

Effective Parent Advocacy

Working with Your Child's IEP Team



Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

Federal Parent Training & Information Center

designated by the *Office of Special Education, US Department of Education*
serving families of children birth through 26 in
Marin, Napa, Sonoma, and Solano counties

California Family Resource Center

designated by *CA Department of Developmental Services*,
serving families of infants and toddlers in Marin, Sonoma and Solano

California Family Empowerment Center

designated by *CA Department of Education*
serving the underserved in Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties

Matrix Parent Network

We **empower** families of children with special needs to successfully understand and access the systems that serve them.

We want **you** to become successful advocates and role models for your children.



Who Are We?



Introductions

You Will Leave Here Knowing:

- What is an advocate?
- What are the skills and strategies needed to be an effective parent advocate?
- Techniques to use before, during, and after your next IEP, whether it is in-person or virtual.
- Why collaboration is THE KEY to successful advocacy at all times.



What is an Advocate?

An Advocate is someone who pleads the cause of another or promotes the interests of a cause or group.

You advocate every day!

Have you ever:

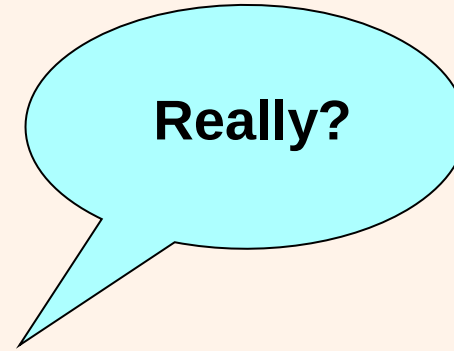
- Met with your child's teacher about any issue?
- Questioned a medical professional on issues concerning yourself or your child?

If you have done these things, you already are an Advocate

What is your Biggest Challenge Right Now?



Wow!



Really?

TURN

&

TALK

Skills & Strategies



Skills & Strategies

1. Use your understanding of your child.
2. Learn about the systems and key players.
3. Stay current on special education.
4. Try to stay organized.
5. Clear and compassionate communication is important.
6. Recognize perspective (yours and others).
7. Solve problems creatively to resolve disagreements.
8. Practice self-care.



Skills and Strategies 1: Use Your Understanding of Your Child

**You know your
child best!**



Use Your Understanding of Your Child

Your experiences are valuable and may be used to improve things – but only if you share with your team:

- You know when something is or isn't working.
- You have ideas about how to make things better.

If you can, observe, learn and communicate:

- How does the disability affect various aspects of life?
- How does the disability manifest itself in your own child?

Use Your Understanding of Your Child

Your observations are important:

- You can keep a journal of what works and what doesn't when you interact with your child.
- You can take videos of your child learning to illustrate how they handle homework.
- You can share your observations and thoughts with teachers and the IEP team.
- You can help teachers understand how well your student understands instructions; how successful they are at completing homework independently.

Skills and Strategies 2: Systems and Key Players

Lots to learn!



Systems and Key Players



- School Districts, Directors of Special Education, Program Managers, Principals, Teachers
- Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)
SELPA is a state-mandated consortium that provides for all special education service needs of children living within its boundaries. [SELPA in our service areas](#)
- Community Advisory Committees
CA Ed Code requires each SELPA to have a Community Advisory Committee for special education - members are both parents and professionals. [CACs in our service areas](#)
- [CA Special Education Advisory Commission](#)
- [CA State Department of Education Board](#)

Systems and Key Players

Social Security Administration <https://www.ssa.gov/>



Regional supports:

- [In-Home Support Services](#) – [Find your IHSS county office](#)
- [Regional Centers](#) – we have 6 in our service areas – [Regional Center look-up](#)
- [Matrix Mental Health resources](#)
- County Mental Health & Human Services

Systems and Key Players



- You can reach out to your child's case manager for every agency you interact with.
- You can reach out to the director or decision maker for each organization that supports your child.

