

You Are the Expert on Your Child With Autism

I've learned a lot over the years in how to be an education advocate for my twin sons with autism. I wasn't successful at advocating for my children in the early days when they were in kindergarten because I was awkwardly overzealous in sharing information and knew nothing about how to be wise in negotiations. Hopefully you can learn from my mistakes. Writing this, it still bothers me that we, as parents, were basically ignored. I know that every professional in that room was there because they'd earned the right to be there through their training. Most of the professionals I've worked over the years are excellent at their jobs, but in 2002, the interventional needs of children with autism weren't as well understood by the public schools as they are now. And yet, most public schools in the United States still fail to provide effective educational programs for most of the autism population.

Wisdom and Discernment

Since 2002, I've become a little wiser in my dealings with experts. As I share these tips, I pray you will internalize them as you travel the road of negotiations with educators and other specialists in your child's life.

You Are the Expert on Your Child

God gave your child to you, not to anyone else sitting at a conference table or behind an office desk. Own that fact and never doubt it.

God's Supernatural Wisdom Is Greater Than Human Wisdom

As a Christian, you have an enormous reserve of wisdom to tap into. God assures us in his Word, "If any of you lacks wisdom,

let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and without criticism, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). God has never once failed me when I've asked for an answer to a hard question. He has always supplied me with the resources and wisdom to make the best decisions for my children. What he did for me, he'll do for you.

Your Child Is Unique

God created your child unique and different from any other child on earth. He knows them best. You can rest in that knowledge and put the burden of how to parent and educate them on his shoulders. The psalmist David wrote: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Ps. 139:13–14). If there are any questions about what is best for your child, ask him. He will reveal it to you.

Prayer Works

Pray for clarity, peace, and cooperation before your meetings with professionals. I also pray for favor. There are things we can do in the natural world to help a meeting go well, but never discount the supernatural hand of God in negotiations. Knowing that he goes before you into the fray will give you peace. "The Lord, He goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you. Do not fear, nor be dismayed" (Deut. 31:8).

And, if you're feeling frustrated, take time to breathe and remember that God is not surprised by what is going on in the conference. He already knows what's up and how he's going to fix it. "It is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves. For the battle belongs to the Lord" (1 Sam. 17:47b).

God Makes Divine Appointments

Just as God knows you and your child, he knows each person on

the committee and has a plan for their life. Our autism walk isn't only about ourselves and our child (shocking, I know). This journey, I believe, is also full of divine appointments. We never know whom we may influence or inspire by our example. You may be thinking, *Are you kidding me? Do you know how overwhelmed I am? I don't have time to worry about being an example!* Believe me, I know. And you're exactly right. Let God do the worrying for you. Let him do the guiding. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6).

Professionals are people too. They have egos, agendas, schedules, car-pooling commitments, soccer games and families to juggle. Try to truly listen in the meetings and recognize that God has placed these people in your child's life for a reason. Think of the orchestrating of lives he's done to bring you and your child to this moment. How miraculous is our God? From the beginning of time, he knew what your child would need, and he is able to provide it. Recognize the blessing these people are. "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Recognize that they are experts too, and respect the years of training and education they've obtained to be where they are now. {eoa}

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