

# The Arc of Virginia

## Family Involvement Project

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# The Arc of Virginia

The Arc of Virginia advocates for individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities and their families, so they may all lead productive and fulfilling lives.

The Arc of Virginia works for the creation of individualized and self-determined community-based supports through:

- leadership
- advocacy
- education

The Arc of Virginia is governed by a Board of Directors. Officers are elected by representatives of the local Arc chapters.

# State Office & Virginia Chapters

The Arc of Virginia is proud to have 23 hardworking local Chapters around the Commonwealth.

State Office:

The Arc of Virginia

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# Family Involvement Project

In an effort to strengthen and increase family involvement in Virginia's early intervention system, DMHMRSAS, Virginia's Lead Agency, funds the Family Involvement Program housed at The Arc of Virginia.

Project staff are parents of children with special needs. Our staff is committed to serving families and providers in Virginia as we all work together to make a good thing, The Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia, even better!

# Purpose

The Family Involvement Project's purpose is to increase and strengthen family involvement with the 40 local interagency coordinating councils that guide local early intervention services.

# Focus

The Family Involvement Project currently focuses on three areas of Virginia's early intervention system these areas are:

# MIMS

- Working with The Infant & Toddler Connection's Monitoring and Improvement Measurement System (MIMS) Consultants to ensure that parents are involved throughout the monitoring process.

# Parent-to-Parent

- Ensuring Parent To Parent support is available to all families receiving services from The Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia.

# Family Involvement

- Strengthening and increasing diverse family involvement with the 40 local interagency coordinating councils that guide local early intervention services.

# The Arc of Virginia Family Involvement Project

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# Advocacy

Advocacy is a key component of our identity as The Arc of Virginia.

# A Child's Most Important Advocate

- Parent
- Team member
- Advocate

# Advocacy

What is an advocate?

- Advocate – Verb, transitive. To speak, plead or argue in favor of.
- Synonym is support.
  1. One that argues for a cause; a supporter or defender; an advocate of civil rights.
  2. One that pleads in another's behalf; an intercessor.
  3. A lawyer

(The American Heritage Dictionary)

# Advocate's Functions

- Supports, helps, assists, and aids.
- Speaks and pleads on behalf of others.
- Defends and argues for people or causes.

(From Emotions to Advocacy Pam and Pete Wright)

# Different Types of Advocates

- Lay Advocates – use their specialized knowledge and expertise to help parents resolve problems with schools.
- Educational Advocates – evaluate children with disabilities and make recommendations about educational services.

- School Personnel – Teachers and special education providers often view themselves as advocates.
- Parents – natural advocates for their children.

(From Emotions to Advocacy Pam and Pete Wright)

# What Advocates Do

- Gather Information
- Learn the Rules of the Game
- Plan and Prepare
- Keep Written Records
- Ask Questions, Listen to Answers
- Identify Problems
- Propose Solutions

# Gather Information

- Advocates gather facts and information.
- Organization.
- Learn about child's disability.

# Learn the Rules of the Game

- Learn About Everything The System Offers and is Required To Offer.
- Make Sure Your Child & Family Benefit From All of the Knowledge and Experience of the Other Team Members.

# Plan and Prepare

- Planning prevents problems.
- Give the other team members the information that they need to help your child succeed.

# Keep Written Records

- Documents are often the key to success.
- If a statement is not written down, it was not said.
- Make requests in writing and write polite follow-up letters to document events, discussions, and meetings.

# Ask Questions, Listen to Answers

- Advocates are not afraid to ask questions.
- Give and receive respect.
- Be Responsible.
- Try to see things from someone else's perspective as well as helping them to see it from yours.
- Hearing versus Listening.

# Identify Problems

- Develop strategies.
- Problem solve.
- Advocates do not waste valuable time and energy looking for people to blame.

# Propose Solutions

- Advocates discuss issues and make offers and proposals.
- Advocates seek “win-win” solutions that will satisfy the interests of parents and schools.

# Mistakes People Make

- Going in for a fight.
- Too uncritical.
- Taking an “all or nothing” approach.
- Understanding your role to educate.
- Not giving programs a try.
- Attempting to “micro-manage.”
- Focusing on minor missteps.

- Not consenting to evaluations.
- Choosing the wrong independent evaluations.
- Not providing information in a timely way.
- Not responding in a timely way.
- Not documenting issues.
- Seeing the system as a monolith.

# What Does the Research Say?

- How does family involvement impact our children's outcomes?
  1. Parent involvement at home and at school.
  2. The nature of parent/family involvement.
  3. Parent/family involvement in early childhood programs.

# Resources

- Family Involvement Project “What Am I Doing Here?” manual.
- From Emotions to Advocacy  
Pam and Pete Wright
- [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)
- Mistakes People Make – Parents  
Robert K. Crabtree

- Family Involvement in Education What Does the Research Say?

By Cherie Takemoto, Executive  
Parent Educational Advocacy

Director

Training Center (PEATC)

- Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope,  
Preparing for My IEP The Partnership for  
People with Disabilities.  
[www.vcu.edu/partnership](http://www.vcu.edu/partnership)