

Tool: Team Inventory

Both parenting and advocacy can feel like isolating, lonely experiences. It can feel as if there is no one who truly understands. It can feel like no one is seeing the work you're doing and how hard you're working. At times, it may even be difficult for you to see the work you're doing, because, when you're in the trenches, it is hard to see the progress you're making.

Don't go on this advocacy journey alone. Build an advocacy team who will help you keep track of what's going on both inside and outside the trenches.

The team should be composed of people who see the hard work you're doing and want to help you support your child's intellectual, academic, social, and emotional growth. This inventory is to help you identify those who are in the best position to support you in your advocacy efforts and how to productively mobilize this support.

It can be difficult to decide who should be part of your team. Right now, maybe you feel like you have no team at all. Maybe you feel like you have a team, but they aren't helping you in the ways you need them to. Both of these are common experiences.

Sometimes people want to offer help but aren't sure how to go about doing so. Sometimes people step in to help, but they are providing the help they assume you need—instead of the help you actually need. These can be frustrating relationships to navigate. However, setting up a foundation of communication, trust, and community to help you as you advocate for your child and family will be worth it.

The purpose of this final inventory is to help you see where there are opportunities for support in your parenting and advocacy work. Once those have been identified, you can start to decide what type of person is best suited to fill these roles. The key to any effective team is a variety of strengths and experiences. No one can be all things to all people.

Good News! You may already have more people on your team than you realize. You and your child are already team members. If you have a partner, an educational advocate, or anyone else who is available as a regular source of support, they are on your team, too!

To start, name 5 people you trust to support you and your child. These should be people who you would feel comfortable talking to about your needs as a parent and advocate, as well as your child's needs and asynchronies. These people may already be helping you, or they may not have joined you in your advocacy journey yet. Maybe they are helping you in other areas of your life. Whatever their relation to you, if you trust them to support you and your child, list them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Next, explain why you picked each person. What characteristics, skills, and experiences does this person have that makes you trust them as a support to you and your child?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Below, we've listed some of the skills that families have found necessary in advocating for their child. Consider the characteristics, skills, and experiences you listed for each person above. Using this information, put a check mark next to each of the skills that this person does well.

Team Members (put initials next to number):	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Recordkeeping (including organizing documents, completing registration or applications)					
Family					
Educational/School					
Medical/Psychological					
Extracurriculars/Activities					
Scheduling (including keeping a calendar, sending reminders, coordinating transportation)					
For Family					
For School					
For Medical/Psychological					
For Extracurriculars/Activities					
Communication					
Via Email					
Over the Phone					
In-Person 1-on-1 (like parent-teacher conferences)					
In-Person in Groups (such as IEP meetings)					
Networking In Person (such as school socials)					
Networking Online (such as parent groups)					
With Known Friends and Family					
With New People					
Problem-Solving					
Helpful Sounding Board/Good Listener					
Anticipating Possible Future Problems					
Crisis Management in the Moment					
Brainstorming Possible Solutions					
Task Management and Executing Solutions					
Reflection & Assessment of Solution Effectiveness					
Knowledge Base					
Capable Researcher					
Knows Local Community/Opportunities in Area					
Knows School Community or Bureaucracy					
Well-Versed in Relevant Fields (such as education, giftedness/2e, child's area of interest)					
Always Up to Date on Latest News/Info					

Now, reflect on your current team and their dynamics. No one person can do everything. Think about your answers to all of the above questions.

Do you have someone on your team who is checking more than a third of the boxes? Who?

Do you have someone on your team who is barely checking any? Who?

What changes can you make to help balance the team?

You don't need to make these decisions by yourself. Talk to the people on your team. How can you more evenly distribute the labor?

Often, families do not always consider the effort that goes into advocacy work to be real labor. But, advocacy takes a toll. Like parenting, advocacy takes work and emotional output. By dividing the advocacy labor, in a way that plays to each team member's strengths, and adding extra supports where needed, you can help make sure the team continues to function in a productive way. If all the work and responsibility falls on one person, things can quickly become overwhelming, with burnout lurking around the corner.

It's a classic airplane situation. When things are out of whack and not going as planned, it's important that you put your oxygen mask first before helping your kids. If you scramble to help everyone else first, you'll pass out and be in no position to do anything at all.

The Spoon Theory can be a useful framework here. In the Spoon Theory, you are asked to imagine that each day you wake up with a certain number of spoons. For the sake of this example, let's say you start with 12. Each spoon equals 1 unit of energy. As you go through your day-to-day activities, you spend spoons. Each of us has different strengths, so the same activity can cost different people a different number of spoons.

Pretend you need to schedule several advocacy appointments. You need to make appointments with your child's therapist, school counselor, math teacher, and swim coach. You also need to make transportation arrangements to ensure your child makes these appointments.

- If you are comfortable with these types of communication and logistical tasks, this can be a low spoon activity: Scheduling the appointments is a spoon. Choreographing drop-off/pick-up schedules is a spoon. Total = 2 spoons.
- If these types of communication and logistical tasks aren't your strong suit, this may be a multi-spoon task: Making the list of who they need to call is a spoon. Calling each person on the list is a spoon, for a total of four spoons based on this example. Choreographing drop-off/pick-up schedules is a spoon. Total = 6 spoons.

So, you may easily spend up to 6 spoons just logistically figuring out how to get some advocacy work started. This doesn't take into account the spoons you've already spent on basic daily tasks (waking up, getting dressed, making breakfast, etc.) or any work-related tasks you may have.

