

*Make a Difference in Children's Lives*

**Section 1-1**

# Becoming an Advocate for Children

Few would dispute the belief that children have distinct, vital needs. Yet, as children, they do not have a political voice because they do not vote. Someone else must serve as that voice for them. Individually, parents and caregivers can make conscientious choices regarding elected officials and laws. However, collectively, people have considerably more power. Advocacy groups that are formed expressly to promote and support programs and laws that protect children are growing in number.

Organizations are as close as a phone book, Web site, or newspaper. At the community level, you may find civic groups, family resource centers, and religious charities that welcome participation. Most rely on volunteers. Working with a children's advocacy group might mean making phone calls, writing letters, organizing campaigns, or even

doing research for the group's cause. Experts recommend that you search your own interests and areas of concern, and then use that information as a guideline for choosing an organization. Most people agree that they can find more energy to put into a cause when they are passionate about it.

The chart below identifies some of the many groups that work on behalf of children. You can contact them to learn about the focus of the group and receive additional pamphlets, newsletters, and other information. (Some might charge a fee for materials.) These organizations may have their main offices in a major city, but some have local chapters in communities across the country.

Children's Advocacy Groups		
<p><b>Voices for America's Children</b> Links together state and community organizations to help them coordinate efforts and share ideas.</p>	<p><b>National Association for the Education of Young Children</b> Works to improve the quality of early childhood education programs for all children.</p>	<p><b>The Children's Partnership</b> Conducts research on trends that will affect children in the future; brings people and organizations together to work for a better future for children.</p>
<p><b>Children's Defense Fund</b> Promotes children's health and family well-being by influencing government to pass laws that protect children.</p>	<p><b>Annie E. Casey Foundation</b> Works on behalf of disadvantaged children by supporting research and projects designed to improve the lives of low-income families.</p>	<p><b>Stand for Children</b> Helps individuals and businesses to make a difference in the lives of children in their communities by helping them set up programs.</p>

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Children's Advocacy Groups continued

<p><b>Reading Is Fundamental</b> Gets children to love reading by fostering family literacy, carrying out reading activities in communities, and giving books to children.</p>	<p><b>The March of Dimes</b> Works for children's health through research, community service, and influencing government to pass laws that promote children's health.</p>	<p><b>National Childhood Cancer Foundation</b> Supports research that benefits children with cancer; promotes cancer prevention and better medical treatment for children with cancer.</p>
<p><b>The Packard Foundation</b> Promotes and protects children's health and education through grants and public information and education.</p>	<p><b>Zero to Three</b> Promotes the healthy development of infants and toddlers by supporting and strengthening families, communities, and those who work on their behalf.</p>	<p><b>Child Welfare League of America</b> A coalition of public and non-profit agencies devoted to the well-being of children at risk and their families.</p>

**Taking Action**

Choose an organization that interests you and find out more about it. In the spaces below record any information you find that could be useful to concerned citizens in your area. Check the telephone book, social services directories in the library, or the Internet for addresses and phone numbers. You may choose one of the organizations listed or another organization that works for children in your community.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of national headquarters: \_\_\_\_\_

Internet address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

How to form a group: \_\_\_\_\_

Newsletter or reports available: \_\_\_\_\_

How the organization supports children: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## Additional Child Development Theorists

In addition to the child development theorists discussed in the text, many others have made important contributions to the field. The table below summarizes some of their findings.

Theorist	Finding or Ideas	Significance
John Watson (1878-1958)	Watson showed that responses, such as fear, could be conditioned in young children. He saw behavior and learning as reactions to environment.	Children develop and gain knowledge by responding to their environments.
Arnold Gesell (1880-1961)	Gesell studied child development by filming children. His observations led him to believe that development followed an inborn, step-by-step sequence. He created a developmental schedule based on his theory.	Healthy children develop and gain knowledge naturally and automatically as they grow older.
Rudolf Dreikurs (1897-1972)	Dreikurs studied why children misbehave. He said that parents need to look objectively at children's behavior and not see it through their own experiences.	Children should experience the natural consequences of their misbehavior, as long as those consequences do not threaten their safety.
Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999)	Bloom maintained that people gain half their intelligence by age four. He ranked the process of thinking from the least to the most difficult.	The early years of childhood are crucial to intellectual development. Teachers should write learning objectives so that students' performance can be measured.
Jerome Bruner (1915-	Bruner's program of learning is based on Piaget's stages. He believed children are naturally curious and wish to succeed at learning, but become bored if a task is too difficult for them.	Skilled teaching is an important part of learning. Teachers should give a child a challenge, but not one so difficult as to restrain learning.

