

# Effective Parent Advocacy

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

–Author Unknown



# Who are we?

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We are Arkansas' Parent Training and Information Center

We are a statewide organization with regional mentors

We are funded by The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), grants, and private donations.

# Parent Training & Information Centers

## Serve

Serve families of children from birth to age 26 with disabilities

## Help

Help families and other agencies understand the benefits of IDEA and Section 504

## Provide

Provide a variety of free services including individual support, workshops, publications, community events, social media connections, etc

## Work

Work together with stakeholders to improve outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities



# Meet our Team!

<https://thecenterforexceptionalfamilies.org/our-team/parent-mentors/>

# 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

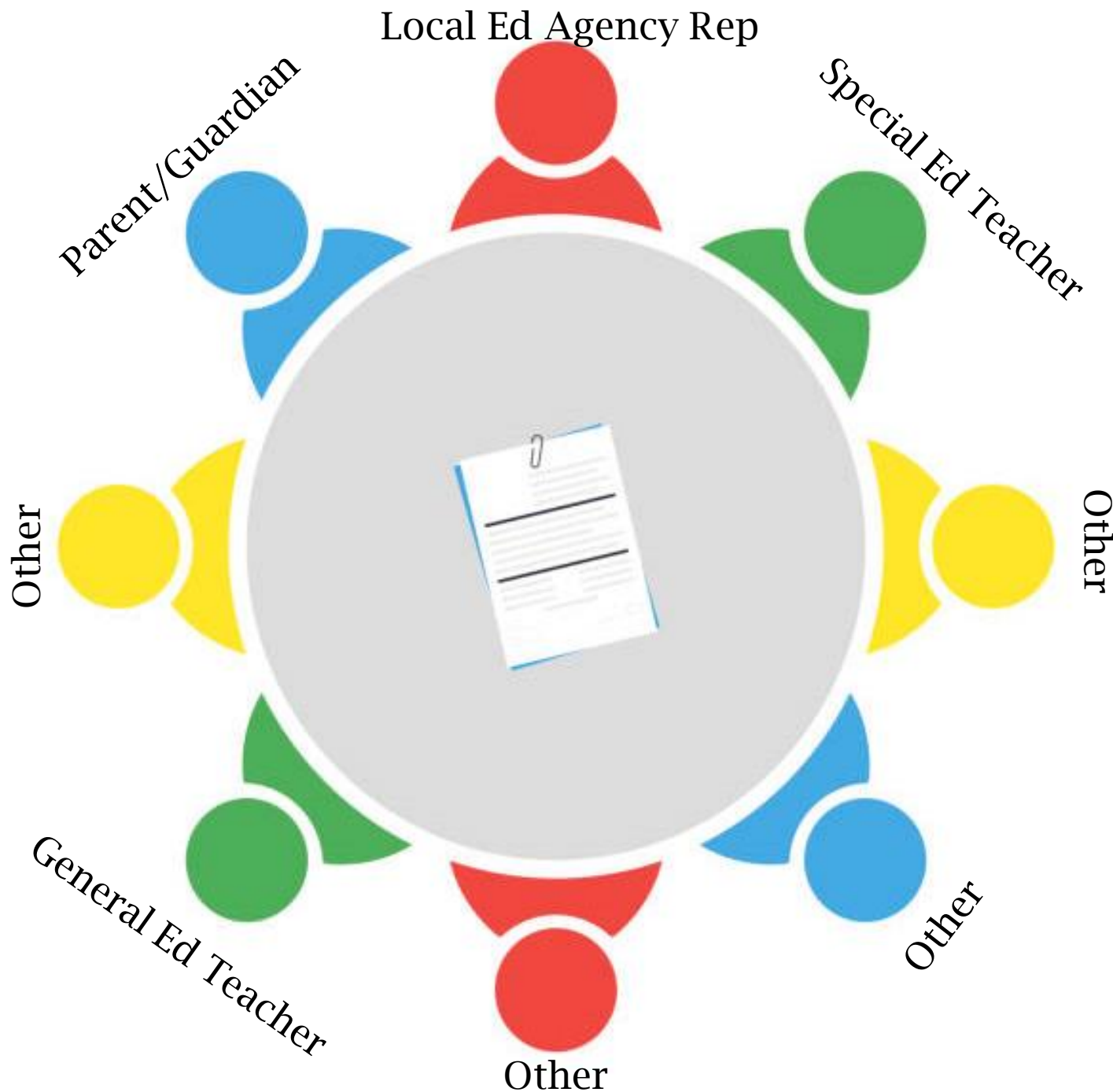
**They are:**

- 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 \(MS Word\) \(arkansas.gov\)](#)