As you can see from this example, the "spoon cost" of an activity is not the same for everyone. When you consider who is on your team and how you'd like your team to work, it is also important to consider the spoon distribution. If you know that scheduling appointments will cost you 6 of your 12 daily spoons, is there someone else who can schedule those appointments for them? Are you able to schedule some of these appointments online, which may reduce the spoon count of the task? Be strategic in how you're using your spoons. Look around and use the resources and supports available to you to maximize your spoon usage.

Once you've spent all your spoons for the day, you don't have as much capacity to navigate tasks easily. Your frustration tolerance is low, and the quality of whatever you're doing suffers. You might try to will your way through by borrowing spoons from the next day, but then that deficit rolls over and continues to follow you throughout the week. And, inevitably there are surprises that come up, and you may want to keep a spoon or two in reserve. Sometimes certain activities can even take more spoons than you thought they would. If work usually takes 3 spoons, a bad day might wipe out 6 spoons.

To make sure your team is collaborating in the most productive way, make a plan for how you can divide the work and better equalize everyone's spoon output.

Finally, brainstorm how you can most effectively communicate and work with your team as you support your child:

**Are you checking in with the members of your team regularly?
Do you feel like your team is generally a reliable source of positive support?**

If you would respond to this question with: YES, my team is supportive, think through how you communicate with this person and what steps you can take to make your advocacy with this person more effective. For example:

- Did you list **yourself**? How do you usually check-in with yourself about your advocacy efforts? How can you use what you've learned in the [Self](#), [Student](#), and Team Inventories to make these check-ins more productive? How can you make sure you're reflecting and replenishing at the end of each day? At the end of each week? Advocacy work can quickly become all consuming if you let it. When advocating for your child, it can feel like using all your energy on advocacy efforts is the best or only option. It is understandable to feel this way. However, by intentionally checking in with yourself and taking care of yourself, you are better able to make sure you're spending your spoons effectively. You may find that your spoon output and reserve needs to fluctuate overtime, which is why regular self check-ins are essential to productive advocacy work. This can help you to more readily identify patterns in spoon usage and hone the [restorative, self-care practices](#) that work best for you.
- Did you list **your child**? How do you usually check-in with your child about your family's advocacy efforts? How can you use what you've learned in the [Self](#), [Student](#), and Team Inventories to make these check-ins more productive? Reflect on how you have been communicating and whether or not it is working for you in an optimal way.
- Did you list **your child's teacher**? You likely have parent-teacher conferences to discuss your child's progress. How else do you regularly contact your child's teacher? If you email, is that working for you? Do you think phone calls or in-person meetings or video calls would be more productive? Reflect on how you have been communicating and whether or not it is working for you in an optimal way.
- Did you list **your partner** as part of your team? Do you and your partner regularly discuss your child's needs and development? If so, that's wonderful! Now, you can consider how to maximize those discussions to make sure both you and your partner are each meaningfully contributing to the advocacy practice, making sure all the advocacy labor doesn't rest on one person.
- **Who else** could fit this category for you? Ideally, how would you like this person to help you? What steps need to be taken in order to bridge the ways in which this person is currently supporting you and them supporting you the way you'd most prefer? How can you improve upon the reciprocal system of communication and collaboration you have with this person?

If you would respond to this question with: NO, my team is not working as well as it could, think through how to more effectively communicate the help you need. For example:

- Did you list **yourself**? You likely have an ongoing dialogue with yourself about your advocacy efforts—what you've done, what needs to be done, what you'd like to see done, etc. How can you make this inner dialogue work better for you? For example, maybe instead of leaving notes and Post-its all over, you can consolidate and have a weekly meeting with yourself. This can be a time that you set aside every week to plan for the week ahead. This could be a standing appointment you make with yourself—even if it is just 20-30 minutes to reflect on the previous week and set your intentions for this week
- Did you list **your child**? You likely ask your child how school and their various activities are going on a regular basis. However, do you often get flat answers of “fine” or “the

same”? It may be time to shake up your check-in questions. Questions like “How was your day?” can be too broad to be helpful. Because PG children often see so many possible answers to open-ended questions, narrowing your questions a bit can be helpful. For example, you might ask, “What was your favorite part of the day?” Some families enjoy playing “Rose, Thorn, & Bud” at the dinner table. This is where each person gets to say their favorite part of the day (rose), the most challenging part of their day (thorn), and what they are looking forward to (bud). This kind of activity can provide you with a more focused and productive check-in experience.

- Did you list **your child’s teacher**? You likely have parent-teacher conferences to discuss your child’s progress. Is this enough? Do you feel like you would like more frequent check-ins? Would that benefit your advocacy efforts? Think about how you’d like to check-in with the teacher (email, phone, video-meeting, etc.). Contact the teacher to put your plan in place.
- Did you list **your partner**? Maybe you and your partner don’t discuss advocacy issues much. This is not uncommon. Often, one parent can end up taking on the lion’s share of the advocacy work. This can happen for many reasons. The question to ask now is: Is now the time that you set aside time with them to discuss how you can better divide advocacy work?
- **Who else** could fit this category for you? Ideally, how would you like this person to help you? What specific steps would you like this person to take to help you? How will you go about asking them for this help? How can you set up a reciprocal system of communication and collaboration with this person?

No matter who you have on your team, it is important to communicate with them regularly. What that communication looks like depends on what works best for the two (or more) of you. As long as you are all being honest about your needs and expectations during this advocacy journey, you will be on the road to more collaborative and productive advocacy efforts.