### Taking Action

Choose one of the theorists described here or in the textbook. Find out more about their work. Present your findings to the class, explaining how that person's work would be useful to parents and to professional caregivers.

## Observations with a Purpose

Observation is one of the most valuable ways to get to know children. Parents, caregivers, teachers, and other professionals all can learn from observing children. There are many reasons for observation. Here are just some of the purposes of observing young children:

- **To determine a child’s interests, abilities, and needs.** Through observation, teachers and other caregivers can get to know each child as an individual. That way, they can motivate and fully involve each child in their programs.
- **To measure a child’s growth and development over time.** Observation allows teachers, caregivers, and developmental specialists to see how a child is progressing intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally.
- **To determine how best to handle problem situations.** Observation can help teachers, parents, and other caregivers anticipate how a child is likely to behave under certain circumstances. By anticipating problems, they may be able to prevent them from recurring.
- **To make changes in the environment.** By observing the way children use play spaces and materials, teachers and caregivers can determine whether materials are meeting the children’s needs, if duplicates are necessary, or if traffic patterns interfere with play.
- **To make changes to the curriculum or schedule.** Teachers and caregivers may observe children to determine if they should make changes to schedules or to the content of programs to better meet the children’s needs.
- **To gain information that can be shared.** Teachers, parents, and caregivers may become partners in a child’s learning by sharing with each other the information they have learned through observation.
- **To identify concerns.** Observation helps identify needs in children that may require special attention. It is the responsibility of teachers and caregivers to recommend children for medical treatment, developmental evaluation, or other special services. For example, through observation a teacher may notice that a child shows signs of a hearing problem, difficulties with speech, or an attention deficit disorder.

### Hearing Problems

To identify a hearing problem in young children, some questions to consider during observation include:

- Do people have to raise their voices to get the child’s attention?
- Does the child frequently say “what” or “huh” when someone is speaking?
- Does the child consistently turn one ear toward the speaker?
- Does the child speak in a very soft or very loud voice?
- Does the child seem inattentive?
- Does the child confuse words that sound alike?
- Does the child lag behind others the same age in talking, understanding language, or learning?

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### Speech and Language Problems

To identify children with speech or language problems, here are some factors to consider while observing:

- How well does the child understand what people say?
- How well do people understand what the child says?
- Does the child have trouble making certain sounds?
- Can the child tell stories and give answers to questions?
- How well can the child hold a conversation with another person, one-on-one?
- Does the child's voice sound strained or breathy?
- Does the child stutter?

### Attention Deficits and Learning Disabilities

To investigate the possibility of a learning disability or attention problem in young children, some factors to consider include:

- Is the child easily distracted by outside stimuli?
- Is the child often forgetful in daily activities?
- Does the child fidget with his or her hands or other objects?
- Does the child squirm continually in his or her seat?

- Does the child talk excessively?
- Does the child often blurt out answers before questions are completed?
- Does the child have difficulty organizing tasks and activities?
- Does the child often avoid activities that require concentration?

### MAKING ACCURATE OBSERVATIONS

When observing children, it is important to create records that are accurate and objective. This is especially true when a teacher or caregiver will be recommending a child for special evaluation attention. The following are guidelines for conducting accurate and objective observations:

- Record the date, time, and place of the observation and who is present. Record only what you actually see and hear. Only record things that occurred during the observation.
- Write down what you see and hear as it happens. Do not rely on your memory.
- Record events in the order in which they occur.
- Try to record as much factual information and as many details as possible.
- Use verbs and descriptive words as much as possible.
- Avoid interpreting behavior or making judgments while you are observing.

## Taking Action

Imagine that you will be observing a group of preschool children. Read more about the signs of hearing problems, speech or language difficulties, and attention deficit or other learning disabilities. Create a checklist that you could use to help you identify children at risk.