



Our Mission

To advance the quality of life, dignity, equality, self-determination, and freedom of choice of persons with disabilities through collaboration, education, advocacy, as well as legal and legislative strategies.

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Advocacy Center
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Ten Steps for Being an Effective Self-Advocate



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for Persons with Disabilities, Inc.



1 BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

You are worth the effort it takes to protect your interests and your rights. You can do it!

2 REALIZE YOU HAVE RIGHTS

You are entitled to equality under the law. Inform yourself by asking questions and using resources, such as The Advocacy Center at 1-800-342-0823 (voice) or 1-800-346-4127 (TDD).

Other resources include: peer-run, family and community support programs, referral/crisis hotlines, advocacy groups, and service providers that may offer informative classes, assertiveness training groups and publications. When contacting a resource insist that explanations are clear and understandable. Remember that service providers are public servants. They work for you!

3 DISCUSS YOUR CONCERNS

Talk directly with your service provider either by phone, in person (you may bring someone along for support) or by writing a letter.

Schedule a meeting with your service provider. Speaking to someone in person can be an effective way to advocate for yourself. Plan what you are going to say, and then practice on friends, with a tape recorder or in front of the mirror can help. Dress accordingly and be on time.



Be courteous and call the person by name. Stay calm. State your message clearly and simply. Prepare an agenda; it helps

keep you focused on your issues. Be attentive and if you do not understand something, ask questions. If you feel you are not getting anywhere, tell him/her that you wish to pursue your issue further and ask to speak to the person's supervisor.

Thank the person for his/her time. It is also important to document who you speak with as well as the phone number and agency name of the person and what was generally discussed. Another option when you are advocating for yourself is to write a letter to request and confirm information, to present facts or to express your opinion. Keep it short and simple-under two pages if possible. Keep your message positive.



Send copies of your letter to agency supervisors, advocacy groups or others you want to inform. In some instances you may want to copy your legislator. Put "cc" (copies circulated) at the bottom of the letter with a list of those to who you are sending copies. Keep a copy for your records. This documentation will be useful if you need to follow up.

4 GET THE FACTS

Problem solve by gathering information. Get the facts in writing. Ask for a copy of the policies, rules or the regulations being quoted to you. People sometimes settle for a quick verbal decision that may not be accurate. Hold agencies accountable for the decisions they make.

5 USE THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

Use an agency's chain of command to make sure a supervisor or someone else with authority has an opportunity to work with you on the problem and resolution.

6 KNOW YOUR APPEAL RIGHTS

Request clear written information on your appeal rights either within an agency or outside an agency. Know what the next step will be if you are dissatisfied.

7 BE ASSERTIVE AND PERSISTENT

Keep after what you want. Remember that effort moves bureaucracies. Follow up!

8 USE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Use the telephone to gather information, to keep track of your progress and to let people know what you want. Before you call, write down the essential points of what you want to say. Stay calm. Make your conversation brief and clear.

Be willing to listen because what you hear may be as important as what you say. Ask for the name and position of the persons you are talking to. Ask when he/she will get back to you or when you can expect action. If this person can't help you, ask who can. If necessary ask for his/her supervisor. Thank the person for being helpful. Keep a record of your call and follow up!

9 ASK FOR HELP

Link up with advocacy organizations, such as the Advocacy Center, for more specific information on problems you are having trouble obtaining services related to a disability. Remember there are also community support groups or organizations.



10 FOLLOW UP

Don't give up without using these skills. Agencies are accountable for the decisions they make. You are entitled to know and exercise all your options to obtain the assistance you need. Remember to thank people along the way.