We can help educate you on the systems that serve you and your child. Give us a call on our Helpline: 800-578-2592 or browse the information at [Matrix](#)

Skills and Strategies 3:

Stay Current on Special Education



3. Stay Current on Special Education

- [Matrix Website](#) and [Matrix Newsletters](#)
- Your school website
- Your SELPA (see links on previous slide)
- [The School & College Legal Services \(SCLS\) updates](#)
- National disability groups ([CHADD](#), [NAMI](#), [Autism Speaks](#), etc.)
- [Wrightslaw Special Education Law and Advocacy](#)
- [Disability Rights California](#) (DRC); [Special Education Rights and Responsibilities](#)



3. Stay Current on Special Education

More from Wrightslaw website

Wrightslaw Website

[How to Prepare for IEP Meetings, Provide Information and Share Concerns](#)

[How will I know if my child is making progress?](#)

[Check out Wrightslaw's IEP Pop-Up Tool covering present levels, goals and services, measuring progress and providing accommodations](#)



Skills and Strategies 4: Try to Stay Organized

**Emails, more emails,
and zoom meetings!**



Try to Stay Organized

- Keep an IEP binder or folder on your computer for documents, assessments, and important school records.
- If you don't have these documents, ask the school to provide them, even during distance learning.
- Put your questions, concerns and requests in writing (email is ok, but keep your emails).
- Keep a phone log.
- The Matrix IEP Toolkit is on the website.



Skills and Strategies 5:

Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

**Do You Hear
Me Now?**



Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important



Remember the 3 Cs:
Communication,
Cooperation,
Collaboration

Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

- Acknowledge and process your emotions.
- Focus on your child's needs *and* your own.
- Show respect and expect it from others.
- Try to avoid making people feel defensive.
- Be grateful and assume your IEP team is doing the best they can!



Talk so schools will listen ... and listen so schools will talk

Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting:

- Set ground rules, these will be different for video conferences.
- Having an agenda can help.
- Clarify time constraints.
- Listen & ask questions.
- Use and ask for facts and data rather than opinions.



Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting:

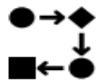
[Virtual Meetings: Strategies, Tips and Resources](#)

[IEP Meeting Tip Sheets](#)



Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

Virtual IEP Meetings: Technology Tips for All Participants

	Be patient—technology may not work as intended. Assume that everyone is doing their best.
	Test out technology in advance, and make sure all devices are charged.
	Have a back-up plan ready in the event technology issues arise.
	Join the meeting about 10–15 minutes in advance to troubleshoot any technology issues.
	Actively listen and participate in the meeting.
	Set up a meeting space that reduces potential distractions to minimize background noise as much as possible.
	Ensure the security of confidential information before, during, and after the meeting.
	Turn off any notifications on your computer—they may show up on others' screens.
	Use headphones or a headset with built-in microphone, when possible.



Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting:

- Be appreciative, acknowledge the efforts of others.
- Use humor.
- Repeat, reflect and rephrase for clarification.
- Build on small agreements.



Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for written communication:

Letters or emails should:

- Be sent to person who can make a change
- Focus on only one or two issues
- Be solution vs. blame oriented
- Be no longer than 1 page (less is more!)
- Set a deadline if a reply is requested
- Give your contact information



Skills and Strategies 6: Perspective (Yours and Others)

**It's Nice When We
Acknowledge Each
Other's Thoughts**



Perspective (Yours and Others)

- Acknowledge your fears & concerns as a parent.
- Empathize with the challenges teachers & administrators face – this is an unprecedented time!
- Find common goals & build upon small agreements.
- Don't rehash the past. Focus on what can be done today.
- Keep an open mind.
- Be grateful!



Skills and Strategies 7: Solving Problems Creatively

**Practice
Flexibility!**



Solving Problems Creatively



- Understand the difference between ***position*** & an ***interest***:
 - A fixed position is one way to solve a problem.
 - An interest can be met in several ways.
- Be willing to brainstorm.
- Ask questions to help others to be more specific.
- Call Matrix for help with this.

Solving Problems Creatively



- Focus on what can be done now.
- Document what services your child is getting... or not getting.
- Observe/record whether your child is happy and motivated at school, and how well they do on homework assignments.
- Ask for help and suggestions from teachers/specialists.
- Collaborate/communicate with your IEP team – reach out to them!

Solving Problems Creatively

Tips for Resolving Disagreements:

- Solve disagreements as close to source as possible.
- Communicate your concerns clearly.
- Be calm and factual.
- Document your process.
- Utilize administrative hierarchy.
- Work to preserve good relationships.



