

family

A D V O C A C Y

Advocacy Tools booklet

Advocacy Tools - shared by families

Consider mapping out the issue

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For whom?	Individuals (self or someone else), group (eg children with disability)
For what?	Appropriate support to meet human needs; inclusion; protection against abuse, legal rights
Towards or against whom?	Individual; Government agency; service providers, other families, workers, legislators
By whom?	Unpaid individual; family; citizen; paid individual, organisation
How?	meeting or phone call?; research; Complaints process; write a letter

Planning for meetings

Meetings may take place as part of a planning process, to think through something that isn't working, to raise a concern – or for many other reasons.

Always be mindful that meetings are an opportunity for the sharing of information and for communication that is focussed on achieving an outcome or a number of actions for your family member. Use this opportunity, wisely.

Allow yourself time to think and plan for a meeting. Unless it is an absolute necessity, do not attend a meeting arranged at the last minute. You are always able to ask for a meeting to be rescheduled. It is important that a meeting is planned around what suits you and your family member.

Planning reduces your vulnerability and enables you to be more confident, prepared for what may arise, strategic and more influential in your advocacy actions.

Measure the success of your meeting by the agreed actions that are listed and the outcomes that are achieved in the interest of your family member following the meeting. Plan for the next meeting and follow up actions.

Be Strategic - Think and question ahead

If it is not known, always ask in advance who will be attending the meeting and what the purpose is. Identify who could be your potential ally or a supporter. Who will challenge you? Who do you need to be present at the meeting?

What do you want to achieve from this meeting? Write down your thoughts.

Does a decision need to be made? Do you want to brainstorm ideas? Are you trying to influence or communicate something? What actions are you seeking? What are your advocacy priorities?

If you are seeking a decision, make sure that a decision maker is attending the meeting.

Think through and recognise in advance what motivates the people in the meeting, what are they seeking? Is there common ground? What are the positive outcomes for all?

'At the meeting'

Acknowledge what has been achieved and what is being worked towards and acknowledge people in the meeting who have been supportive and helpful.

Allow time for others to speak and listen to what they have to say. This is about being respectful and using a positive approach. Have your notes of things you would like to discuss.

You may be nervous or want to be confident that you express your message well. It can also be helpful in making sure you cover everything you hope to. Prior to the meeting, name the barest essential outcome or action that you are seeking from the meeting. Focus on this. Recognise that meetings are challenging, people will have different agendas and most things are not achieved instantly. You are on a journey.

Recognise what challenges you

Reduce your vulnerability and think through, acknowledge and prepare yourself for what is likely to upset, anger or challenge you. Identify what could help you to cope better. Remember that you are not required to have all the answers.

Give yourself time to think and remaining silent to create a pause is perfectly fine. Some families pause and drink some water to create a pause, others have a signal for their partner to take over, others have some notes and refer to those to bring the conversation back on track.

Be well organised

- Create a checklist for a meeting
- Keep all documents, correspondence and your phone notes in a safe place
- Create records of all phone conversations and face to face discussions that include the date, time and who you were speaking with
- Prepare in advance what you may need to take to the meeting
- Confirm the date, time and who will be in the meeting at least a few days before the meeting
- Ask for the agenda – if you cannot get this, ask for the agreed purpose of the meeting and topics that may be discussed
- Don't go alone – bring your partner, friend or a family member for support and to possibly take notes for you. Meetings can be very overwhelming and a time of vulnerability. Often there are more professionals attending a meeting than you anticipated. Make sure it is the right person – someone who is on the same page as you
- Remember, you do not have to agree with everything
- Find out how much time is allocated to the meeting. Will you have time to raise and discuss your queries? If it is not enough time, ask for more time to be allocated or if appropriate ensure that an additional meeting is planned for
- Whatever the advocacy issue is – make sure you are well informed and updated
- Take notes during the meeting

After the meeting

Write up a brief meeting summary of important discussion points. Include a list of agreed actions, when are they to take place and who is responsible. Compare this to any minutes or meeting summary that is circulated. Share your notes if there are any differences

