

Introduction to Advocacy

What comes to mind when you hear the word “advocacy?” A lobbyist in Washington, DC? A political rally with thousands of participants? Or perhaps a state senator speaking on the senate floor about the concerns of her community? These are all examples of advocacy, as are other types of actions that most of us take every day.

You are an advocate if you have ever:

- helped a family receive needed services;
- stood up for someone who was being treated unfairly;
- attended a parent/teacher conference at your child’s school;
- participated in a city council meeting.

This toolkit is designed to prepare you to successfully advocate for public policies that benefit young children and their families.

Advocacy is building support for an issue among audiences such as the general public, elected officials, the media, and key opinion leaders. Activities such as educating audiences about a topic, sharing illustrative stories, or working on a solution to a problem are considered advocacy. Individual citizens can always contact their elected officials as constituents. State and federal governments do not regulate the public at large from par-

ticipating in advocacy or lobbying activities. Remember to use your personal e-mail and telephone when contacting policymakers.

Lobbying is communicating with elected officials to influence their actions regarding a specific piece of legislation. Many nonprofits can legally lobby, as long as they do not exceed restrictions on how time and resources are expended based on federal Internal Revenue Service tax laws. Expert legal and tax advice should be sought by an organization before engaging in lobbying activities.

Advocacy activities that are not lobbying

- Invite a legislator to visit your program and hear about the work being done.
- Provide a policymaker with information or educational materials on a topic.
- Talk with the media about a specific social issue.
- Track legislative positions and voting records.

Learn more about permissible activities during an election in the Voting and Elections section.

Consult the following resources for additional information on advocacy guidelines for nonprofit organizations:

Alliance for Justice

(www.allianceforjustice.org)

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest

(www.clpi.org)

Donors Forum

(www.donorsforum.org)

National Head Start Association

(www.nhsa.org)

Why Should You Advocate?

The goal of early childhood advocacy is to improve the lives of children and families by influencing legislators’ and policymakers’ opinions and activities. To carry out their responsibilities, public officials require and welcome the advice that well-informed people (like you) provide.