



MITCHELL'S PLACE  
UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

# BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD

Presented by:  
Glenda Grbac, M. Ed., BCBA, LBA



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF  
Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention  
Children's Trust Fund of Alabama

# INTRODUCTION



Glenda Grbac, M. Ed., BCBA, LBA



School Consultant and Parent Advocate



Mitchell's Place - 2016



# OUTLINE

1

Intro to advocacy

2

Effective  
communication

3

Developing a  
master plan

# USE YOUR POWER



“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

- Alice Walker

# FACT OR MYTH?

-  1 Advocacy is only for major conflicts.
-  2 Special education is only for kids with severe physical and intellectual disabilities.
-  3 Parents have the right to request an evaluation for their child to determine if special education services are needed.
-  4 Getting services is always a battle.
-  5 Kids who are eligible for special education services are entitled to a free and appropriate public education.



# INTRO TO ADVOCACY



# WHAT IS AN ADVOCATE?

- 1 Support, help, assist and aid
- 2 Speak and plead on behalf of others
- 3 Defend and argue for people or cause



# WHY IS ADVOCACY IMPORTANT?

1

To raise awareness

2

To influence and change policies

3

To represent individuals who may not be able to speak for themselves

# WHO IS AN ADVOCATE?

EDUCATIONAL  
ADVOCATES

LAY  
ADVOCATES

SCHOOL  
PERSONNEL

PARENTS

# PARENTS CAN BE THE BEST ADVOCATES!



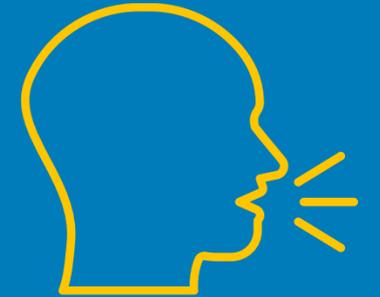
First teacher



Responsible for  
child's well-  
being

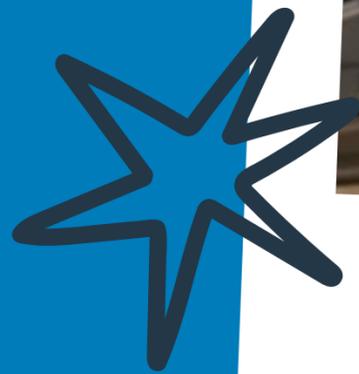


Make informed  
decisions



True advocacy

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



# WHERE IS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IMPORTANT?

1 Doctor's office

2 Community (sports, church, etc.)

3 School setting

Practice prior!!! Start with someone you trust – family member, child's teacher, or parent in similar situation

# DOCTOR'S OFFICE

- Choose a sensory friendly provider and ask questions
- Schedule well
- Manage shots
- Pack comfort items
- Medical accommodations
- Do a practice visit
- Utilize social stories
- Mindfulness techniques
- Rewards
- <https://starautismsupport.com/march-2025-newsletter-navigating-doctor%E2%80%99s-office>



## QUICK TIPS: MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

- Tip 1: Trust your instincts; you know your child best.
- Tip 2: Use phrases like...
  - “Can you explain that in a way I can understand?”
  - “What are the next steps?”
  - “How is this going to help my kid?”
  - “Any other options we should look at?”
- Tip 3: Write down your questions and doctor recommendations.

# COMMUNITY

- Teaching Your Child Self-Advocacy
  - Encourage your child to express their feelings and needs.
  - Teach simple phrases like “I need help” or “I don’t like that.”
  - Set goals to boost confidence
  - Practice advocacy
- Setting Boundaries
  - Model how to set boundaries respectfully.
  - Advocate for your child’s comfort in social situations (e.g., declining unwanted hugs).
- Accessing Community Resources
  - Don’t hesitate to ask for help from community centers or social services.



## QUICK TIPS: DAILY LIFE

- Tip 1: Role-play situations where your child might need to speak up.
- Tip 2: Build a support network with other parents.
- Tip 3: Teach your child to identify trusted adults they can turn to for help.
- Tip 4: Encourage your child to ask questions and practice problem-solving skills.
- Tip 5: Celebrate small advocacy successes to build confidence.

# Eric's Tools

I feel...



I need...



