

# YOUNG CARER TIPS FOR SELF ADVOCACY



Young carers can face challenges when caring for a family member, partner or friend. The tips and checklists below are designed to help you when communicating with service providers, such as health professionals, youth workers, counsellors or government agencies.

## HOW TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

Be sure about the following.

### What information you need

Don't be afraid of asking questions about what you've read. It is important that service providers understand your role of being a carer and the type of information you are interested in. Prepare specific questions about what you want to know.

### The main issue you want to get across

Be clear about the issue you want to cover (for example the health condition of the person you are caring for). You can do some research via websites etc. When researching, try to stick to reputable organisations' websites to ensure information is accurate. Also, communicate your own situation clearly, including your practical needs (e.g. I don't have enough time to study or work due to my caring role).

### Identify the main contact person

If there are more than one of you with care responsibilities, appoint one person as the main contact. Ensure that the appointed person knows all important information and shares it with the service provider, other caregivers and possibly the person you are caring for.

### Identify who else can support you

Ask about other help and resources. Service providers can often make referrals to other appropriate supports, e.g. carer support groups, financial supports etc. Be patient and prepared that not all of your support needs may be met initially. You may have to talk to several services to find the right supports.

### Good decision making

Take some time to make big decisions. Have you received all information you need? What are the potential consequences of your decision? If you can, involve the person you are caring for and other family and friends decision-making (e.g. about medication, treatment etc.).

### What you can do if you feel you haven't been heard

Try to be patient and repeat your request in other words. You could also follow up your request with an email, letter or phone call. Ask to speak to a manager. If you still have concerns, you can make a complaint. You have a right to make a complaint if your concerns have not been addressed.

*Remember to show appreciation to those who provide assistance or good advice. This can help achieve a good relationship with your providers/ workers.*

Use the two checklists below to help you prepare for calling and meeting with providers.

## 1. PHONE CALLS AND PHONE APPOINTMENTS

Make sure you have your notebook and diary handy when calling service providers. Write down your questions before the call, and ensure you ask these questions.

**Ask questions clearly.** State your situation briefly, and your request for support. Remember to ask for the person's name and phone number for future follow-up. If nobody answers, leave a message stating your name and phone number and when it suits to call you back.

If you haven't received the information you are after, **make an appointment** to come in person to discuss.

## 2. FACE TO FACE MEETINGS AND APPOINTMENTS

**Make an appointment beforehand**, if possible, and ask for a longer appointment if you have lots of issues to discuss.

**Make sure you have a notebook and/or diary handy.** Write your questions down before your meeting. Take notes during the meeting, if appropriate.

**Speak clearly and with confidence.** Use your prepared questions and notes during the meeting. Do not worry about talking to a professional – remember that their job is to support you and allow you to raise issues that affect you and/or the person you care for. It is ok to repeat your requests, or clarify information. It is important to ensure the person understands your request and your needs.

If you feel you don't get the information or service you need: **Repeat your request**, and explain that you do not feel your request has been understood or answered fully. Remain polite. If your request is still not understood or met, ask to talk to a manager or supervisor. If the service cannot meet your request, ask if they know of another service or agency that may be able to assist.

Remember: you are the expert on your and your family's situation. You have a right to have your questions answered and be treated with respect by any professionals you interact with.

## SIGNS YOU HAVE BEEN TREATED WITH RESPECT AND RECEIVED APPROPRIATE SUPPORT:

- You feel you have been listened to and you could talk freely about your concerns.
- You feel the service provider was helpful and supportive. You feel the person understands your personal situation and the needs of the person you care for.
- You have talked through all the available support options either for yourself or the person you care for in order to make a decision.
- You feel the service provider explained issues well and you (and possibly the person you care for) understand the provided information.
- You are confident you can communicate your support needs to professionals, and how to follow up if your needs have not been met, or appropriate responses have not been given.
- You feel you have been acknowledged in your role as carer and have been given sufficient information.
- You and your family feel empowered to make better decisions.