Extra tips for meetings

- Consider your motivation. Advocacy should be about achieving what needs to be done for the vulnerable person. Speak and act in a way that elevates and enhances the image and status of the person with disability
- Prioritise your advocacy: Advocacy should prioritise issues which are major and which can impact on a person's life
- Focus on the interests and needs of your family member
- Have your vision at the forefront of your thinking and on paper to share
- Have a high expectation
- Acknowledge that this is likely to be one of many meetings, conversations that will occur. Not everything can be achieved in the one meeting
- Set minimum expectations for this meeting
- Be confident; remind yourself that you are a person with knowledge, experience and insight
- Retain a sense of humour, be confident, be yourself
- Speak in a way that welcomes and gives the space for others to join you
- Work at building relationships, allies and respectful communications
- Identify who is likely to support you
- Recognise that others are likely to have different agendas and conflicts of interest - accept that people will disagree
- Be confident in saying 'No', when 'No' is necessary to be communicated
- Do not make a decision on the spot if you require more time
- Be respectful of others and expect to be respected
- Be selective about what you say, when you say it and how you say it
- Use the time allocated to a meeting - very wisely and purposeful
- Ask questions (especially around jargon)
- Be an effective communicator: This means being assertive not aggressive, respectful and encouraging
- Body language and the voice: Whether you are aware of it or not, your body language is saying things about your power position before you start to speak. It is important to know how to reinforce your message with your body language

What not to do....

- Never apologise for what you are seeking or saying
 - Remember you are not the one that has to come up with the solutions or answers
 - You do not have to answer every question and you do not have to have the answer for every question
 - Don't be drawn into irrelevant debate, ie he said she said
 - Don't speak in terms of the past or what should have been
 - Don't agree if you don't agree
 - Don't commit to anything or sign anything unless you have had time to think it through and understand the consequences.
 - Don't appear to take anything personally or accept a professional speaking in terms of their personal opinion
 - Don't take on other peoples issues or battles
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Communication

Drafting an email

Emails are generally quick and easy, they are also a form of communication that is easily sent on to others and that leaves a written record.

As with all your advocacy actions, do not act in the heat of the moment.

Think about what you want to achieve, the relevant level of formality, tone and formatting, before you send. Sometimes it is best to do a draft and send it to yourself. Leave it overnight and review it the next day. You may be surprised at the number of changes that you may make to the email, the day after the event.

Like letters, emails should be to the point, and have a clear purpose. If you want a reply, it is useful to note when you would like to receive it. That way, the recipient has a clear time frame to work to and is more likely to prioritise a response.

Emails can be a great way of sending a thank you or summarising a meeting or a telephone call.

Tips on how to write a letter

The following are some broad ideas for letter writing that you will need to adapt. Who you are sending the letter to and why will impact on content and formality.

Preparation

The first step to take is think through the content – jot down your thoughts, what is the reason for the letter, what has happened, what are the most important points, and what are you seeking from the person you are writing to?

What is your motivation? The expected outcome of writing this letter must be in the interest of your family member with disability.

Putting the letter together

Include all relevant information – date the letter and provide all your details.

Keep the letter concise and short. Briefly explain the situation and the action you have taken to resolve the issue or your understanding of what has taken place.

Extra advice and tips

If appropriate, identify where the organisation/ the person/body you are writing to are being helpful and supportive.

Outline your understanding of what has occurred, state your concerns and name the issue. State what it is that you are seeking and your commitment to working towards achieving this.

Thank the reader for listening to your concerns and write in a manner and tone that communicates your expectation that they will respond and contribute to further discussions or the decision you are seeking, within a particular time frame.

Write a draft letter and have a friend read the letter and offer their thoughts. Review the contents of the letter the day after you wrote it. Make the necessary changes.

Keep a copy of the letter

Keeping in mind that you want the letter to be to brief and to the point, it can be helpful to attach a supplementary document or documents to add any personal information that will bring your circumstances to life for the reader.

Making phone calls

Like preparing for meetings, it is a good idea to have thought clearly about and written down, what you want to say and achieve before you make the call.

Think through the order of your proposed conversation and make a bullet point list that reflects your planned process. Make sure that you listen well and allow for the other person to speak.

Take notes during your phone conversations and make sure that you have covered all of your priorities. Take quick notes of actions or a conclusion. Make sure there is a clear conclusion and understanding. Summarise this over the phone, at the end of your conversation. This will ensure that there is a clear and agreed understanding of what you have reached and what future actions are required. A good action is to also send a follow up email summarising your phone conversation.