[https://www.instagram.com/p/Cri-YFiMH0/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igshid=MzRIO DBINWFIZA%3D%3D&img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cri-YFiMH0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIO DBINWFIZA%3D%3D&img_index=1)

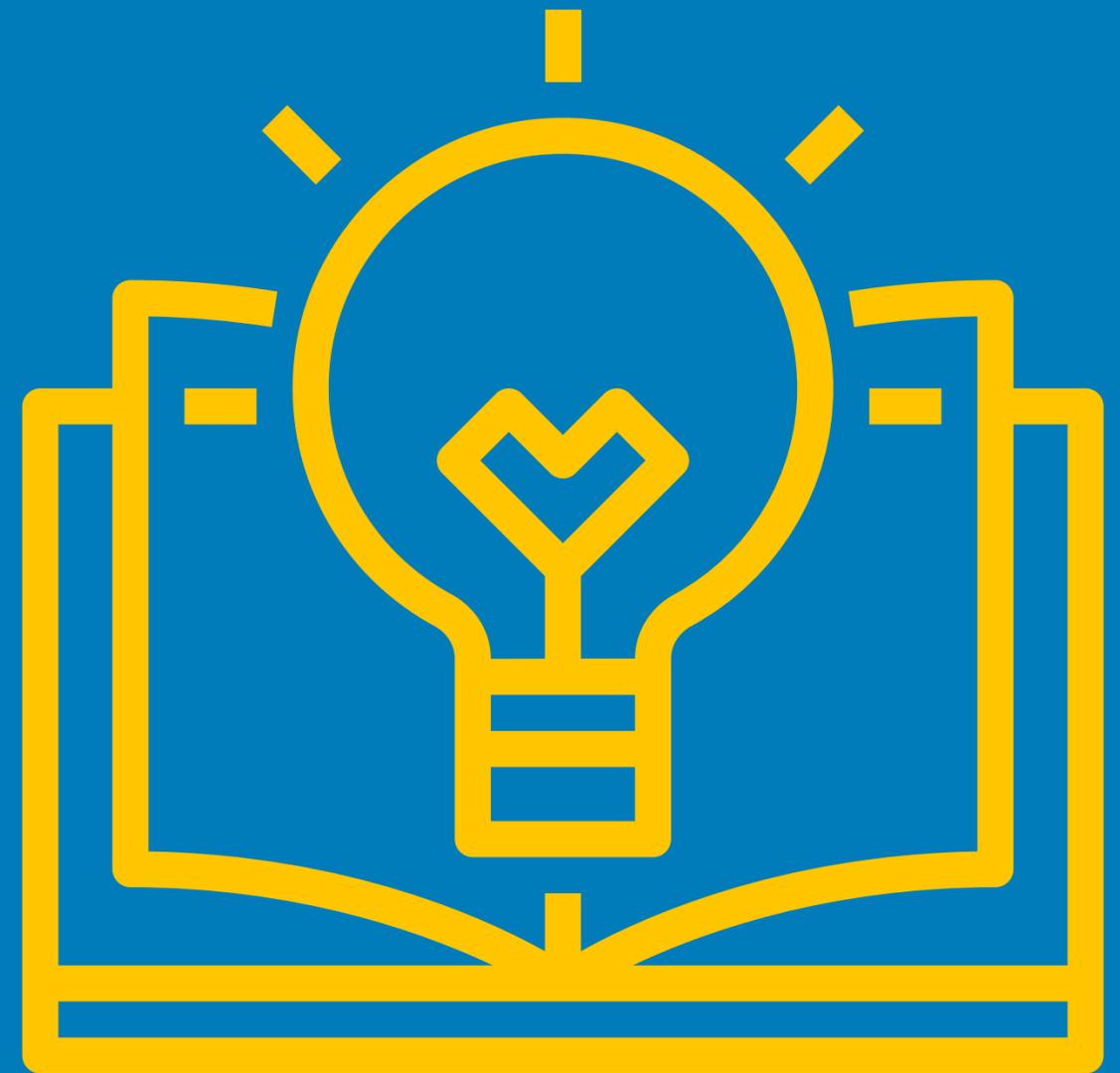
Sometimes I struggle with processing information, could you please give me time to think about that please?

I rely on my headphones and stim toys as disability aids. I am still listening. These aids help me to take in information more easily.

@neurodivergent\_lou

# EDUCATION

- Understanding Your Child's Rights
  - FAPE
  - Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) vs. 504 Plans.
- Building Relationships with Teachers and Staff
  - Introduce yourself and your child early in the school year.
  - Communicate regularly with teachers about your child's progress and challenges.
- Addressing Concerns
  - Be specific about what you're noticing (e.g., "My child is struggling to follow instructions").
  - Request a meeting if needed to discuss concerns and create solutions.



