

# BE AN ADVOCATE

When facing suicide or self-harm concerns, many parents and caregivers become their child's main/best advocate.

For one mother, Sarah, and her daughter, trying to find the right resources often felt like clawing her way up a muddy hill. "I had no assistance or idea of what to do so I kept an eye on her and kept checking in. I asked family for help and called the school. I had to advocate and put things in place."

Another mother, Angie, said she also had to become an advocate for her son. "I found I had to advocate for what I believed was right – I know my son and I know what he needs, what will help and what won't. I had to get a backbone and stand up for what I think is right for my son. As a mom / parent you know your child best and you have to stand up for what you believe in."

Here are some helpful tips to help you advocate for your child or youth.

## Educate yourself (and your child/ youth)

Learn about mental health, your child's diagnosis and/or concerns, make a plan for potential crisis situations. You can also help your child or youth to manage their own learning, and watch for patterns/triggers, for example, time of year, specific events, or feelings that precede a symptom increase.

### 1. Listen

Ask your child about their experiences and emotions. Ask them specifically about suicide, self-harm and other mental health concerns. Be prepared to listen without necessarily solving a problem.

### 2. Keep track

Write down the symptoms, situations and experiences your child/youth is having. Help them look for any specific triggers or preceding events to share with their team. Include in your records things like the safety concerns you have and the impacts on yourself and other family members. These sorts of journals support you in speaking to professionals and others who can help.

### 3. Persist

Keep asking for the service and keep trying until you find the right one. Ask for what you need. If you or your child needs additional care, education, training, diagnosis, treatment, in-home support, school system support or an advocate, keep asking. When you are offered an appointment or a service, take any options you can until you find the right fit for your child/youth and family.

### 4. Encourage your child to ask for help

Through modelling a comfort and willingness to ask for help and identify your own needs this sends the message that asking for help is a positive choice and can prompt your child to do the same. Respond to your child's requests for help as much as possible in a calm, positive and supportive way. Be sure to advocate with your child youth as much as possible. It is an emotional, stressful and scary experience, but it is theirs.

### 5. Manage your fears and emotions

Your child is going to need you to manage your own fears as a parent. Allow your child to see that you know this is their crisis, not yours, so that you are the calm influence. You will need your own emotional outlet but try not to allow yourself to be a part of the emotional salad spinner." Your child needs to know you care about their experience, you love them unconditionally and that you are on their side, but they also need you to be their constant.



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