

## Arc Guide to Advocacy Services

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### What is advocacy?

- Actions that speak in favor of, argue for, recommend, support or defend
- Process to change “what is” into a “what should be”
- Dialogue to discuss issues/concerns
- Proposed solution(s) through an inclusive and engaging process

### In all advocacy situations, it is important to:

- Know what is wanted and how it will help
- Be prepared
  - Be specific about what is wanted
  - Make notes before a meeting to remember what to talk about, what to say, and possible solutions. Notes can also help you stay on track.
- Know the laws, rules and policies about a specific service or program
- Document, document, document
  - Save all important papers. It may be beneficial to staple the envelope onto documents so you can determine when they were mailed or note “date received” on the document
  - Keep notes during phone conversations and meetings
  - Use email cautiously. While email can be useful documentation, messages can be misunderstood and can be forwarded to others.
- At the beginning of the meeting, be sure everyone introduces themselves and states their role
- Ask questions and listen to the answers. Ask for clarification when necessary and repeat to check for understanding
- Use “I” statements whenever possible. “You” statements are easily interpreted as blaming
- Remember everyone involved may believe they are acting in the best interests of the person with a disability. Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- Propose solutions to identified problems/issues
  - Focus on strengths, concerns and priorities
  - Identify your BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) and WATNA (Worst Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement)
  - If you disagree, clearly state why, what you disagree with, and if possible, propose a solution or alternative

### The Arc Minnesota recommends NOT:

- Feeling obligated to sign and approve documents at the meeting. You need time to process and review the document before signing.
- Signing blank or partially completed forms

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- In some situations, it will be important for an Arc Minnesota advocate to attend a meeting with you.

### **The Arc Greater Minnesota advocates:**

- Use a person-centered process and philosophy to coach and empower individuals
- Maintain a comprehensive understanding of pertinent laws, rules, policies, governing systems and due process rights
- Help parents and individuals with IDD clearly identify issues and options within a given system. Knowledge gained through this process is utilized to make decisions, create and implement a plan of action
- Empower parents and individuals with IDD to advocate for themselves
- Assist parents and individuals with IDD to prepare for and participate in meetings
- Respect choices made by individuals with IDD, their parents, guardians and family members

**September 2018**