



Early Childhood Background

What is Advocacy?

To many of us, the word “advocacy” seems somewhat mysterious. The word may conjure up visions of a professional lobbyist in Washington, D.C., who is a paid expert on an issue. Alternately, we may envision mass demonstrations or rallies. While professional lobbyists are advocates and demonstrations and rallies are relevant examples of advocacy efforts, they are only a small piece of the advocacy puzzle. Advocacy can actually be quite simple. Much of advocacy is simply seeing a need and finding ways to address that need. In short, advocacy is as basic as speaking on behalf of oneself or others to get something done or accomplished. You are an advocate if you have ever:

- ◆ Given your opinion in a town meeting;
- ◆ Returned a faulty product to a store;
- ◆ Stood up for someone who was being unfairly treated in a public place;
- ◆ Written a letter to a business about poor or outstanding services received;
- ◆ Gone to City Hall to complain about a property tax bill that seems too high;
- ◆ Participated in a “Get Out the Vote” effort for a bill you supported; or
- ◆ Met with your legislator to discuss concerns in your community.

This toolkit will focus on advocating on behalf of young children and their families. Being a child and family advocate gives you the opportunity to influence the way the public and policy makers think and act on issues involving young children and their families. As child advocates, we are concerned with ensuring that the institutions and policies in place to protect children are operating effectively, and we are concerned with supporting efforts to help these institutions and programs operate more effectively.

The following sections will provide detail and guidance on the following advocacy tactics:

Legislative Advocacy: Legislators are the decision-makers through which policies are made, programs are created, and dollars are allocated to those programs and policies. This section focuses on ways to cultivate those relationships and strategies for influencing the legislative process.

Media Advocacy: Informing the public and policy makers through the media can be a powerful force for change. This section offers tips on dealing with media and cultivating relationships with the press, and provides the tools needed to use the media to effectively communicate about issues facing young children and their families.

Advocacy During Election Years: Election years provide an important venue from which to initiate public awareness and social change. This chapter discusses ways to inform candidates about the importance of the early years and garner support from candidates on children's issues. This chapter also covers post-election advocacy strategies and ways to communicate with newly elected officials.

Regulatory Advocacy: Local, state, and federal regulatory agencies are the administrative bodies responsible for implementing the programs and policies authorized by the legislature. Advocates have the opportunity to help shape how these programs and policies will look and ensure that they are operationalized as intended and in the best interest of children and families. This section provides an outline of the regulatory process and suggests ways to advocate throughout the process.

Organizing Your Advocacy Efforts: The techniques described in each of the above sections can be used by your organization as you pursue your advocacy goals. However, you will probably find it useful to join forces with others to promote your cause. Collaborating with others can make your advocacy efforts more effective. This chapter focuses on two ways to organize your efforts – through coalition building and grassroots organizing.

10 Advocacy Tips

Coalition Building: There is power in numbers. By creating or joining a coalition with organizations focused on compatible child and family issues, network members can strengthen their voices and create a powerful presence for young children and their families. This section provides the framework of how to build a coalition and offers advocacy strategies for your coalitions.

Grassroots Organizing. Constituents elect their public officials. It follows that constituents influence the decisions that these officials make. This section provides the framework from which to mobilize an advocacy effort around the people in your community.

To become an effective advocate, it is critical that you know your subject. In order to speak effectively about an issue, one must be equipped with accurate information. It is important to stay abreast of the latest developments in the field of early childhood.

1. **Get to know your legislators.**

Become familiar with their districts and constituencies, voting records, schedules for being in the capitol and being home in their district, expertise, interest, and views. Become familiar with legislators' concerns and priorities. Contact legislators before you have an issue that you want addressed.

2. **Learn the legislative process.**

Understand how ideas work their way through the process to become laws or programs. Stay abreast of events and issues in the community and the legislature.

3. **Identify fellow advocates and partners.**

Forming a coalition with those with common goals arms you with more power and potentially more influence. Strengthen relationships with allies.

4. **Be open to negotiation.**

Do not dismiss potential allies because of past disagreements or a history of opposition. You never know who may turn out to support your issue.

5. Be honest, straightforward and realistic.

These are musts for any successful relationship. Never stretch the truth of a situation or make promises that you can't keep.

6. Timing is everything.

The earlier in the legislative process that you involve yourself, the more likely you will be able to influence the process.

7. Be sure to follow up with legislators and their staff.

Provide requested follow-up information and be a reliable and timely resource to your legislators. Let them know that they can rely on you as a resource.

8. Recognize the sensitivity of issues that involve government and family.

The same policy that some people believe will strengthen families is often seen by others as intrusive. Don't let anyone attack your objective because you described it in a way that appeared to support only one kind of family.

9. Always say thanks.

Complement policy makers who support your issues. Policy makers get hundreds of letters of criticism for every letter of appreciation they receive. Write letters thanking them when they support goals and policies you have recommended. Write letters to the editors in their community newspapers thanking them by name for their leadership and support. They will remember those letters and who wrote them.

10. Have staying power and be persistent.

Don't give up! Don't let one defeat discourage you. Changes don't happen overnight, but if you stay committed, you will succeed.

Attention Grabbing Talking Points

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Invest Now ... Or Pay Later

- **\$1** invested in quality early childhood programs for low-income children saves **\$7**.
- **\$1** invested in immunizations against diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough saves **\$23**.
- **\$1** spent in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutritional program saves **\$3.07** during a baby's first year.
- The average cost of providing a year of Head Start for one child is **\$5,403**.
- The average cost of keeping a person in prison for one year is **\$20,000**.
- In Iowa:
 - 188,413 children are ages 0-4 (36,380 under age 1)
 - Sixteen percent of children under age 5 are living in poverty.(1999) [Kids Count, 2000].
 - 77% of families with children ages 0-5 have both, or the only, parent working.
 - Half of all families with young children earn less than \$35,000 a year.
 - Child Care in Iowa
 - 2/3 of Iowa preschoolers need child care
 - Second highest living expense
 - \$8964 per year for 2 children (\$738/month)
 - \$3692 per year for tuition at public university