

How to Advocate For Your Child Without Speaking Over Them

A direct guide empowering parents and guardians to support their child in medical environments, counter diagnostic overshadowing, and preserve the teen's agency.

How to Use This Guide

When speaking to a doctor on behalf of your child, the goal is to support, not replace, their voice. Keep these script options accessible on your phone or in your Her Health Advocacy Toolkit during appointments to help you remain respectful, firm, and focused on physical root causes.

Parent & Guardian Advocacy Matrix

Clinical Scenario	What You Are Supporting	Actionable Parent / Guardian Script
1. Opening the Appointment	Establishing the goal of investigating physical causes from the start.	<i>"Thank you for meeting with us. My child has been experiencing ongoing symptoms that are significantly impacting her daily life. We're looking for a thorough investigation into possible physical causes before assuming it's psychological."</i>
2. Dismissed as "Anxiety" or "Stress"	Pushing back against diagnostic overshadowing when mental health is assumed first.	<i>"We understand anxiety can play a role in health, but these symptoms appeared before any anxiety diagnosis. We'd like to rule out underlying medical conditions rather than assuming a mental health cause first."</i>
3. Requesting Specific Testing	Asking for objective laboratory or diagnostic evaluations.	<i>"Can we run lab work or screening for things like anemia, autoimmune markers, or nervous system disorders before moving forward with treatment?"</i>

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4. Protecting the Teen's Agency	Ensuring the physician addresses your child directly as the primary source of data.	<i>"I want to make sure she speaks for herself; she knows her symptoms best. Can you please direct questions to her first?"</i>
5. Seeking a Specialist Referral or Second Opinion	Navigating a dead end or severe symptoms that require specialized care.	<i>"We appreciate your input. However, given the severity of her symptoms, we'd like to explore referral options to a specialist in (neurology / gastroenterology / rheumatology). Can you recommend someone?"</i>

Communication Boundaries for Parents

- **Avoid Saying:** *"She's very emotional / dramatic / sensitive / exaggerating."*
- **Instead Say:** *"Her symptoms are real, consistent, and escalating - and we won't stop until we understand why."*

Key Power Terms for Parent Advocates:

- **Diagnostic Overshadowing:** The clinical practice of attributing physical symptoms to a pre-existing or assumed psychiatric label without thorough investigation.
- **Patient Agency:** Supporting a teenager's right and capability to communicate her own symptoms, make healthcare decisions, and act as a primary partner in her medical care.
- **Baseline:** A patient's normal, daily level of functioning prior to severe symptom onset or flare-ups.
- **Clinical Justification:** Requesting that a physician formally document in the medical record the specific medical reasoning behind declining a requested test, scan, or referral.
- **Holistic Assessment:** An evaluation model that looks at the entire body and interconnected physical systems rather than isolating single symptoms or defaulting to psychological explanations.