



Arc Guide to Effective Advocacy/Working on a Team

This guide will provide information on general advocacy. It will also provide information on communication with professionals, which is an important part to advocacy.

Advocacy is:

- An action taken to effect a desired outcome.
- Essential in maintaining or improving the quality of life for individuals.

Advocacy involves a person with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) becoming empowered to speak for oneself with assistance from others if needed.

Individuals, including a person with an IDD know themselves best and is usually the best advocate. Parents, family members and friends can be helpful partners in advocacy.

Advocacy involves:

- Knowing what is important and helpful to you
- Knowing what you want and be able to explain how it will help
- Finding and sharing things that can work
- Creating a process to change “what is” into “what should be”
- Directly communicating to get at issues/concerns
- Brainstorming about options/resources and creating new ones
- Having an understanding of laws, rules and policies
- Knowing what your strengths and needs are
- Being persistent
- Listening and hearing others thoughts/opinions

Communicating with professionals:

Communicating with professionals is part of all our lives. When an individual receives services, multiple people are working together to help determine and arrange for services.

- Use “I” statements whenever possible. I statements force us to take responsibility for what we are thinking, feeling and saying.
- Be respectful. People have different opinions to solutions. Be open to listening to others viewpoints.
- Be careful with what you say and how you say it. Think before reacting.
- If you disagree, state why, what you disagree with and give a solution or alternative.

- Ask questions and listen to the answers. Ask for clarification when necessary and repeat to check for understanding.
- Ask for clarity around jargon or abbreviations used. Again, make certain you understand what is being said.
- At times teams can't agree. Make sure you think about your best and worst solution. What are you willing to live with?
- Feelings vs facts. Separate facts from feelings. Feelings can be helpful and at times not allow us to reach the end goal we are looking for. When we are able to talk about facts it allows all to keep focus.
- Be aware of how your feelings are being projected. How you react in a situation can make or break a process.

Communication Methods:

- Choose your method of communication. A phone call can be quicker and allows you to hear the other person's tone. Written communication provides documentation.
- As a team, agree on how to communicate, with whom, when and how often.
- Email can be useful documentation. Messages can be misunderstood and forwarded to others. Reread your email before sending it. Others may perceive the information differently than you intended. When using email:
 - Be clear.
 - Don't expect an immediate response.
 - Be careful with "Reply All" and only use if you want to reply to everyone.
 - Don't YELL IN EMAILS by using all CAPITALS.

Meetings:

- In planning for meetings, think about who needs to be at the meeting. The individual, a few people, the whole team, supervisors? Make sure decision makers are present. Too many people can be overwhelming.
- Be sure everyone introduces himself or herself and says their role.
- A summary of decisions and/or initiatives is important. Who is taking meeting minutes?
- Everyone should have the same understanding and ideas. Creating action steps outlining who will do a task and by when.
- Share documentation with those who were at the meeting especially around important decisions.



Additional Suggestions:

- Be realistic with requests. Generally speaking, allow the person you're trying to contact at least 24 business hours to respond.
- You may be working with some professionals for a long time. Maintaining a positive relationship is important. In certain situations, it is okay to contact a supervisor if there are issues.
- Keep notes during phone conversations and meetings.
- Focus on strengths, concerns and priorities.
- The key is to collaborate.
- Think about whether or not you should take a break and talk later. This may be especially important if you are overwhelmed, upset, etc.

Paperwork:

- Professionals need signed releases of information to talk about you and your private information with others outside their organization.
- Save documents and organize/file them. Put date received on them.

For further information or advocacy services, contact The Arc Minnesota at 952.920.0855 or toll-free at 833.450.1494 or visit www.arcminnesota.org. (Please note: *This document is not legal advice, and should not be construed as such. Thus, no information herein should replace the sound advice of an attorney.*)

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