## QUICK TIPS: SCHOOL MEETINGS

- Tip 1: Be respectful but direct, focusing on **COLLABORATION & SOLUTIONS**. Use phrases like, “How can we work together to support my child?”
- Tip 2: Ask questions!
  - My child seems to be struggling with \_\_\_\_\_. Is that typical?
  - I’m worried about \_\_\_\_\_. Do you see that too?
  - At home \_\_\_\_ happens when \_\_\_\_\_. How do they handle similar situations at school?
  - I’ve noticed \_\_\_\_\_ recently. Have you noticed any changes?
- Tip 3: Document all communications with the school.
  - Confirm verbal agreements in writing (e.g., email, communication app).

Copyrighted Material  
WRIGHTSLAW

# All About IEPs

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About IEPs



Peter W. D. Wright, Esq.  
Pamela Darr Wright, MA, MSW  
Sandra Webb O'Connor, M.Ed.

Copyrighted Material

WRIGHTSLAW

# From Emotions to Advocacy Second Edition

OVER  
100,000  
COPIES IN  
PRINT

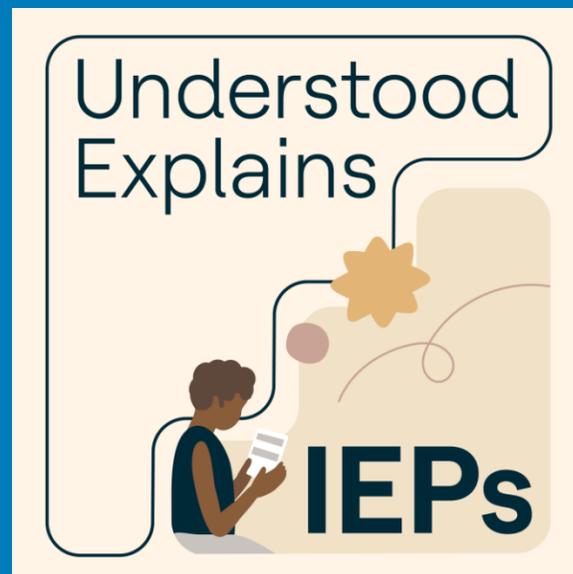


Revised and Updated with Information About:  
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004  
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

