

Self Advocacy Tips

DISABILITY RIGHTS

NORTH CAROLINA

Champions for Equality and Justice



The best way to guarantee you receive the services you need and protect your rights is to be an advocate from the beginning.

There are five parts to being a self advocate:

1. Personal responsibility;
2. Knowledge of the law and other rules;
3. Fact finding and documentation;
4. Negotiating; and
5. Believing in yourself.

1. Personal Responsibility

Realize you have rights - You are entitled to equality under the law. Keep informed. Ask questions. Use resources including: 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 you are responsible for...

- ✓ Being clear about what you need and what you want!
- ✓ Always going to meetings.
- ✓ Asking who is at your meetings and why.
- ✓ Keeping all your papers.
- ✓ Never signing blank copies of forms.
- ✓ Documenting what happens, taking notes or have someone do it for you.
- ✓ Taking someone with you if you need help.

2. Knowledge of the Law

Know the law(s) that regulates your services.

- ✓ Most services are provided because of state or federal laws.
- ✓ Laws have regulations that provide guidance about how that law should be implemented.
- ✓ There are always rules about how to spend money – sometimes in regulation or policy.
- ✓ Laws include definitions for eligibility and services.

Learn the best practices/standards for your services.

- ✓ Many professions have standards which must be met to be licensed or certified.
- ✓ Ask if your provider is licensed, certified or otherwise qualified to do her/his job.
- ✓ If there is specialized training needed to work with you, find out if your provider has that special training (CPR, CPI, etc.)
- ✓ Best practices help to justify requests for services.

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

3. Fact Finding and Documentation

It is important that you keep good records and document what happens. This will become your proof.

- ✓ Keep notes about times, dates and who you talked to, what they told you, etc.
- ✓ Keep copies of all your receipts, reports, evaluations, plans, correspondence, complaints and responses.
- ✓ If required services are not being provided when promised - write it down!
- ✓ Take pictures.

Figure out if it's working.

- ✓ Make sure that you understand what is supposed to happen.
Ask questions about when, where, and how often the service is going to happen.
- ✓ Then keep a log. Write down when services happen.
- ✓ If services don't happen, know whom to call. Write it down.
- ✓ Are you happy with the services?

Get the facts.

- ✓ Problem solve by gathering information.
- ✓ Get the facts in writing.
- ✓ Ask for a copy of the laws, policies, rules or the regulations being quoted to you.
- ✓ Always ask for any decision or change to be put in writing and wait for it! People sometimes settle for a quick verbal decision that may not be accurate.
- ✓ Hold agencies accountable for the decisions they make.

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 s/he 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 her/his supervisor.
- ✓ Thank the person for being helpful.
- ✓ Keep a record of your call and follow up!

4. Negotiating

Sometimes when you advocate you will have to negotiate for what you need. A negotiation is what takes place when two or more people do not agree.

- ✓ Pay attention, do not frown.
- ✓ Use good listening skills.
- ✓ Ask for what you want.
- ✓ Say why you want it.
- ✓ If the other person agrees, thank them.
- ✓ If they do not agree, suggest a compromise.
- ✓ If they agree with your compromise, thank the person.
- ✓ Do not give up.

5. Believing in Yourself

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

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Upon request, information is available in alternate formats.

North Carolina's Protection and Advocacy System

www.disabilityrightsnnc.org

Disability Rights North Carolina is a federally mandated protection and advocacy system with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Social Security Administration.