Center for Disability Leadership
Partnership for People with Disabilities
Virginia Commonwealth University

www.vcu.edu/partnership/CenterforDisabilityLeadership

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Developing Healthcare Advocacy Skills

“Inclusion occurs when we invite others to understand our perspective.”
Developing Healthcare Advocacy Skills

- Advocacy Basics
- How to Communicate with Professionals for Yourself or Others
- Developing Communication Skills
First, it’s important to know:

- Not every service provider has the benefit of your perspective.
- The way you choose to communicate can tell people that they are respected.
- The way you choose to communicate can inspire people to listen to your concerns respectfully.
Advocacy Basics:

- Advocacy means speaking up for yourself or someone else
- Advocacy takes careful thought and preparation
- When you recognize that there’s a need for advocacy, you may feel strong emotions and have to make difficult decisions
Advocacy Basics:

Be Confident

Effective advocates are confident, motivated, knowledgeable, and tactful.
Self-Advocacy

- You are the best qualified to assess your own needs.
- You should be treated with dignity and respect.
- You have the power to make your own decisions.
- You are responsible for your own welfare.
- You can pursue the best healthcare available.
Supportive Advocacy

When you advocate for another person, you are supporting an individual’s rights

Above is a picture of a person gently holding the hands of another person as if listening compassionately
Supportive Advocacy

Advocating for someone is a privilege that comes with great responsibility

Above is a picture of a flowchart with the word “risk” and arrows to the words “yes” and “no”
Supportive Advocacy

It is important to first listen carefully to the person you’re advocating for to be sure that you can communicate their priorities and concerns well.

Above is a picture of a woman looking another person in the eye and smiling, listening carefully.
Supportive Advocacy

Do your best to involve the person you’re advocating for because it promotes their independence & their ability to advocate for themselves.
Supportive Advocacy

By demonstrating advocacy, you are a role model
Advocating for a Service

- Identify the need or the problem
- Gather data to document the need or problem
- Identify the people or organizations that make the decisions about the issue
- Gather support
- Develop recommendations that may solve the problem
- Make your case to the decision-makers.
Common Advocacy Mistakes

- Failing to effectively communicate needs to healthcare providers

Above is a picture of a group of people sitting around a table each pointing in different directions.
Common Advocacy Mistakes

- Taking an “all or nothing” approach

Above is a picture of a child with his arms crossed and his eyes closed, refusing to eat his dinner.
Common Advocacy Mistakes

- Not being willing to try another solution to the problem

Above is a picture of a person explaining an idea while another person listens unwillingly.
Common Advocacy Mistakes

- Focusing only on unproductive approaches to the problem

Above is a picture of two people looking in opposite directions, each through their own handmade tunnels.
Common Advocacy Mistakes

Not documenting everything

Above is a picture of a note with the words “Don’t Forget” at the top of the page.
It Takes Teamwork

So, how can you communicate effectively with healthcare providers?

- Remember that each person involved in healthcare brings important knowledge & information to the process
- Maintain realistic expectations of service providers
- Respect individual & cultural preferences
- Remember that trust is based upon mutual respect, honesty, & equality
- Trust can lead to constructive solutions
Negotiating

- Negotiation is not about getting your way or about sacrificing things that are important to you.
- Negotiation is about reasonable compromise to bring everyone closer to their goals.
- People are able to negotiate when they can identify the goals they have in common.

*The most important trip you may take in life is meeting people half way*
Effective Advocacy Requires Organization

- Preparation
- Communication
- Mutual Respect
- Realistic Expectations
- Collaboration
How can you get organized to advocate?

- Ask the healthcare provider about side effects and adverse reactions to new medications
- Disclose your allergies and current medications in case of potential drug interactions
- Know your insurance coverage
How can you get organized to advocate?

- Maintain a contact list of healthcare provider staff & know who to call for specific issues

- Maintain comprehensive personal healthcare records
And finally, who can help you become an effective healthcare advocate?

**Partnership for People with Disabilities @ VCU**
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