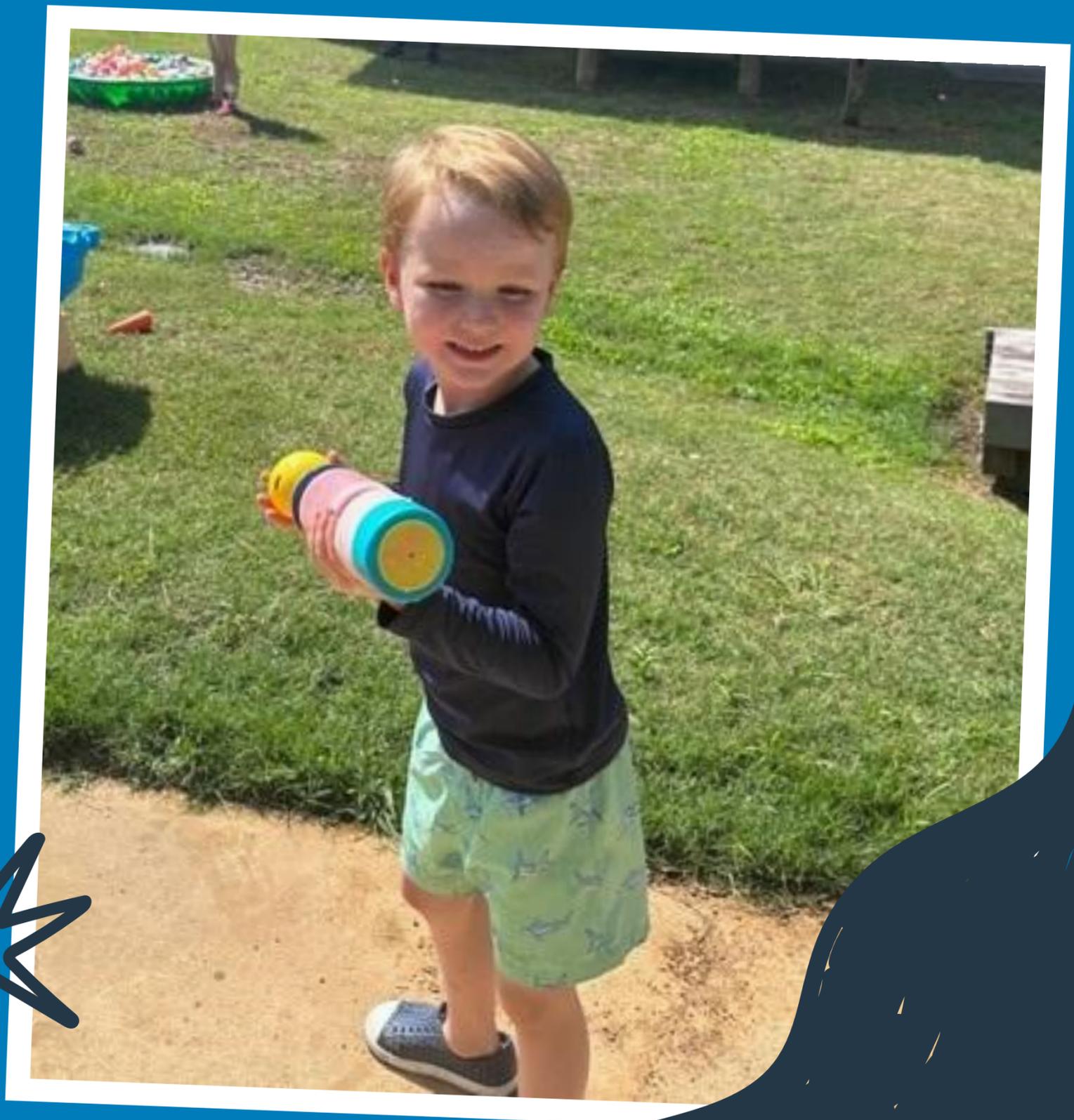
*The Special Education Survival Guide*

Pam Wright and Pete Wright  
*Founders of the Wrightslaw Website*

# FREE RESOURCES



ARE YOU  
READY TO  
ADVOCATE?



# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS KEY!

1

Manage emotions

2

Listen and ask questions

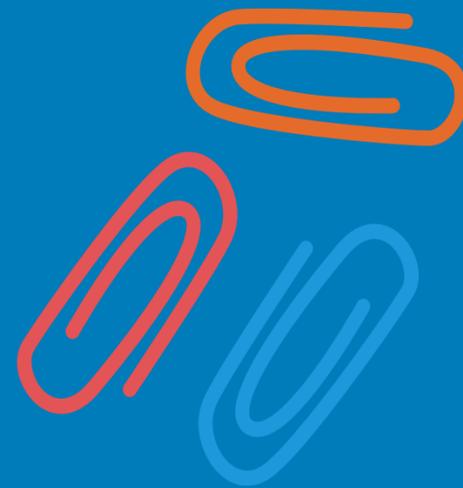
3

Bring solutions for problems



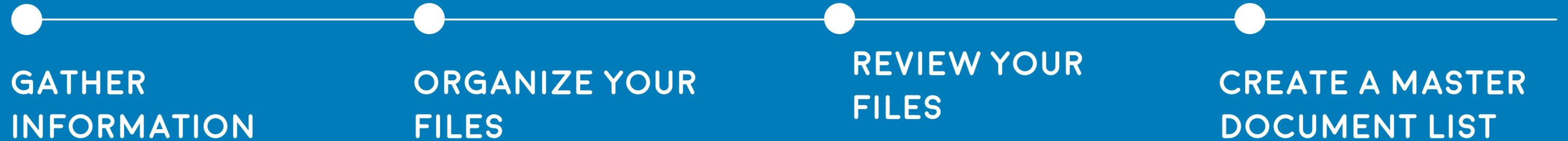
# GET ORGANIZED!

- Two 3-ring binders (one for your child's file, and one for information about your child's disability and educational information)
- Highlighters
- Sticky notes
- Envelopes and stamps
- Calendar
- Journal
- Contact log





# CREATE YOUR DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM



# Organize your child's IEP binder

## IEP binder checklist

Put the relevant items on top of each section.

