

fAMILY

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**Parent Advocate of the Month
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WHAT MADE YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

When we first got my son's diagnosis, he was non-verbal, and advocating for my child was my only option. We had our diagnosis and started all recommended therapies within three months. We were very lucky and grateful for such speedy programs, and I feel it was my persistence that got us our evaluation and everything after so quickly.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES?

When we got my son's diagnosis, I was a ball of emotions. Joy because we had answers, but the fear of the unknown was very overpowering. I bought the books, I read the article the doctor gave us, I joined Facebook Mom groups, gathering as much information as I could. I was hands-on with his early intervention, ABA, and speech therapies. I had an open chat with his developmental pediatrician, asking if we need to try other therapies if she feels this will help him even more. This year, especially, was hard and really pushed my knowledge of IEP laws and supports. I did the research; I reached out to the Arc for help. Asking for help, asking the questions you may not be the only one who doesn't have an answer, is, in my opinion, always the best way to educate yourself. Having a special needs child is isolating; you pour so much into support for your child that you lose sight of the rest of your life. Having support groups with people going through the same thing is so helpful.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHER FAMILIES ADVOCATING FOR THEIR CHILD'S RIGHTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

The advice I would give to other families is to never stop advocating. Your child is depending on you for help no matter the disability; while it is Autism for us, it could be something different for you. My son depended on me to get him support, and when we did, we watched him bloom into an amazing little boy. He talks now, he reads, and he is unbelievably smart—he does things I had no idea he even knew how to do. He makes it easy to advocate for him, and I never want his spirit to diminish.

WHAT DOES BEING YOUR CHILD'S BEST ADVOCATE MEAN TO YOU?

Being my child's advocate means everything to me; it's up to me to pave his future. I fight his battles, whether they are the silent ones or loud ones, to ensure he has all the tools he needs to succeed in everyday life.

