



Part 1: Child and Family Advocacy

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 children and 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 children and 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.

10 Advocacy Tips

- 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.

It is important to remember to thank the policy makers who give support to the goals and policies in which you have recommended. You can write a personal letter directly to your legislator, or you can publicly thank the policy legislator for his or her support in a letter to the editor in your community newspaper.

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.

Examples of Attention Grabbing Talking Points

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.
 - 6,682 children enrolled in Head Start (FY 2003).
 - Child Care in Iowa
 - 2/3 of Iowa preschoolers need child care
 - Second highest living expense
 - 4 year old child in a Family Child Care Home \$4815 per year
 - 4 year old child in a Child Care Center \$5595
 - \$4750 per year for tuition at public university