

# The 3 Rs of Advocacy: Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

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Communication leads to community, that is,  
to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing. *Rollo May*

The relationships we develop and nurture make all the difference for our children! The tips below apply to relationships with school staff, medical personnel, and/or other service providers.



**Turn a stranger into a person you know.**  
Get to know staff as people: learn their likes and dislikes, discover commonalities, etc. People will go the extra mile for those they're connected to.



**Describe your child as a real person, a whole person.** Don't define your child by his label. Let others be connected to your child as a person, first.



**Give permission for mistakes to be made.**  
Parents have all made mistakes and learned along the way. Don't expect perfection from others.



**Focus on positives and demonstrate gratitude.**  
Everyone appreciates being recognized when things are going well.



**A Little Effort Can Generate Big Smiles!**  
Send birthday greetings, recognize support staff on administrative assistant day, thank lunchroom helpers, bring baked goodies to medical staff, etc.



**Be hard on the goals and soft on the strategies.**  
Hold fast to the ideal goals for your child, but be willing to brainstorm with others on how your child can reach those goals.

What to do when relationships become strained?  
Read more tips on next page.

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## Strategies for Improving Difficult Situations

### Arranged marriages take work.

Relationships between families and people paid to be in children's lives are similar to arranged marriages. There will be times when extra effort is needed to develop relationships.



### Paint an *objective* picture of your concerns.

Share specific examples, how long it has been going on, and how often it occurs. Offer more than one possible solution.



### Shorter notes get quicker responses.

Your correspondence to teachers, doctors, or others needs to be brief. Use bullet points to make it easier to read.

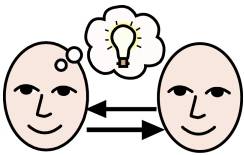


### Listen to yourself, first.

Before sending a letter, read it out loud first, and/or practice what you're going to say in the mirror. Listen to the thoughts you have and the feelings in your gut. What is it you want others to understand?

### Effective listening doesn't come naturally.

All perspectives need to be spoken and understood by everyone. Others will listen better to your perspective if they first feel that they have been understood.



### Add yourself to the equation.

Move beyond "us vs. them" thinking. Your child's future depends on you being an active member of the team that makes critical decisions.



### Nurture relationships.

Everyone involved must work to sustain the partnerships.



### Stay focused on your child.

Your child's interests come first. Partnerships with the whole community play a critical role in supporting all children to be successful.

