



Speak-up ADVOCACY GUIDE

BEING YOUR OWN
BEST ADVOCATE

Solving everyday issues and being your own advocate



Being your own advocate, or self-advocacy, means speaking up for your rights and needs and the things that are important to you.

Everyone should expect access to good quality services that we need in everyday life, such as disability support, phone, banking, housing, aged care and other services in your community. What does this look like?

- you are able to get the services you are entitled to
- you have clear information about the service that you understand
- you are able to make choices, including choosing a different service provider
- your needs and concerns are heard and responded to
- staff are respectful and know how to do their job
- you feel comfortable and safe

But sometimes there are problems. When this happens, it is important to speak up about how you feel and ask for what you need.

This guide gives you steps to follow and some practical tips to help you get started. Don't worry if you don't get far. Being confident to speak up for yourself can take time.

It takes **planning, patience** and sometimes **persistence**.

STEP ONE: What is the problem?

Sometimes there are many parts to the problem. Being clear in your mind about the issues will help get results. Make a list of your issues before you make a phone call or go to a meeting.



- **A problem shared is a problem halved.** Talking it through with a friend, family member or someone you trust can help you be clear about your issues.
- Do you have a decision-maker? A decision-maker is someone who helps you make decisions and choices in your life. It's their role to help you solve everyday issues. **Ask for help.**
- If there are many parts to the problem, **work on just one thing at a time.** Think about which is most important to you and what you could do as a first step.

TAKE IT STEP BY STEP



STEP TWO: What would you like to happen?

After making a list of issues, think about what you would expect to happen for each one. This will help keep everyone focussed on what's important to you.



- Work out what is most important to you. It will help you focus and know what you can let go.
- There might be a quick fix for some issues where others will take longer to solve.

STEP THREE: Know your rights and what is expected of you

Find out what you are entitled to and what you can expect. For example, who is eligible for the service? What information do you have to provide? Is there information about how to make a complaint?

You might be thinking that you are at step three and have still not done anything to fix the problem.

But you have. Preparing is important. Now you are ready to talk to someone directly about the problem with confidence.

STEP FOUR: Make a phone call

Talk to someone who can make changes and work with you towards fixing the problem. You should ask for the Manager or someone who handles complaints.



- Keep trying. Be patient but be persistent. If someone doesn't get back to you to discuss your issue within a few days, call again.
- Keep calm and be polite. Most people want to help when you are respectful and patient.
- Use the speaker phone. Have someone with you when you make the call. A friend, family member or trusted person can help with taking notes or help to explain the problem or situation if needed.

What to do during the phone call

- Take names and notes. It's important that you note down the full name and position of who you speak to. That way if you need to call again, or your advocate needs to follow up, you know who to ask for. Taking notes will help you keep track of what was discussed, what will happen next, and when.
- Focus on how to solve the problem. Be clear about what you would like them to do to fix the problem. What final outcome are you hoping for?
- Ask **when** the changes will be made, or the problem fixed.
- If you are not making any progress on the phone, ask for a meeting.

STEP FIVE: Hold a meeting

Sometimes you need to meet face to face. It might not be a problem that can be fixed over the phone, or more time is needed to understand the problem.



- A friend, family member or trusted person can help with the discussion or talk about it with you after the meeting.
- Take notes. You may need to use this information later if you or your advocate have to take the problem further.

STEP SIX: Keep check

If the changes or actions you have agreed to have not been done you will need to follow up. Call again, and explain that you are not happy with progress. Ask for an update or if you can speak with someone else about the issue.



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