

1. BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

You can do it!

- Self-advocacy can be challenging, but you are worth it!

2. PREPARE

Define the problem.

- Clarify your issue. You may have many issues, but decide what is most important?

Set your goals.

- What do you want? What does 'winning' look like to you?

Learn your rights.

- You are legally entitled to equal rights. Educate yourself with reliable information.

Write an outline.

- List the key points you want to make, your concerns, and your questions.

Practice.

- Try talking about your issue to a friend or advocate before sharing with others.

Set the scene.

- Plan calls and/or meetings in places without distractions.

3. COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Be polite.

- Introduce yourself and anyone with you. Learn and use other people's names when you communicate. State your concerns in a courteous manner.

Be willing to listen.

- What you hear may be as important as what you say.

Keep it short and to the point.

- Keep your message clear and focused. Keep letters no more than one page long. Leave short voicemails with your name and contact information.

Stay calm.

- Be assertive, but not aggressive. You will be understood and heard the best if you speak in a professional manner and show respect to others.

Take a break if you need it.

- If you find yourself overwhelmed on a call or in a meeting it is OK to politely ask for a break. Sometimes space encourages clearer thinking for everyone.

Share information responsibly.

- Only copy your letter or 'cc' an e-mail to supervisors or advocacy groups who can assist you. Be cautious with sharing confidential information.

4. GET THE FACTS

Who can help?

- If one person cannot help you, ask who can. Use the organization's chain of command to help you find the supervisor you need to communicate with.

Who did you speak with?

- Always get the name and position of the person you are talking to. Ask when he/she will get back to you or when you can expect action.

Can I have that in writing?

- If someone tells you something, ask them to put it in writing or send you documentation. If they tell you something is a law, policy or procedure, ask for a copy. If you disagree with a decision, ask for the reason in writing.

How can I appeal?

- If you disagree with decisions, most organizations and government agencies are required to have a process to review decisions. Ask for information about the dispute resolution process. Be sure you understand your responsibilities.

5. KEEP RECORDS

Provide information in writing.

- Provide information, requests and concerns in writing. Keep it short and to the point. Begin and end your letter or e-mail by stating your request or concern.

Keep track of contacts.

- Keep track of all your calls. Write down who you spoke with, when you spoke with them, and what you discussed.

Keep a Copy.

- Keep a copy of all your communication including emails and letters.

6. FOLLOW UP

Meet deadlines.

- Keep track of and follow key deadlines and time frames.

Follow up.

- Send a follow up note listing your understanding of any agreements reached or next steps decided during the conversation or meeting. Keep a copy.

Say Thank you.

- Remember to thank people along the way and recognize good service.

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