

www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/parents/starting-school/

Why advocacy is important

As your child's caregivers, your love, experience and knowledge of their needs should influence decisions that are made about their participation in the early years of school. Being positive about your child and sharing information with your child's teacher about how best to support and include your child in the classroom environment will guide planning and support your child's wellbeing. Families have a legitimate role in partnering with their child's school to advocate for their child and to ensure their own views and the voice of their child are heard.

It is important, particularly in the first terms of primary school, to establish open dialogue with the team around your child. This will allow you to provide information about your child's strengths and interests, and suggest how the school can support your child to be calm and happy, develop independence and interact with friends. This initial contact provides the groundwork for ongoing communication.

I think in the first year of schooling, when you're so little, it can be really hard to explain how you feel. I have a lot of difficulties with my interoception. It can take me a long time to actually process how I am feeling and then it can take another long chunk of time for me to be able to then explain that to other people.

— Kiah Latham, autistic individual

Families of a child with disability receive a lot of advice about what is good for their child and their education. Students on the autism spectrum need support and understanding in their early years to ensure they have the best chance of success at school. A focus on strengths and interests, rather than the challenges, will help you to think about what a fulfilling life can be like for your child. Involve your whole family and your child in the process.

Video: How can families advocate successfully?

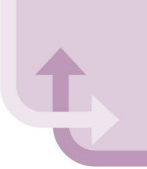
Write a vision statement

A vision statement is a short, written description of what your family and your child want for their future and the goals for their education. It clarifies your goals for a positive schooling experience and fulfilling life for your child, and communicates these to others.

Your vision statement can help guide decision-making about your child's future at school and beyond. Sharing this vision about how you expect your child to participate and engage in learning with their peers will support the development of a positive family-school partnership.

An example of a vision statement for a child beginning primary school:

Our child is included in all classroom activities and receives support to be successful in learning. They are safe and happy and feel like they belong at school with their friends. Our child's teachers understand their strengths and adjust the curriculum, teaching approach and learning environment appropriately. Our family is committed to working in partnership with educators at the school.



A vision statement can be reviewed and rewritten as needed as your child matures and their capacity to add their voice to the vision grows.

I think that it's important for young people and children to be involved in advocacy because ultimately it impacts them the most and they can provide the most information about their day-to-day lives. But also I think it's really important because those kids do grow up and one day they'll need to advocate for themselves. And so it's important that they start to learn how they can do that from a younger age.

— Ashton Bartz, autistic individual

Create a vision statement

Create a vision for an everyday life of a child rather than a special life for someone who has a disability. Try to have high expectations rather than placing limitations on what your child can achieve. Your vision should inform building a supportive and natural community around your child.

In creating your vision statement it is important to:

- believe in your child and have a positive attitude and encourage others to as well
- not see disability as a problem that needs to be fixed or cured
- write a vision that will aid family discussions about what is important to have a good life
- share your vision so that others understand the focus is on your child feeling valued, having a sense of belonging and a genuine sense of inclusion
- remember that a vision is not static – it changes as your child matures and faces further transition periods.

A vision statement can be presented in any format that suits your family. You could use this [vision statement template](#) [PDF] to assist you.