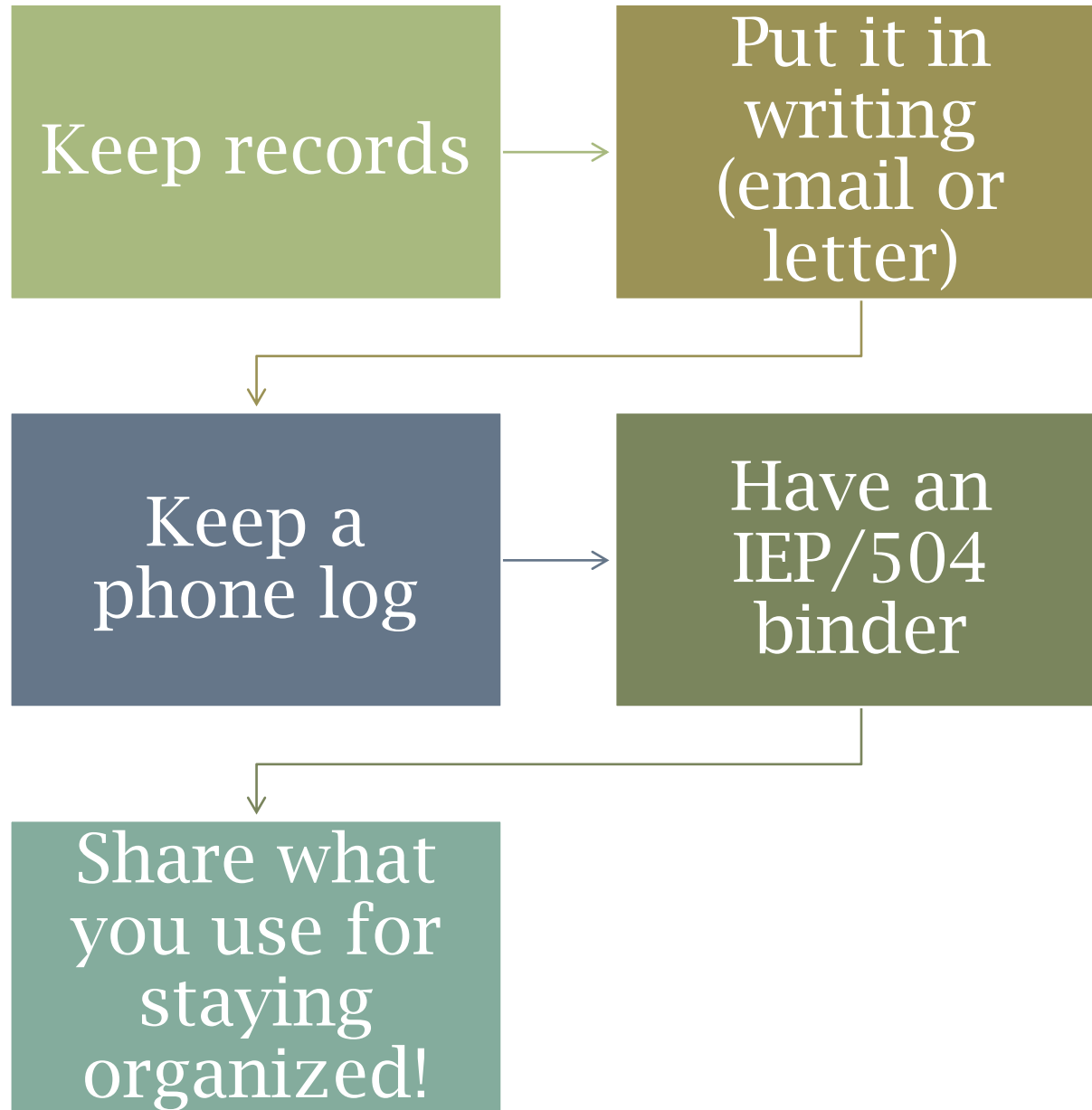


# Some Resources to Get Started

- [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 \(parentcenterhub.org\)](#)



