

Effective Advocacy During Distance Learning

Effective Advocacy

Working with Your Child's IEP Team



during distance learning



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Matrix Parent Network

We **empower** families of children with special needs to successfully understand and access the systems that serve them.

We want **you** to become successful advocates and role models for your children.



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Who Are We?



Introducing today's presenters

Assessing how we are all feeling (Poll #1)




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Things to Remember

Self-care is key at this time!
Make a note of present levels if possible.
You can call a meeting (IEP or other).
This is an opportunity to observe:


- your child's education in action,
- services (speech, academic, OT) and
- social interactions and behavior.



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You Will Leave Here Knowing:

- What does advocacy look like during distance learning?
- Skills and techniques to use before, during, and after your next IEP, whether it is in-person or virtual.
- Why collaboration is THE KEY to successful advocacy at all times.



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What is an Advocate?

An Advocate is someone who pleads the cause of another or promotes the interests of a cause or group.

You Advocate Every Day!
Have you ever:

- Met with your child's teacher about any issue?
- Questioned a medical professional on issues concerning yourself or your child?

If you have done these things, you already are an *Advocate*



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What is your biggest challenge right now?


Wow! **Really?**

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Skills & Strategies



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Skills & Strategies

1. Use your understanding of your child's disability.
2. Learn about the systems and key players.
3. Stay current on Special Ed during distance learning.
4. Try to stay organized.
5. Clear and compassionate communication is important.
6. Recognize Perspective (yours and others).
7. Solve Problems Creatively to resolve disagreements.
8. Practice self-care.



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Skills and Strategies 1: Use your Understanding of Your Child's Disability

You Know Your Child Best!



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1. Use Your Understanding of your Child's Disability

Your experiences are valuable and may be used to improve things – but only if you share with your team:

- You know when something is or isn't working.
- You have ideas about how to make things better.

If you can, observe, learn and communicate:

- How does the disability affects various aspects of life?
- How does the disability manifests itself in your own child?

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1. Use Your Understanding of your Child's Disability

During distance learning:

- Focus on what can be provided right now
- Moderate your expectations
- Use the services and resources that are helpful and convenient
- Matrix resources are available
- And remember to communicate your thoughts, concerns and observations to your team

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1. Use Your Understanding of your Child's Disability

During distance learning:

- Try keeping a journal of what is working and what's not working.
- You could take videos of your child learning to illustrate what's working and what's not .
- Email teachers and the IEP team about what's working and what's not working.
- Your documentation on access to distance learning and progress on goals may help with receiving compensatory services in the future, if your child needs them.



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Skills and Strategies 2: Systems and Key Players

Lots to Learn!




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2. Systems and Key Players

Public Agencies are trying to provide support

- School Districts
- SELPA
 - <https://www.napacoe.org/selpa/>
 - <https://www.sonomaselpa.org/>
 - <https://www.marinschools.org/SELPA>
 - <https://www.solanocountyseipa.net/>
 - http://www.vallejo.k12.ca.us/cms/resources?d=x&folder_group_id=1310009055869&group_id=1486199276435&id=1385191355683




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2. Systems and Key Players

Public Agencies are trying to provide support

- > Community Advisory Committees
 - > <https://www.marinschools.org/domain/92> (called SEAC)
 - > https://www.sonomaselpa.org/pub/selpa_docs/cac.html
 - > <https://www.solanocountysepa.net/parents/cac>
 - > <https://www.napacoe.org/selpa/> (scroll down for CAC brochure)
 - > <https://vusd-ca.schoolloop.com/sped> (scroll down for CAC meetings)




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2. Systems and Key Players

Public Agencies are trying to provide support

- > Social Security Administration
 - > <https://www.ssa.gov/>
- > County Mental Health & Human Services link
 - > <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health-Services/>
 - > <https://www.marinlhs.org/>
 - > <https://www.countyofnapa.org/156/HHSA>
 - > <https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/hss/default.asp>




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2. Systems and Key Players

In summary:

- You can reach out to your child's case manager for every agency you interact with.
- You can reach out to the director or decision maker for each organization that supports your child.




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Skills and Strategies 3: Stay current on Spec. Ed during distance learning

IDEA still in place during distance learning!



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3. Stay current on Special Ed during distance learning

Matrix Website and Newsletters link:
<https://www.matrixparents.org/resources/matrix-newsletters/>

Your school website

Your SELPA (see links on previous slide)

The SCLS legal updates: <https://sclscal.org/legal-updates/>

California Department of Education COVID-19 Guidance page for Spec Ed:
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/covid-19sspcom.asp>
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/specialedcovid19guidance.asp>

-- link to the weekly newsletter registration:
join-covid19-update@mlist.cde.ca.gov

National disability groups (CHADD.org, NAMI.org, Autism Speaks, etc.)

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3. Stay current on Special Ed during distance learning

- Most services cannot be delivered the same way they were before distance learning.
- Many districts are creating “Contingency Learning Plans” for IEPs, not doing change of placements and prior written notice.
- These plans are not meant to replace IEPs, just an alternative way of teaching for now.
- Check if your district is creating “Contingency Learning Plans”.

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Skills and Strategies 4: Try to stay Organized

Emails, more emails, and zoom meeting!



