

Tips & Tricks for Advocating for Babies & Non-Verbal Children

1. Observation is Key

- **Body Language:** Pay close attention to the baby's or child's body language. Look for cues like eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures that might indicate comfort, distress, or interest.
- **Developmental Milestones:** Be aware of age-appropriate developmental milestones. Use these as a reference to understand the child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development.

2. Build Strong Relationships with Caregivers

- **Collaborate:** Caregivers, whether they are foster parents, relatives, or biological parents, often know the child best. Establish a trusting relationship with them to gather valuable insights about the child's routines, likes, dislikes, and needs.
- **Consistency:** Ensure the child has a consistent caregiver or point of contact. Consistency helps the child feel secure and can provide more reliable observations.

3. Engage with Professionals

- **Healthcare Providers:** Regularly consult with pediatricians, therapists, and other healthcare providers involved in the child's care. They can offer professional insights into the child's health, development, and any concerns.
- **Early Intervention Services:** If the child is receiving early intervention services, communicate with the service providers to understand the child's progress and any areas of concern.

4. Use All Senses

- **Sound:** Pay attention to the sounds the child makes. Even non-verbal children can communicate through different types of cries, babbling, or laughter.
- **Touch:** Gentle touch can help assess the child's response to physical contact. Is the child comforted, indifferent, or agitated by touch?

5. Document Everything

- **Contact Logs:** Keep a detailed log of your observations during visits. Note the child's mood, behavior, interactions with caregivers, and any significant changes.
- **Photographs:** Don't forget to take photos of the baby to attach to your report.

6. Advocate for Their Needs

- **Medical Evaluations:** Ensure the child is receiving regular medical check-ups, including developmental screenings. If there are concerns, advocate for referrals to specialists.
- **Early Childhood Services:** Advocate for the child's enrollment in early childhood programs that support development, such as Early Head Start, Early Childhood Intervention (SD2), or infant mental health services.

7. Voice Their Needs

- **Court Reports:** Clearly articulate the child's needs and observations in your court reports. Since the child cannot speak for themselves, it's crucial that their needs are accurately represented.
- **Personal Observations:** Include personal observations and concerns in your reports, as well as insights gained from caregivers and professionals.

8. Safety First

- **Environment Checks:** Regularly assess the safety of the child's environment. Look for potential hazards, cleanliness, and whether the child's basic needs (like food, clothing, and hygiene) are being met.
- **Emotional Safety:** Monitor the child's emotional well-being. Even if a child cannot express it verbally, signs of fear, anxiety, or withdrawal can indicate emotional distress.

9. Educate Yourself

- **Training:** Continuously seek out training on child development, infant mental health, and trauma-informed care. The more knowledgeable you are, the better you can advocate.
- **Resources:** Utilize available resources, such as books, articles, and online courses, to deepen your understanding of how to best support non-verbal children.

10. Trust Your Instincts

- **Intuition:** If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts. Ask questions and don't hesitate to advocate for additional support or intervention for the child.