Item	To be updated	Date updated		
Communication				
Initial contact set	Yearly or as new members join the team	9/16/22		
Communication log	Every time you have a meeting, call, or other interaction with school	10/9/22	10/7/22	10/17/22
	As needed	10/9/22	10/7/22	10/5/22
	As needed	11/27/22		
	As needed	11/15/22		
	As needed	11/15/22		
	As needed	10/28/21		
		10/13		
		10/13		
		10/13		

- COMM
- LEGAL
- IEP
- PROGRESS
- HW
- BEHAVIOR

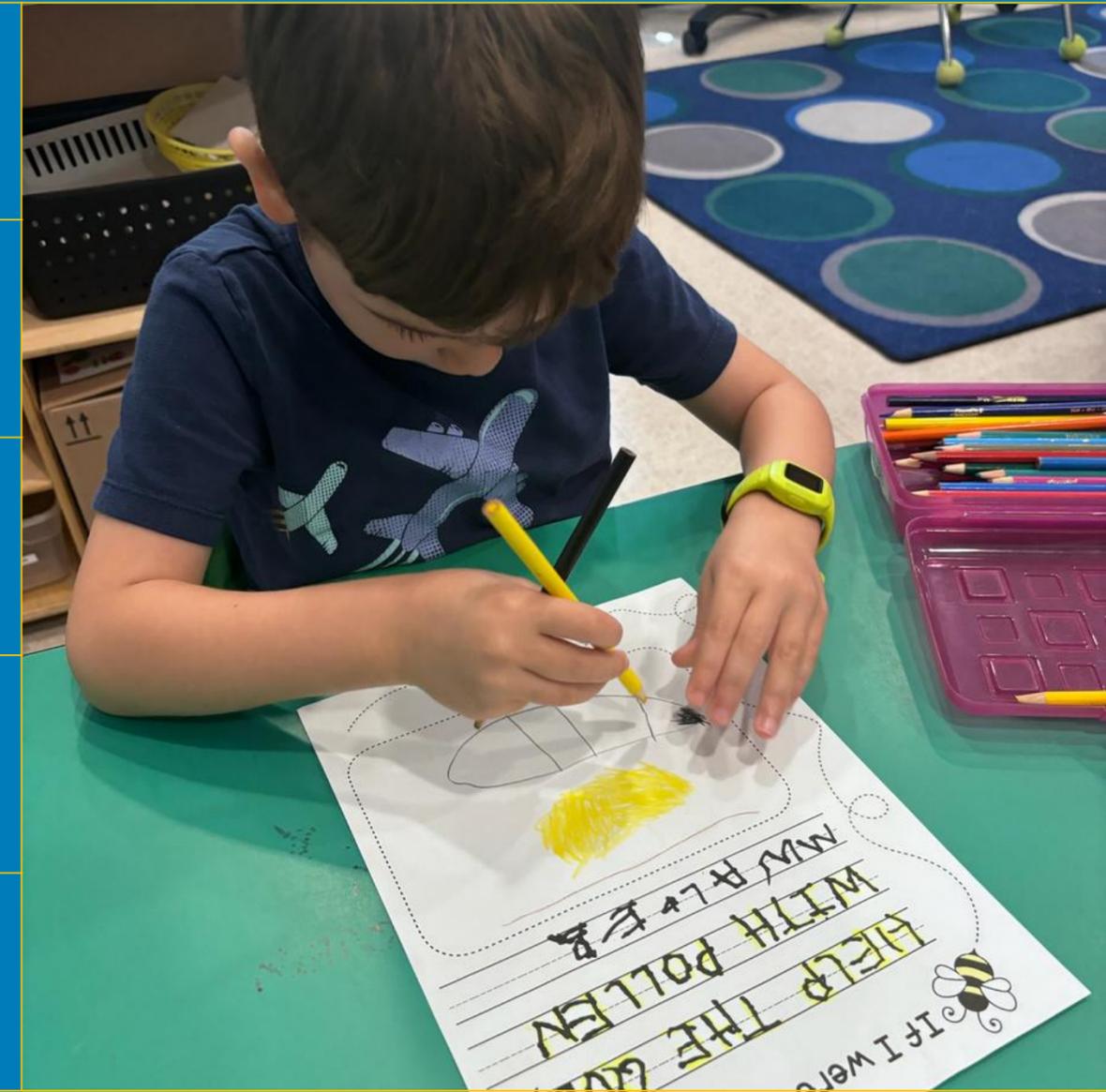


“Raising a child is hard work. If you have a child who learns differently, has a disability, or has special needs, you work harder and longer. A master plan will help you work more efficiently.”