Solving Problems Creatively

When you disagree:

- Disagree without being disagreeable.
- Separate the person from the problem.
- Realize no one has all the answers.
- Make sure your facts are correct.
- Choose your battles.
- Call Matrix for help.
- Resolve conflict at the lowest level.



Begin Conflict Resolution at the Lowest Level

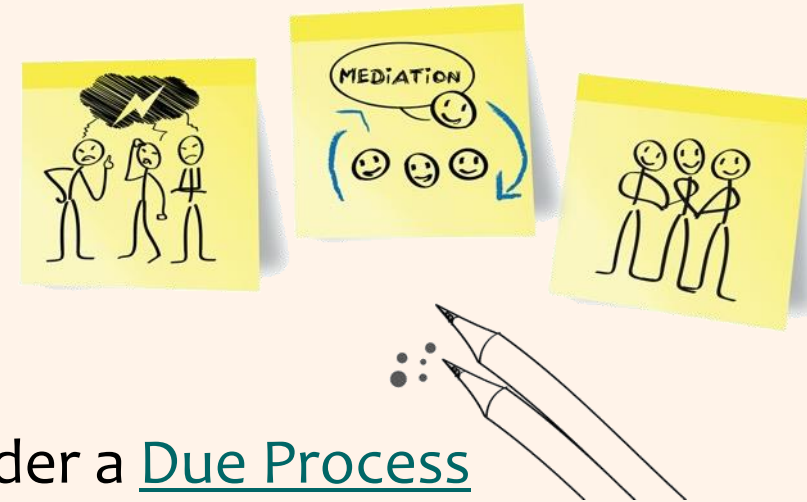
If you're having concerns or issues that effective communication, collaboration, and cooperation are not solving, be ready to climb the conflict resolution ladder.



Educate yourself as to your options: the [Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education](#) is a great place to start

Begin Conflict Resolution at the Lowest Level

- Call Matrix to discuss and strategize.
- Connect with teacher, principal, district program manager, special education director.
- Call an IEP meeting; consider a facilitated IEP meeting.
- Consider Alternative Dispute Resolution or Mediation.
- If necessary, file a [State Compliance Complaint](#) or consider a [Due Process Complaint with the Office of Administrative Hearings](#).



Skills and Strategies 8: Practice Self-Care

Self-Care is
not Selfish!



Practice Self-Care

- Try to get rest, exercise, and healthy food.
- School is not everything! Consider family harmony and well-being.
- Add enjoyable activities to you and your child's schedules when possible.
- Connect with people who give you encouragement & hope.
- Consider a class in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or other stress relief approaches.
- Try not to feel guilty!



Practice Self-Care

- Be gentle with yourself.
- Practice asking for help when you need it.
- Try not to not give in to resentment or frustration, but everyone does sometimes.
- Try to make self-care a habit.
- Look for Special Express emails and support groups from Matrix on/about stress reduction.
- We are role models for our children in how we manage stress, growth, and change.



The Gift of Self-Advocacy

“Nothing About Us Without Us”

- James Charlton

“Expresses the conviction of people with disabilities that they know what is best for them”

Short videos:

[Self-Advocacy: Find the Captain in You!](#)

[10 Self-Advocacy Tips - for Youth by Youth](#)

[I'm Determined \(VA Dept of Ed\)](#)

[CADRE Student-Led IEPs \(from DC\)](#)

[Whose Future Is It Anyway?](#)

[CADRE Self-Determination Series](#)

[Parent Center Hb Self-Advocacy](#)

[Dude, Where's My Transition Plan](#)