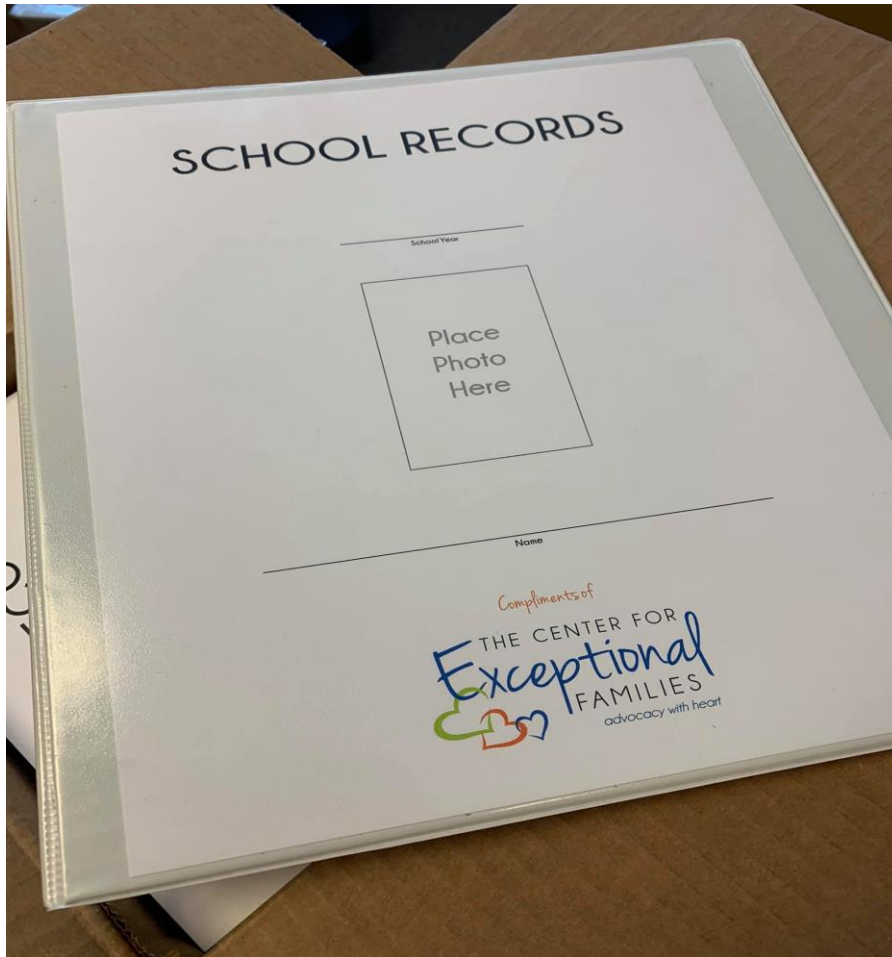
## Skill #4: Become Well Organized



# The Center for Exceptional Families

## Example Binder!

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### 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

