

# Self-Advocacy

Gifted learners who speak up for themselves are more apt to find challenges and opportunities to best fit their needs.

While it's true that all people may benefit by self-advocating, it's especially important for gifted learners whose needs go beyond the regular classroom.

As parents, you are on the front line of support for your child's self-advocacy. In order to be effective, however, you must be knowledgeable. Both you and your learner should have a clear understanding of the nature of giftedness, your child's individual learner profile, your rights and responsibilities within the education system, and possible options and alternatives.

## TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN

Even in the primary grades, it's not too early for parents to start teaching their young child to self-advocate in both academic and social settings:

- Don't solve every problem that arises for your child. Problem-solving builds life skills like self-reliance, sharing, conflict resolution, and independence.
- Help your child discern what is important to her and how to choose what's worth fighting for.
- Teach that advocating is not about complaining or whining. Instead, it's about knowing what she wants, assessing the situation to determine if the desired outcome is feasible, thinking about the best way to approach the person who can make the decision, and arming herself with evidence to support her position.
- Practice role-playing situations in which your child has a choice whether to simply complain or to self-advocate for a desired outcome.
- Empower your child to approach teachers, coaches, and other adults directly to present their ideas or solutions.

## HELPING TWEENS & TEENS

By middle school and high school, adolescents should be taking charge of their academic paths.

**1. Together, read and discuss the following information to better understand your gifted child's rights and responsibilities.**

- *The Survival Guide for Gifted Kids* or *The Gifted Teen Survival Guide: Smart, Sharp, and Ready for (Almost) Anything*—good overviews written for kids.
- Your school district's mission statement and its implications for gifted children.
- Your district's policies and plans regarding gifted education.
- Any state or provincial laws regarding gifted students' education.

(Continued)



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Self-advocacy is the process of recognizing and meeting the needs specific to your learning ability without compromising the dignity of yourself or others.

—Loring Brinckerhoff

» Four essential steps to successful self-advocacy for gifted learners:

—Understand your rights and responsibilities.

—Assess and reflect on your personal learner profile.

— Match options and opportunities to your profile.

—Connect with the advocates who can support your plan.

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## HELPING TEENS & TWEENS (continued)

### 2. Together, consider options that match your child's learner profile.

- Help your child assess and reflect on her learner profile in these five areas: Cognitive ability, specific academic strengths, interests, learning preferences, and personal traits.
- Study your district's *Course of Study* bulletin and, for comparison, those of neighboring districts.
- Discuss which additional classroom, course, extracurricular, and out-of-school options are available and those which might be created; determine which are best for your child's interests and abilities.

### 3. Plan for success. Help your child take the lead in each of these:

- Choose a short or long-term goal. Then create a step-by-step plan to achieve that goal.
- Communicate the plan to the adult advocates needed to help make it happen (See "10 Tips for Talking to Teachers").
- Put the plan into action.
- Regularly assess progress toward the goal and make revisions as needed.
- Celebrate successes.
- Choose a new goal and begin again and again, each time with your child taking on more and more responsibility.
- When your learner is ready, willing, and able to begin taking charge of her own education, your support and feedback at every step of the process may be your most important advocacy role from then on.



## FOR MORE INFO

Douglas, D. (2017). *The power of self-advocacy for gifted learners: Teaching the four essential steps to success*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Galbraith, J., & Delisle, J. (2015). 10 tips for talking to teachers. In *When gifted kids don't have all the answers* (Rev.ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

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Rogers, K. B. (2002). *Re-forming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.



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