

PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

Parent's rights: Legislation and litigation have ensured the rightful place for parents of children in the public education.

Parents have the right to:

- Know the available services or facilities before making decisions;
- Help plan the best program for their child;
- Ask for and receive explanations from professionals;
- Review all written records regarding the child and family;
- Act as the child's advocate;
- Refuse requests or pressures without feeling guilty, selfish or ignorant;
- Express opinions and be heard with the same respect and consideration given others;
- Make the ultimate decision regarding the child, within the limits of the law.

Children's rights: Participate in an educational program that "is designed to enable learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy."

Tips For Talking To Professionals

- 1) Choose your time wisely! Do not try to address a concern if there is not time; do not begin a discussion in the hall or while the teacher is doing supervision, etc. Acknowledge you know the person is busy and ask when you can meet to discuss your concern. Press for a commitment – do not accept "I'll get back to you".
- 2) Know what you want to say. Write down your questions or concerns in advance. Have a friend read it to see how it sounds.
- 3) When you are addressing a problem, go prepared with suggestions for solving it.
- 4) Listen, make an effort to understand their position.
- 5) Avoid "you" statements use "I feel...", "I believe..", "I am..."
- 6) Keep cool. Do not lose our temper.
- 7) Be willing to compromise, negotiate.
- 8) When it doesn't work, go to Resolving Conflict.

When It Doesn't Work: Conflict Resolution

Have a strategy – Use conflict resolution strategies.

- 1) Jointly acknowledge that there is a problem.
- 2) Jointly agree on ground rules.
- 3) Jointly agree on a process for dealing with the problem.
- 4) Jointly define the problem.
- 5) Jointly identify shared interests.
- 6) Jointly identify options for mutual gains.
- 7) Jointly agree on criteria for choosing among options.
- 8) Jointly choose an option.
- 9) Jointly plan for evaluation. Set the date and identify the criteria.

THE TEACHER/PARENT CONFERENCE: Parent's energy during a conference needs to focus on the child. If your planning prior to the conference is complete, you will be more efficient and have more energy for gaining or processing information.

An Example for your preparation:

- 1) Look at your child's schoolwork. Write down your concerns.
- 2) Observe the child at home and play. Write down your observations.
- 3) Ask your child (if possible) his/her feelings about school.
- 4) Review school and other reports and records.
- 5) Identify your questions or concerns.
- 6) Develop some possible alternatives.
- 7) Ask a friend or spouse to accompany you to the conference.
- 8) Collect and arrange materials to bring to the conference.
- 9) Prepare yourself psychologically. Rehearse assertive behaviours.
- 10) Identify how and when to evaluate, set the date.

Begin the process again if necessary.