

# ADVOCACY: ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

Health professionals can be involved in advocacy either at an individual level (for example, obtaining services for a child or family) or at a local or national level (speaking with the media, community groups, or legislators).

## 1. Identify Family Needs or Concerns.

- Use open-ended questions to identify specific needs or concerns of the family  
*Example: "What are some of the main concerns in your life right now?"*
- Choose a specific area of focus  
*Example: Obtaining special education services for a child.*
- Clarify family's beliefs and expectations about the issue
- Determine what has been done to date, and what has (or hasn't) worked  
*Example: Parents may have tried unsuccessfully to obtain services for their child.*
- Do some initial "fact finding" and obtain data  
*Example: Contact board of education or local department of public health.*
- Talk with others, determine progress  
*Example: Is there a local school coalition that addresses the issue?*

## 2. Assess the Situation.

- Determine existing community resources
- Learn the laws  
*Example: Are there any existing laws that address the issue?*
- Review the data and resources to be sure they support the issue
- Assess political climate to determine support or opposition  
*Example: Is this issue of interest to anyone else (school/early intervention teacher, local policymakers)? Who (or what) might oppose the advocacy efforts? Why?*

## 3. Develop a Strategy.

- Limit efforts to a specific issue  
*Example: Obtaining special education services for a child rather than changing the laws.*
- Use existing resources
- Start with small steps, then build upon successes  
*Examples: Write a letter to the school district. Attend the special education evaluation.*

## 4. Follow Through.

- Be passionate about the issue, but willing to negotiate
- Review the outcome
- Evaluate your efforts
- Determine next steps with family
- Recognize that health professionals and families can learn from one another about effective advocacy

Source: Reproduced with permission from Green M, Palfrey JS, Clark EM, Anastasi JM, eds. 2002. *Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents* (2nd ed., rev.)—Pocket Guide. Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.