

TIP SHEET:

Communication Skills



No matter how you choose to advocate on your own behalf, it will involve communicating with a person or agency – by phone, by letter or in person. The most important tool you have for self-advocacy is yourself.

The ability to say what you want, and listen to what other people are saying will increase your chances of getting what you want. The only way that others are going to know about your feelings, concerns, experiences and challenges, is for you to tell them.

The best reason to be your own advocate is that no one knows as much about you and what you think, feel, need and want as you do. Speaking up is a big step towards self-respect, dignity and reclaiming your rights. You will know that you took care of yourself, even if you do not get what you want.

Take responsibility for your own feelings:

You have the right to be safe from physical and verbal abuse and so does the person you are talking to. When speaking with your income support worker, it helps to remain calm and patient. This way you can communicate effectively with them and you do not make the person you are talking to feel uncomfortable. Try taking a friend with you to appointments who can help you stay calm and who can give you support when you are feeling angry or upset.

Be assertive, not aggressive:

You are using assertive communication skills when you:

- Use a 'reasonable' tone of voice/attitude
- Are brief, clear and consistent
- Ask for explanations until you understand what is being said
- Listen to what the other person has to say and repeat it back to them to show that you understand. You don't have to agree, but try to understand that they have a different point of view
- Make sure everyone at a meeting understands what you want

Give credit where credit is due:

Sometimes agency workers are helpful or work hard on your behalf even though, in the end, they don't get you what you want. There could be difficulties you don't know about, such as laws or rigid policies. Let these people know you appreciate their efforts whether you get what you want or not.