-Pete Wright, From Emotions to Advocacy

# CREATE A MASTER PLAN!

- 1 Vision statement
- 2 Mission Statement
- 3 Goals
- 4 Strategies
- 5 Timelines



# VISION STATEMENT

- Focus on the future!
- What does your child's future look like to you?
- Do you envision your child continuing their education and training?
- Do you see your child working in the community?



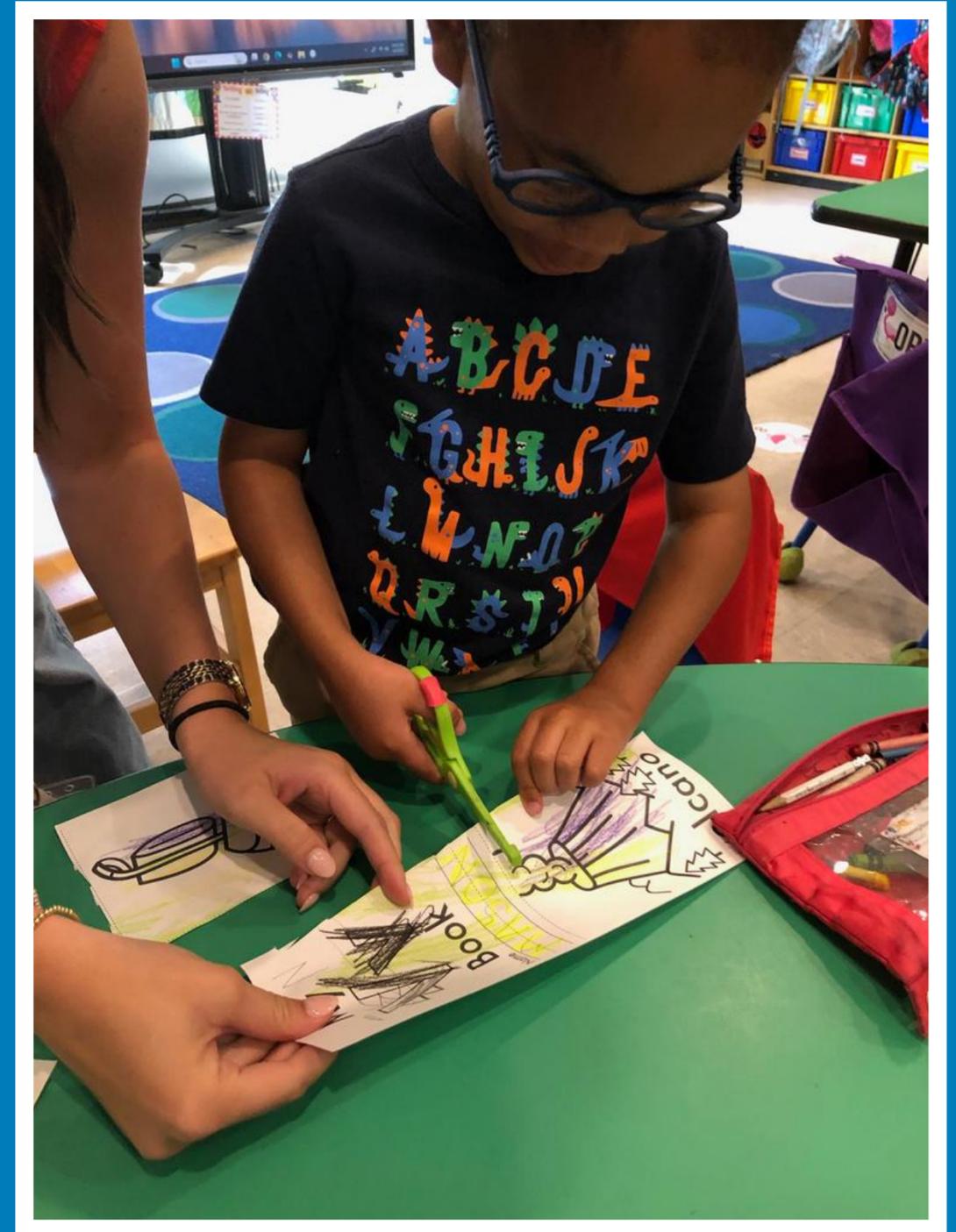
# MISSION STATEMENT

- Your mission is your “WHY?”
- “I am seeking high quality education so my child can ..... and reach his maximum potential.”



