

## Advocating for a Child with ASD

When it comes to education team meetings, parents know their child better than anyone in the room. Research on family-school partnerships consistently finds that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) bring essential insight into their child's communication, sensory, and social needs, and that involving parents fully in the development of an individual education and learning plan, using their participation rights, leads to stronger outcomes than a school-led process alone. Here are some practical, evidence-informed strategies for advocating effectively for your child.

### 1. See Yourself as a Partner, Not a Guest

A [systematic review](#) of parent involvement in ASD education identified four distinct roles parents take on: home-school communication, advocacy, collaborative partnership, and school-based participation. Studies on family-school consultation models show that a collaborative, rather than adversarial, orientation is what improves communication and outcomes over time. Approaching meetings as a shared problem-solving process, rather than a negotiation to win, tends to produce better results for your child.

### 2. Come Prepared with Documentation

Before an IPRC or individual education and learning plan meeting, gather concrete evidence: recent report cards, teacher emails, samples of schoolwork, and specific examples of how your child manages transitions, sensory input, or social situations. If your child has a psychoeducational assessment, review it closely, since this is what should be driving the specific goals and accommodations written into the plan. Bring written notes of what you want to raise. Documentation, rather than general impressions, grounds the conversation in your child's actual day-to-day experience.

### 3. Ask for Accommodations with an Evidence Base

Familiarizing yourself with [research and evidence-based practice for autism](#) helps you evaluate whether the strategies and goals proposed for your child align with what works, rather than accepting a generic template. Some accommodations with a reasonably strong evidence base include:

- Predictable routines and advance notice before transitions or schedule changes
- Access to a quiet space for sensory regulation, built into the day rather than used only after distress
- Deep pressure or movement-based sensory strategies, which have stronger research support than passive tools like alternative seating

- Visual supports for schedules and multi-step directions
- Positive behaviour support strategies focused on skill-building, not just behaviour reduction

If a proposed accommodation doesn't have clear research support, it's reasonable to ask the team what evidence or rationale is behind it.

## 4. Help Your Child Build Self-Advocacy Skills

Where your child can participate, [research on self-advocacy](#) shows real benefit to preparing them for the meeting itself: explaining its purpose in advance, practicing how they might describe their own strengths and needs, and rehearsing questions they might be asked. Students who can effectively advocate for accommodations and preferred supports tend to show fewer expressions of frustration and challenging behaviour, since they have another way to get their needs met. Even brief, age-appropriate preparation at home builds a skill that carries well beyond a single meeting.

## 5. Communicate Collaboratively Between Meetings

Education and learning plan meetings are only one point of contact. [Studies on parent-teacher consultation models](#) find that ongoing, informal communication, not just formal meetings, is where trust and shared understanding are built. Short, regular check-ins with the classroom teacher or special education resource teacher (SERT) about what's working at home and at school keep everyone working from the same picture and make the next formal meeting far more productive.

## 6. Know That Transitions Require Their Own Plan

Many provinces and school districts require a documented transition plan whenever a student moves between panels (elementary to secondary), between schools, or eventually out of secondary school. Check with the law in your province and the policies of your district to determine how these changes should be managed. Qualitative research with autistic students identifies transitions, and the unpredictability around them, as a major source of school-related distress, and points to advance planning, reduced last-minute change, and predictable routines as effective supports. If your child is approaching a panel transition, ask specifically how the transition plan will be developed and what continuity will look like.

*This handout is intended as a general guide and does not replace individualized advice from your child's assessment team or school board.*