

## **Advocating from Strength** *Bringing our best selves to the table*

The back-to-school time is when we look to the year ahead and hope for the best for our children. The complex systems of the school board, health care, and social services to name a few can appear daunting, especially when things are not going as well as we would like. At these times, we summon our energies to become the advocates our children need.

When we advocate, we are usually asking for something. We want something to change, we want a new support or service, or we want a wrong to be rectified. To do that job well, we gather information and prepare our case, yet sometimes the outcome isn't what we hoped for. Whether things go well or not often has to do with the invisible dynamics that occur when we interact with other people. You can't control the thoughts or actions of those you will be meeting with, but there is a lot you can do to ensure you bring your best self to the table and make it easier for those on the other side to really hear and understand your interests.

Focusing on our part in the process, if we can use our personal strengths effectively and manage how our emotions affect our behaviour, then we are on the road to a more successful advocating experience.

Emotions can run high when our loved ones' best interests are at stake. This can work for, or against, us. Our emotions give us the fuel to take action, but also cloud our judgment when we speak or act. "I'm sorry I said that, but I was just so angry!" is often an excuse when a meeting didn't go well.

Being emotionally self-aware is a crucial step in preventing our feelings from sabotaging our efforts. There is no shortage of practices that we can incorporate into our lives that can help us stay emotionally healthy and self-aware. Understanding the mind/body dynamic of emotions and exploring what works for you will pay great dividends for you, both personally and as a parent. Feeling on top of your game emotionally allows you to engage in the advocating opportunity with a clear perspective, use your strengths effectively, and respond to the uniqueness of the people you deal with in the most productive and respectful way.

What are your personal strengths? How about those of the person across the table from you? There are some effective personality assessment tools that, when used properly, can provide a goldmine of hints on how to make the advocating process run smoothly for you and the person you are meeting with. It is like knowing a secret language when you sit down for these important interactions.

Knowing how to best use your strengths and manage your emotions are keys to effective advocating. How to do that and create a plan designed for you, with tips for before, during and after the advocating process was what we learned at Dufferin Parent Support Network's Advocating from Strength presentation.

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