

Achieve with us.

Documentation as an advocacy tool

Documentation is an extremely effective tool for advocacy efforts. It is often the key to success when dealing with difficult situations. Documentation calls for accountability and also allows for kudos when things go right. Following are tips that parents have found useful and successful in clearing up misunderstandings and clarifying what they want for their child. Again, this is not legal advice, just suggestions you might try.

- Gather up all your child's records, such as IEP's, school multidisciplinary evaluations, medical records, and any correspondence with people involved in your child's education.
- Separate and organize them in a large 3-ring binder. Create tabs for each section. The binder keeps everything accessible, and organized.
- In each section of your binder organize the documents by date. I like to have the most recent in the front of the section.
- Ask copies of school documents
- Keep a copy of everything
- Keep a notebook by your phone. Record every effort you make to contact personnel, the date, reply, the name and position of the person contacted, and a brief summary of the visit. This also goes into your binder in a section called phone logs.
- When you attend any meeting, or if you initiate a phone call, have a written list of points you want addressed. Cross them off as they are discussed. Often parents think of those important points after the meeting has ended.
- Follow up every contact with a "letter of understanding". This documents all verbal agreements, and gives the other party a chance to clear up misunderstandings.
- Remember to make it a priority to send handwritten thank you notes when appropriate. Everyone can use a pat on the back when something positive has happened. Teachers very seldom receive such encouragement and it is most precious to them when they receive a thank you.