



Advocating for Children

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As a child care teacher/provider, you work hard to create positive experiences for children, but you also know that many forces outside your home or classroom are at work. State policies determine the amount of funding for child care and for support for child care providers, as well as for health care, schools, and other children's services. Local land-use and business policies impact child care. State and local education policies influence early care and education, both directly and indirectly.

You may feel that you have no ability to affect these decisions – but your knowledge and commitment to children give you an important role in advocacy. Because of your relationships with families, you are in a key position to broaden advocacy for children by encouraging families to join in taking action.



REACH OUT TO FAMILIES

The families in your program already look to you for guidance – you can make your child care home or center a communication hub for information on child care issues and for engaging families in advocacy.

Families are powerful voices for child care. Decision-makers are often moved by their personal stories about what high-quality child care means to them. Parent Voices, a statewide organization of parents advocating for child care, has been effective in improving policies and stopping many threatened cuts to state child care funds. Provide Parent Voices brochures and handouts (available at www.parentvoices.org) to the families in your program and encourage them to get involved.

JOIN WITH OTHERS

Whatever your concern – the low level of funding for child care in the state budget, the need for more educational opportunities for providers, local zoning decisions – the first step is to invite others who share your concerns to get together, talk about the problem, and brainstorm solutions. By joining together, you can share your ideas and skills and give each other support. Find out if any local or statewide organizations are already working on the issue and sign up for email updates from advocacy organizations.

MAKE A PLAN

To take effective action, identify:

1. a specific objective, such as stopping proposed cuts to state child care subsidies or persuading the local community college to offer child development classes in the evenings,
2. who has the power to make it happen,
3. actions you could take to motivate those decision-makers,
4. potential allies, and
5. specific steps that will make your actions successful.

BUILD SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY

- **Recruit potential allies** by pointing out their stake in your goal; for example: employers benefit from reliable child care for their employees and educators can relate to how early care and education helps children succeed in school.
 - **Tell your story through the media.** Write letters to the editor. Contact local radio shows. Invite the media to visit your program.
 - **Use election campaigns** to raise awareness about your issue and push campaigners to make specific commitments to support child care.
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BUILD AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

- **Prepare:** Write out “talking points” and role play before meeting with legislators or the media.
 - **Follow up:** Double-check everything, confirm appointments, follow up on commitments.
 - **Keep in touch with participants and supporters:** Send email alerts or set up a phone tree. Use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media tools. Make sure teachers and providers keep parents informed and involved.
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LEARN ABOUT THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Find out who has the power to make the change you want. If it’s the state legislature, learn about the process of passing laws and budgets. If it’s a local agency or board, learn about its decision-making process.

CRAFT A PERSUASIVE MESSAGE

- Focus on the needs of children, not teachers or child care agencies.
 - Focus on one to three key points.
 - **Tell stories:** It helps people understand an issue if you describe how it affects one child.
 - Provide a few key facts to back up your arguments.
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DELIVER THE MESSAGE

- Write, call, or visit the decision-makers. If the issue will be decided by the state legislature, contact the legislators who represent your district. If the issue will be decided by a local board, consider individual visits to board members.
 - A personal visit by a group of people has the most impact on a legislator – even more if your delegation includes a variety of people, such as teachers, parents, health care providers, business people, community or faith leaders.
 - Give testimony in meetings of the decision-making group: a state legislative committee or local board.
 - Invite decision-makers to visit your program.
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MAKING CHILDREN A PRIORITY IN THE STATE BUDGET

“**There’s no money**” - You will hear this refrain whenever you defend programs to meet children’s needs. Every recent year, the state has cut funding to vital programs including child care, to balance the budget. But California actually has enormous wealth. If it were a separate country, its economy would be the eighth largest in the world. In the last few decades, however, upper-income individuals and

corporations have been receiving a greater share of the state’s income and paying a smaller share of their income in taxes.

By taxing more of that income – raising the tax rate for the highest incomes and closing corporate tax loopholes – we could solve the state’s budget problems and raise the revenue we need to provide services that will help our children – and our state – thrive.