

Advocating for Your Child's Needs in School

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It is difficult when we see our children struggling in school. They could be struggling academically, socially or in their relationships with their teachers. This month I will explore the idea of advocating for our children in school. Each week, we will focus on an aspect of advocacy. If you have a story about how you have advocated for your child, please share your experience. We are all comforted by knowing we are not the only ones facing problems at school with our children, and we are enriched by knowing that these problems have solutions.

Teachers and principals work with a multitude of children each day. Often children have similar problems. It becomes convenient to sometimes define a student by his or her problem, rather than see the student as a complete, unique human being. Parents, know their children better than anyone else. In a problem-solving situation, parents can bring that perspective to the table. When children have difficulty in school, parents bring the knowledge of who the child is; what the child feels; and how the actions the school may take will impact him or her. That important perspective will help

develop solutions that are more likely to work for the individual child.

I know a parent whose child was having behavior problems at school. The teacher was dealing with the child's behavior by using her progressive discipline chart. The child's behavior "progressed" to the lowest level of performance on the chart. In addition, the child was getting into confrontations in the school yard. Finally, the principal called the child into the office and requested that mom come to meet with her. When the child's mother arrived the child was very hostile to both his mother and the principal. Mom and the principal agreed that the child would be placed on in-house suspension on the subsequent Monday.

While the child was cooling off in another room, mom and the principal discussed what had been happening in the child's life up to that time. Mom described that her child was feeling discouraged in various aspects of his life. The progressive downward trend in his behavior in the classroom was making him feel that he could never be a good student. Mom and the principal concluded that they needed to implement consequences that would encourage rather than further discourage this child. They discussed actions that would be taken at home and at school to help the child work successfully. The solutions included a referral to a counselor.

Over the weekend mom and the child worked together to accomplish tasks at home. His contribution was recognized with positive feedback. Part of those tasks included school work that needed to be caught up. On

Monday, part of the in-house suspension time was used for a meeting between the child and the principal to make behavioral plans that included options on how to behave in difficult situations. The child would be checking in with the principal to assess his continuing progress. Things have greatly improved for the child and continue to progress for the better.

Every child can be successful in school. Problems must be addressed, but to be addressed effectively, parents need to be part of the solution. They bring the perspective of the whole child to the problem-solving process. It can be the difference between success and failure.

We will continue on the theme of advocacy next week.

With love and affection,
Rosemarie

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