

12 Tips for Engaging and Supporting Families in Advocacy

For Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organizations and community partners

Early experiences play an important role in shaping children's developing brains at home, in child care, and in their communities. Connecting the science of early brain development to families' everyday experiences can help parents recognize the power of their voices and serve as a starting point for meaningful family advocacy. Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organizations and other community-based partners can support families along their advocacy journey using the tips below.

1. Meet Families Where They Are
Build awareness and interest through trusted relationships and familiar settings. Connect with families at community events, family nights, child care, and other programs and services offered by your organization and in the community.

2. Connect Early Brain Science to Everyday Experiences
Help families understand how everyday interactions and experiences support children's early brain development. Incorporate brain-building tips and information about the importance of brain development from resources like Vroom® into outreach events, parent workshops, advocacy trainings, family activities, and one-on-one conversations.

3. Make Getting Involved Easy
Offer simple, low-pressure ways for families to take the next step into advocacy. Invite them to express interest in an advocacy event, sign up for email updates, join an advocacy distribution list, or follow social media campaigns. Use plain-language advocacy materials. Follow up with timely email or text reminders about upcoming events, workshops, and opportunities to take action.

4. Make Relationships the Foundation
Prioritize trust, consistency, and meaningful connections. Assign dedicated staff or mentors to check in regularly, answer questions, and help families navigate advocacy opportunities. Listen to families' experiences and interests and create welcoming spaces where families feel valued, respected, and heard.

5. Build a Ladder of Engagement and Advocacy
Create a flexible ladder of engagement and advocacy that allows families to participate at a level that matches their interests, time, and comfort. Families might begin by learning about brain development at a local outreach event, then participate in a brain-building workshop, attend an Advocacy 101 training, respond to an action alert, share a personal story, meet with a decisionmaker, and eventually take on a leadership role. Make it easy to move between activities and celebrate progress at every step.

6. Remove Barriers to Participation
Make participation in workshops, trainings, and advocacy events realistic for families with different schedules, responsibilities, and resources. Whenever possible, provide child care, meals, transportation vouchers, stipends for families' time, and flexible scheduling. Offer both virtual and in-person workshops with language and interpretation options, accessible locations, and family-friendly activities. Consider incentives such as gift cards, interactive experiences, and family nights to encourage participation.

7. Build and Support Advocacy Skills
Offer advocacy training that starts with the basics and builds toward more advanced skills, including storytelling, communications, media engagement, public testimony, and meeting with lawmakers. Use readiness surveys before, during, and after workshops and trainings to understand families' interests, confidence, and support needs. Use hands-on activities to connect brain science, families' lived experiences, and policy issues. Provide resources to help families develop personal "why" statements, share relevant fact sheets, and identify the decisionmakers who can influence change.

8. Help Families Develop and Practice Their Stories
Support families in crafting their experiences into clear, compelling messages. Provide storytelling templates and guided activities to help families connect their personal experiences to children's needs and early brain development. Offer practice sessions where families can rehearse, receive constructive feedback, and refine their messages before sharing them in meetings, written communications, videos, or testimony.

9. Create Opportunities for Peer Connection
Help families learn from and support one another. Offer peer-mentor groups, networking opportunities, and informal conversations where families can exchange ideas and experiences. Invite experienced advocates to welcome new participants, share lessons learned, and provide encouragement.

10. Create Meaningful Opportunities for Action
Give families practical ways to apply their skills and influence decisions. Opportunities can include emailing lawmakers, signing letters, responding to action alerts, sending postcards, submitting testimony, attending public meetings, joining task forces, participating in state advocacy events, or meeting with policymakers. Before each activity, provide talking points, plain-language informational materials, relevant brain-science information, and coaching so families feel prepared.

11. Provide Ongoing Coaching and Support
Offer regular check-ins, individualized support, and opportunities to practice new skills. After advocacy activities, hold debriefs and feedback sessions to reflect on what went well, address challenges, and identify next steps.

12. Grow Family Advocate Leadership Opportunities
Create pathways for families to move from participation to leadership. Invite experienced advocates to mentor others, facilitate peer sessions, help plan advocacy activities, and represent family perspectives in coalitions or community meetings.