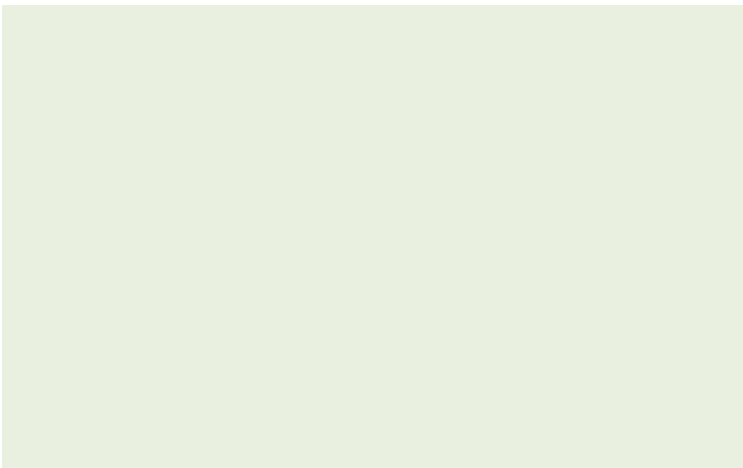


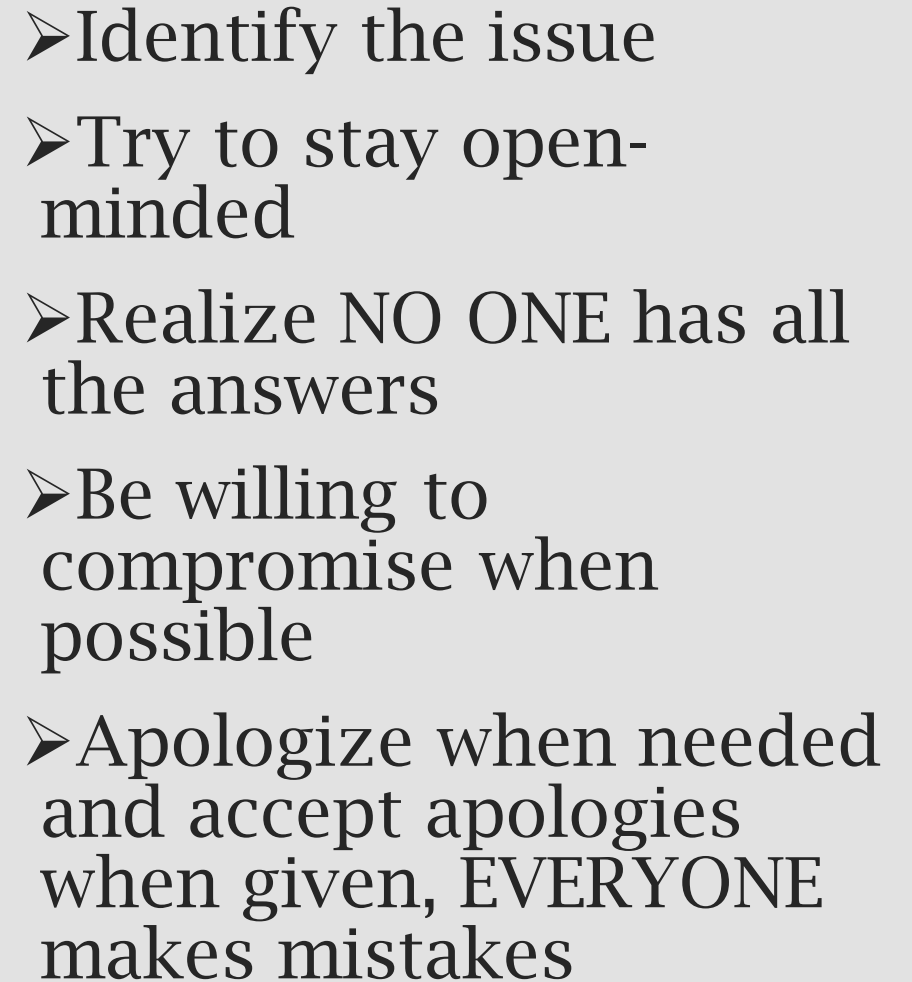
# Tips for Written Communication

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!





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





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 group of people's hands and forearms stacked in a circle, creating a sense of unity and teamwork. The hands are of various skin tones, and the clothing includes a striped shirt, a plaid shirt, a brown sweater, a red and black plaid shirt, a grey sweater, a blue and white checkered shirt, a yellow long-sleeved shirt, and a red long-sleeved shirt. A watch is visible on one of the wrists. The entire image is framed by a thin grey border.

*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](http://Thecenterforexceptionalfamilies.org)



Office of Special Education Programs  
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