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4. Try to stay Organized

- Keep an IEP binder or folder on your computer for documents, assessments, and important school records.
- If you don't have these documents, ask the school to provide them, even during distance learning.
- Put your questions, concerns and requests in writing (email is ok, but keep your emails).
- Keep a phone log.
- The Matrix IEP Toolkit is on the website.

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Skills and Strategies 5 : Clear and Compassionate Communication is Important

Do You Hear Me Now?




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5. Clear & Compassionate Communication is Important

- Everyone needs to try and be flexible, compassionate and patient during this difficult time.
- Acknowledge and process your emotions.
- Focus on your child's needs *and* your own.
- Show respect and expect it from others.
- Try to avoid making people feel defensive.
- Be grateful and assume your IEP team is doing the best they can!



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5. Clear & Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting:

- Set ground rules, these will be different for video conferences.
- Having an agenda can help.
- Clarify time constraints.
- Listen & ask questions.
- Use and ask for facts and data rather than opinions.



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5. Clear & Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for Good Communication at a Meeting:

- Be appreciative, acknowledge the efforts of others.
- Use humor.
- Repeat, reflect and rephrase for clarification.
- Build on small agreements.



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5. Clear & Compassionate Communication is Important

Tips for written communication:

Letters or emails should:


- Be sent to person who can make a change
- Focus on only one or two issues
- Be solution vs. blame oriented
- Be no longer than 1 page (less is more!)
- Set a deadline if a reply is requested
- Give your contact information



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Skills and Strategies 6: Perspective (Yours and Others)


It is Nice When We Acknowledge Each Other's Thoughts



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6. Perspective (Yours and Others)

- Acknowledge your fears & concerns as a parent.
- Empathize with the challenges teachers & administrators face – this is an unprecedented time!
- Find common goals & build upon small agreements.
- Don't rehash the past. Focus on what can be done today.
- Keep an open mind.
- Be grateful!




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Skills and Strategies 7: Solving Problems Creatively

Practice Flexibility



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7. Solving Problems Creatively

- Focus on what can be done now.
- Document what services your child is getting... or not getting.
- Observe whether you child is accessing distance learning.
- To the extent you can, monitor progress.
- Worry about compensatory services later – but document your child’s progress now!
- There may be issues to resolve when in-person instruction resumes.
- Collaborate with your IEP team!

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7. Solving Problems Creatively

- Understand the difference between *position* & an *interest*:
 - A fixed position is one way to solve a problem.
 - An interest can be met in several ways.
- Be willing to brainstorm.
- Ask questions to help others to be more specific.
- Call Matrix for help with this.

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7. Solving Problems Creatively

Tips for Resolving Disagreements:

- Solve disagreements as close to source as possible.
- Communicate your concerns clearly.
- Be calm and factual.
- Document your process.
- Utilize administrative hierarchy.
- Work to preserve good relationships.



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7. Solving Problems Creatively

When you disagree:

- Disagree without being disagreeable.
- Separate the person from the problem.
- Realize no one has all the answers.
- Make sure your facts are correct.
- Choose your battles.
- SELPA and ADR are still available during school closures.
- Call Matrix for help.



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Skills and Strategies 8: Practice Self-Care

Self-Care is not Selfish!




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8. Practice Self-Care


- Try to get rest, exercise, and healthy food.
- School is not everything! Consider family harmony and well-being.
- Add enjoyable activities to you and your child's schedules when possible.
- Connect with people who give you encouragement & hope.
- Consider a class in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or other stress relief approaches.
- Try not to feel guilty!



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8. Practice Self-Care

- Be gentle with yourself.
- Practice asking for help when you need it.
- Try not to not give in to resentment or frustration, but everyone does sometimes.
- Try to make self-care a habit.
- Look for Special Express emails from Matrix on stress reduction.
- We are role models for our children in how we manage stress, growth, and change.




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Apply what you've learned



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Collaboration = Success

Student
Special Ed Teacher
School Psychologist
Child Expert
School Administrator
Service providers
Parents

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Collaboration = Success

- Parents & Professionals should be partners.
- Maintain good relationships in this difficult time.
- Work together.
- Share goals.
- Recognize that roles have changed.
- Draw on everyone's different skills and strengths.
- Solve problems together.

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Skills Checklist

What have you learned?

- Is there a skill you hope to improve?
- Do you need more resources?
- Do you need more support?

What did you think about this presentation? (Poll #2)

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Q&A



The ability to ask the right question is the single more important skill!




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Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

We are Parent Advisors not
Attorneys or Advocates

We *do not* give legal advice or advise a course of action. We provide support and information to help parents learn about their rights and options, find referrals and resources and help parents become the best advocate they can be for their child.

1-800-578-2592  www.matrixparents.org


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Federal Parent Training & Information Center
designated by the *Office of Special Education, US Department of Education*, serving families of children birth through 26 in Marin, Napa, Sonoma & Solano counties

California Family Resource Center
designated by *CA Department of Developmental Services*, serving families of infants and toddlers

California Family Empowerment Center
designated by *CA Department of Education* serving the underserved in Solano and Sonoma Counties




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U.S. Office of Special Education Programs




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Please consider supporting Matrix in any way you can!

Thank you.

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