



15 Tips for Self-Advocates

1 You are the Most Important Person in the Process

Your voice and your choices matter. Think about what you want. What are your goals? Where are you now? What would it take to achieve those goals? Once you have answered these questions, you will be better able to understand what services, agencies, and organizations should be included in your planning process.

4 Primary Language

You have the right to receive information in your primary language. You have the right to request an interpreter in your primary language, including American Sign Language (ASL). If you have a disability, you have the right to receive information in alternative formats such as, Large Print, Braille, or other formats. You can ask the agencies to provide an interpreter for meetings and/or for documents in your primary language or in an alternative format.

2 Keep Records

Keep copies of documents, assessments, letters and notices. You can keep them in a folder or notebook. You may even scan or take pictures of documents so that your important papers don't get lost. Most agencies are legally required to provide you with copies of your records. If you need records that you do not have, you may ask for copies of your records at any time. If you speak to someone over the phone, write down the name and title of the person that you spoke to and the agency they work for.

5 Know Your Rights

Each agency may have different laws, policies, and procedures that govern who they serve, the type of services they provide, and their process for providing services to people with disabilities. The Law Center provides advocacy and information about the agencies that provide services to people with disabilities in Arizona and New Mexico.

3 Ask for what you need

We suggest that you make your request in writing and explain what you would like to talk about at the meeting. It may be helpful to include in your request when you are available to meet.



6 Prepare

Before a meeting, give yourself time to look over documents, assessments and records. If the agency you are meeting with will be sharing a new assessment or report with you at the meeting, you can ask for a copy ahead of time.



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7 Plan

Before the meeting, think about your goals, needs and preferences. Make an outline of things you would like to talk about at the meeting. If you are asking for a service, it may also be helpful to make notes about why you think you need the service. You can bring documents with you that help to support your request.

8 Participate

You are the focus of the meeting. You must share information about your goals, abilities, interests, capabilities, and challenges. At the meeting, be sure to ask questions, share information, and propose ideas. If you do not understand what is being said or what is given to you in writing, ask questions. You have the right to ask as many questions as you need to to understand what is happening clearly. If you have information, reports, assessments, or records that help support your request, you must share the information with the relevant people or agencies.

9 Be Creative

The planning process should be individualized. This means your services should be right for you. Encourage others to explore different ways of doing things, especially if the current way is not working for you.



10 Work Together

Each agency and staff person has different skills and knowledge to share. Be willing to listen to their perspectives and ideas. Ask about resources, services, and success stories of other people. Where there are disagreements, remind the team of the common goal – supporting your success.



11 Be Assertive

Everyone, especially you, are invested in the planning process. Be clear about what you want. Ask for clarification about what the agencies can and cannot do. In deciding how you want to address disagreements, keep in mind that you will most likely have a long relationship with the agencies providing services.

12 Your Right to Appeal

You have the right to challenge a decision if you disagree. You have the right to ask what the process is for challenging a decision you disagree with. You have the right to have that information provided to you in writing. Most appeal processes have timelines related to how much time you have to challenge a decision. Make sure you understand what the process and timelines are if you plan to challenge the decision.

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13 Interim Solutions

You may have an issue or request that cannot be resolved at the meeting. If this happens, talk about making a short-term plan of action that ensures that you will have the services you need while the issue is being resolved.

14 Confirm Agreements and Action Items

Before the close of the meeting, read back your notes about the agreements and action items you have discussed to make sure everyone has the same understanding of the meeting. You can also ask the agency to read them to you. You may send a follow-up email or letter to the team about what you discussed at the meeting. This will help you create a record of your meeting that you can keep if you have questions later on.

15 Signing Documents

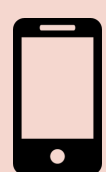
Be sure to read the documents before you sign them. You have the right to review the whole document before you sign. You do not have to sign a plan or other documents at the meeting. You can ask to take a copy home with you. You may think about discussing the document with your family, friends or professionals before you sign. If you disagree with a document or would like to make changes to it, you can ask the agency to make changes before you sign. Sign only what you agree to and make a note of what you disagree with on the same document or in a cover letter that you attach to the document.



If you have any questions regarding your rights, you can contact the Law Center.

Monday - Thursday

8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.



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