



Mission

To advance the quality of life, dignity, equality, self-determination, and freedom of choice of persons with disabilities through collaboration, education, advocacy, as well as legal and legislative strategies.

Disclaimer

This brochure provides general information only and is not legal advice or counsel. For legal advice or representation, please consult with a licensed attorney.

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10 STEPS To Effective Self-Advocacy



Disability Rights
FLORIDA

Advocacy. Equality. Dignity.

DisabilityRightsFlorida.org



Ten Steps to Effective Self-Advocacy

1 Believe In Yourself

- You are worth it! You can do it!

2 Learn Your Rights

- You are entitled to equal rights under the law. Educate yourself with reliable information.
- Contact Disability Rights Florida to request information about your rights.
- Use libraries, the internet, e-mail groups, and social networking. Put yourself on mailing lists.
- If you need an accommodation, ask for it.
- Use peer-run, family and community support programs, referral or crisis hotlines, advocacy groups, and service providers.
- Attend classes or workshops.
- If you do not understand information or explanations provided, say so.

3 Discuss Your Questions and Concerns

- Prepare. Write an outline of your concerns. Write down your questions.
- Raise your questions and concerns by phone, in person or by writing a letter. Use e-mail and on-line forms to start a conversation about your concerns.
- Schedule a meeting. Speaking to someone in person can be an effective way to advocate for yourself. Plan what you are going to say. Practice with friends, with a tape recorder, or even in front of the mirror. Dress for the occasion and be on time. You may bring someone along for support.

- Be polite. Introduce yourself and anyone with you. Learn and use other people's names when you communicate. State your concerns clearly and simply. Ask politely for what you want.
- Listen carefully to the explanations and answers given. If you do not understand something, ask for clarification.
- Write down the name of each person you spoke with and their contact information.
- Send a follow up note listing your understanding of any agreements reached or next steps decided during the conversation or meeting. Keep a copy for your records.

4 Be Effective on the Phone

- Before you call, write down the key points you want to say and your most important questions. Stay calm and be polite. Keep your message clear and focused.
- Try to make your call in a place without distractions. If you must leave a voice message, keep it brief and make sure to include your name and a contact number where you will be available to accept a call.
- Be willing to listen. What you hear may be as important as what you say.
- 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.
- If this person cannot help you, ask who can. Thank the person for being helpful.
- Keep a record of your call and follow up!

5 Put it in Writing

- Write a letter or send an e-mail about your request or concern. Provide information in writing. Keep it short and to the point. Begin and end your letter or e-mail by stating your request or concern.
- If you need others to become aware of the situation, you may send copies of your letter or e-mail to supervisors or advocacy groups.
- Only copy your letter or e-mail to people who can assist you. Be cautious with sharing confidential information.
- When you circulate a letter or e-mail to other people, put "cc" (copies circulated) at the bottom of the letter with a list of the people you sent copies. If you are sending an e-mail, list the names of other people in the "cc" line of the e-mail.
- In some instances, you may want to contact your legislators or include them in the people you copy with your letter or e-mail.
- Keep a copy for your records.

6 Get Information and Decisions 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 it in writing along with the reasons for the decision.

7 Use the Chain Of Command

- If you feel you are not getting a straight answer, thank the person for their time and ask to speak to someone else who can address your concerns.
- Use the organization's chain of command to help you find the supervisor or other person you need to communicate with.

8 Know Your Appeal Rights and Responsibilities

- If you do not get a satisfactory decision, ask what you need to do next to resolve the dispute or appeal the decision. Most organizations and government agencies are required to have a process to review decisions.
- Request clear written information about the dispute resolution process and your right to appeal a decision you believe is wrong. Be sure you understand your responsibilities.

9 Follow Up and Say Thank You

- Keep track of key deadlines and time frames. Follow up.
- Remember to thank people along the way. Recognize those individuals that provided helpful information and good service.

10 Ask For Help

- If you need assistance resolving a dispute, contact Disability Rights Florida or another advocacy or community organization to request information or assistance.