# GOALS

- Write your goals as outcomes:
  - Short-term goals
  - Long-term goals
  - Academic goals
  - Non-academic goals



# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

---

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Mason Music - https://masonmusic.com/](https://masonmusic.com/)
  - [The Autism Parent - https://www.theautismparent.org/](https://www.theautismparent.org/)
- 



# STRATEGIES

- Think of strategies as your road map:
  - Help you make decisions
  - Solve problems
  - Overcome obstacles
- Find a consultant or independent evaluator.
- Learn from other parents by joining a support group or advocacy group (i.e., The Autism Parent).



THE  
*Autism  
Parent*

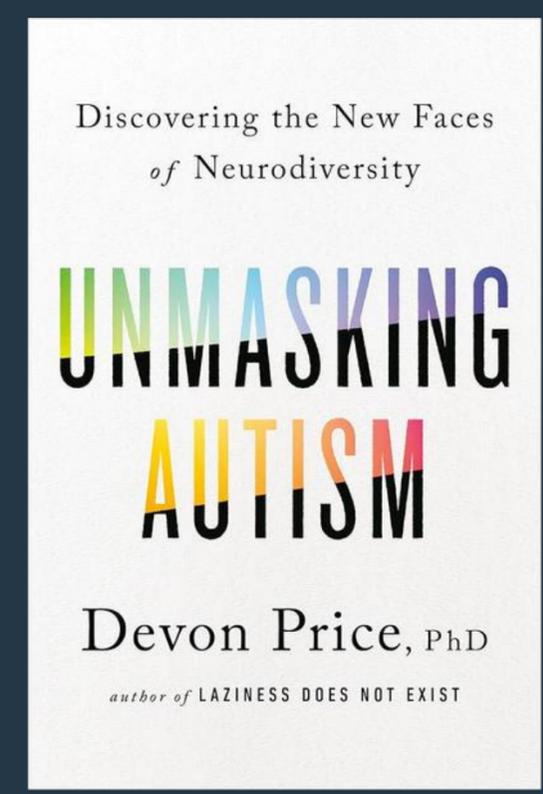
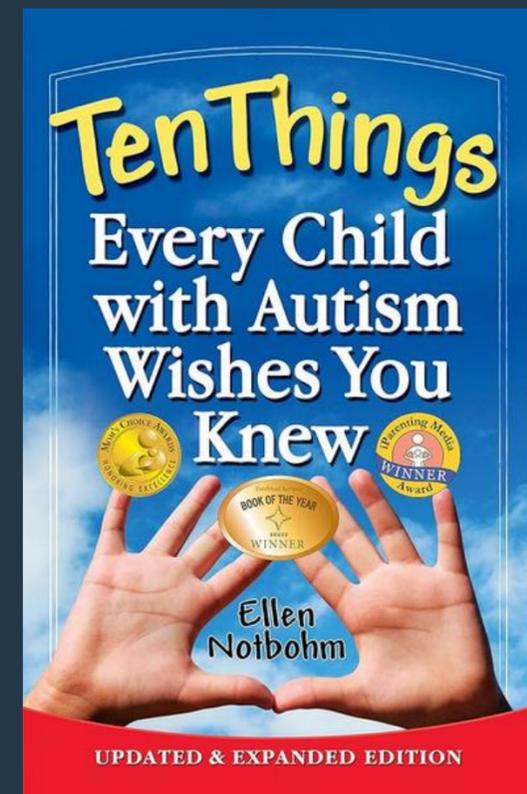
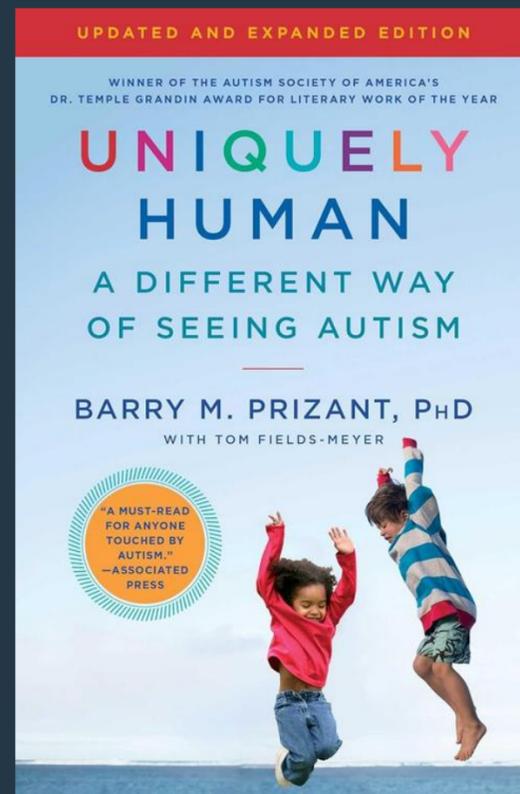
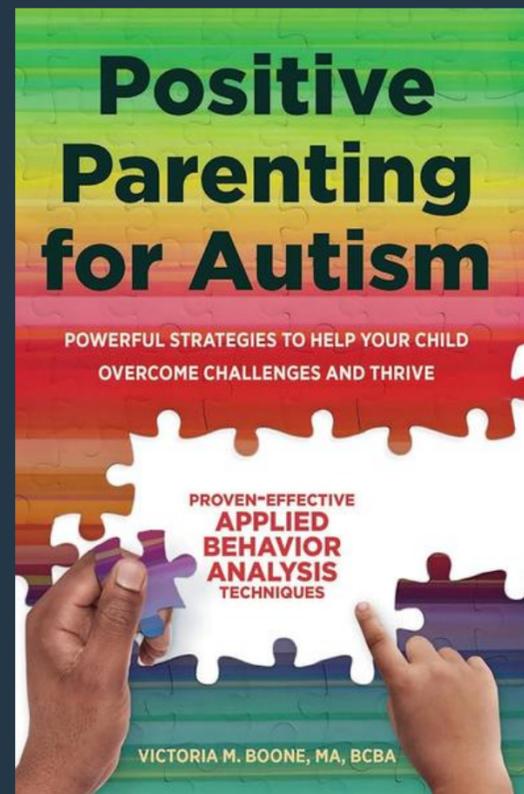
HERE FOR  
COMMUNITY

# CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

---

- Parent support groups or online communities
  - Facebook groups – Alabama Autism Families
  - The Autism Parent
- Advocacy Organizations
  - <https://www.copaa.org/> - Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- Conferences and community events
- Additional Local Non-profits
  - Mitchell's Place
  - Exceptional Foundation
  - The Red Barn

# BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



# TRUTH!

You are responsible for making long term plans that continue long after the school journey is over. If you don't ensure that your child has received an appropriate education, then you will deal with the outcome.





# YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S GREATEST ADVOCATE

PERSISTENCE AND COLLABORATION ARE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY!

- Be confident
- Listen and ask questions
- Prepare
- Push back or get a second opinion
- Take care of yourself

## SKILLS CHECKLIST:

- 1 What have you learned?
- 2 Is there a skill you hope to improve?
- 3 Do you need more resources and support?

# QUESTIONS?

For more support or advocacy training, please contact...



Glenda Grbac

[ggrbac@mitchells-place.com](mailto:ggrbac@mitchells-place.com)

# RESOURCES

Wright, Peter W. D., & Wright, Pamela Darr. (2006). *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide*. Harbor House Law Press

<https://www.fetaweb.com/>

<https://emergepediatrictherapy.com/4-ways-to-work-on-self-advocacy-with-your-child/>

[https://res.cloudinary.com/everyday-speech/images/v1757331646/Advocating-for-Yourself/Advocating-for-Yourself.pdf?\\_i=AA](https://res.cloudinary.com/everyday-speech/images/v1757331646/Advocating-for-Yourself/Advocating-for-Yourself.pdf?_i=AA)

<https://parents-together.org/how-to-teach-your-child-to-advocate-for-themselves/>

<https://starautismsupport.com/march-2025-newsletter-navigating-doctor%E2%80%99s-office>

<https://thrive.psu.edu/blog/advocating-for-your-child/>

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/10-myths-parents-may-hear-about-special-education>

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/how-to-organize-your-childs-iep-binder>

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/parent-advocacy-steps>

[https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/triad/tips/Academic\\_Self-Advocacy\\_Overview.pdf](https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/triad/tips/Academic_Self-Advocacy_Overview.pdf)

<https://westsidechildrenstherapy.com/10-tips-for-bringing-your-special-needs-child-to-the-doctor-or-dentist/>