

I Am My Child's Advocate

Alma R. Sandoval Garcia

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does it mean to be your child's advocate? Describe a time you advocated for your child.
2. In English, we have an idiom: "Before you judge someone, walk a mile in their shoes." Discuss what this means and try using it in various contexts.



wasn't receiving speech therapy, even though the IEP required it. I went to the Department of Education to complain. After many meetings, and a lot of back and forth, they finally started to provide the speech therapy that he was supposed to have been receiving for several years.

My Son Faces Many Difficulties

Being a mother is a hard job, and being mother of a child with disabilities is harder. I became a single mother when I was 17.

My son was born with hearing problems. He is not 100% deaf, but almost. He wears hearing aids. All his education has been in American Sign Language (ASL). But he still had problems. At the age of 9, my son was diagnosed with learning disabilities. And at the age of 11, he was diagnosed with a mild intellectual developmental disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I felt so bad and sad. I knew this would mean my son would face many difficulties in life.

It Took Many Meetings to Get Him the Help He Needs

Moms, dads, and legal guardians of children with disabilities are their first (and sometimes only) advocates. I always had hard moments in his school. The IEP (individual education plan) wasn't working for him. I found out that my son

Walking in My Child's Shoes

I loved to help my son with his learning. I read books to him and made games for him. We had flash cards and a white board with markers, and we counted everything around the house. Instead of going out or watching TV, I wanted to invest my free time to help my son,

Over time, I learned a lot about his disabilities and how to help him. For example, he doesn't do well when he is around a lot of people. Now, he knows what to do in those situations. It took years for both of us to know what is good for him and what is not. It is important to walk in your child's shoes. You must try to understand your child, no



matter what age they are, so that you can support them.

An Accident, A Change of Plans

When my son was about to graduate from high school, he got in an accident during his welding class. A big metal table fell down on his left toe. He had an emergency surgery that day, and his toe was amputated. I felt so horrible for him, but he felt worse. He told me that on the day of the accident, he was about to tell me his plans for the future. He wanted to become an underwater welder, and he knew he could do it. After the accident though, his plans changed.

Momma to the Rescue!

He graduated with a modified high school diploma, and now he is working at Walmart as a stocker. I encouraged him to go to college, but he rejected my suggestion. I couldn't convince him.

But wait! Momma to the rescue! I went to the college and asked for some information. I made an appointment for him and got him there. Now, he is convinced that he can have a better job by getting a certificate or degree. They explained to him all his legal rights as a student with disabilities in college and how college works. Once he starts classes, he will have an ASL interpreter for all his classes. Soon, he will start classes at community college.

If you have a disabled child, spend time with your child to discover his interests. Encourage him, speak up for him, and encourage him to speak up for himself. Don't just be present; be in his shoes. Your child needs you to help him with his future. "Give him the spoon, and let him measure the sugar."

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What challenges did Alma face, and how did she overcome them? Cite passages from the text to back up your answer.
2. Look up Issue 65 of The Change Agent and read more by parents who have advocated for their children with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

George H.W. Bush signed the ADA in 1990. This year, 2025, is the 35th anniversary of the ADA becoming law. In 2008, George W. Bush signed amendments that widened the definition of disability. This law was called the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA). Most people still refer to it as the ADA.



Photo of President George H. W. Bush signing the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nationalmuseumofamericanhistory/20825041956/>. CC-by-sa-2.0

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