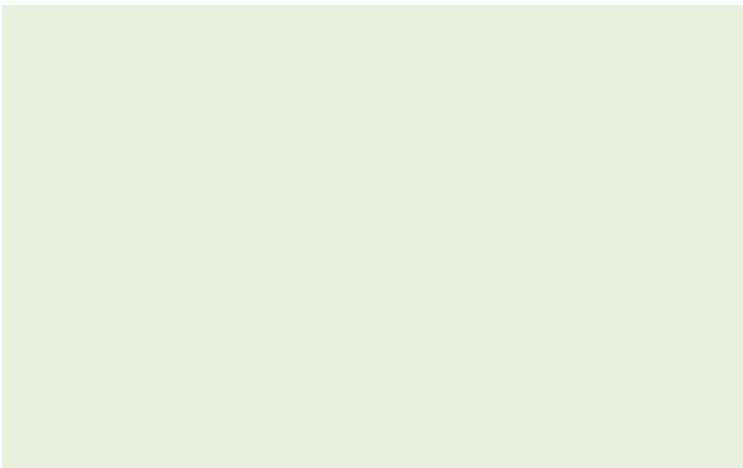
- ❖ Do your planning and BE PREPARED!
- ❖ Focus on your goal
- ❖ Show respect and expect it from others
- ❖ Manage your emotions
- ❖ Ask questions, rephrase for clarification
- ❖ Say thanks

Tips for Written Communication

Emails or letters should:

- Be sent to person who can make a change
- Be dated and signed
- Focus on one or two issues
- Be direct and concise
- Set a deadline if a reply is requested
- Give your contact information

Remember to keep a copy for yourself!



When you Disagree



- Identify the issue
- Try to stay open-minded
- Realize NO ONE has all the answers
- Be willing to compromise when possible
- Apologize when needed and accept apologies when given, EVERYONE makes mistakes

Skill #6: Know How to Resolve Disagreements

Informal Processes:

- Talk to team members first
- Try to give team members an opportunity to work with you
- Call a parent mentor from TCFEF

Formal Processes:

- Facilitation
- Mediation
- Complaints
- Due Process



Resources on Dispute Resolution

- [Division of Elementary and Secondary Education - Offices - Special Education - Dispute Resolution \(arkansas.gov\)](http://arkansas.gov)
- [Arkansas Special Education Mediation Project | William H. Bowen School of Law | University of Arkansas at Little Rock \(ualr.edu\)](http://ualr.edu)
- [CADRE | The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education \(cadreworks.org\)](http://cadreworks.org)





WHAT
HAVE YOU
LEARNED?



IS THERE A
SKILL YOU
HOPE TO
IMPROVE?



DO YOU
NEED MORE
RESOURCES?



DO YOU
NEED MORE
SUPPORT?



MAKE A
“TO DO”
LIST TO
GET YOU
STARTED.

Skills Checklist

A top-down view of a diverse group of people's hands stacked in a circle, symbolizing teamwork and collaboration. The hands are of various skin tones and are wearing different colored sleeves and watches. The background is a light, neutral color.

*We cannot accomplish all that we need
to do without working together.*
— *Bill Richardson*

Thank you
for your participation!

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Thecenterforexceptionalfamilies.org



Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education