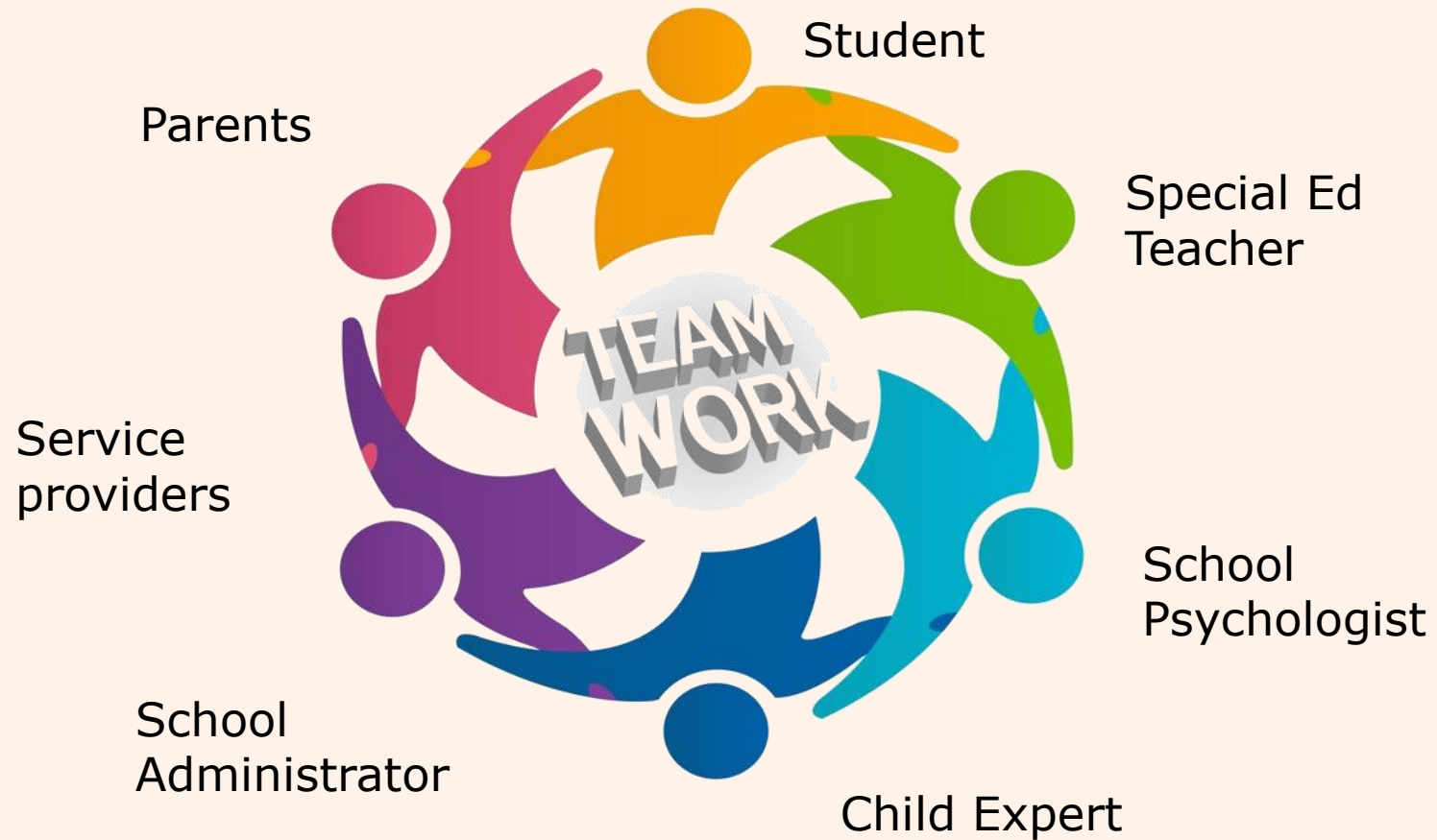
[Understood.org: Self-Awareness Worksheets](#)

[Understood.org: Self-Awareness Resources](#)

[Learn with Two Rivers Student-Led IEPs](#)



Collaboration = Success



Collaboration = Success

- Parents & professionals should be partners.
- Maintain good relationships.
- Work together.
- Share goals.
- Recognize that roles sometimes change.
- Draw on everyone's different skills and strengths.
- Solve problems together.



Apply what you've learned



I'll try that.



Me too!

TURN

&

TALK

Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

This workshop was developed in part under a grant from the US Department of Education, the Office of Special Education and the California Department of Education.

Matrix is grateful for the Federal and State funding it receives, but it's not enough. We rely on other grants and on donations from people like you!

Help Us Help You: Donate

Q & A

**The ability to ask
the right question is
the single most
important skill!**

