

Working with others



Introduction

In order to advocate effectively with and for children and young people, advocates need to develop and maintain positive working relationships with the adults involved in their lives – this includes other professionals, parents, carers and extended family members.

In this short information booklet we will look at some of the reasons an advocate would want to work closely with other adults involved in a young person's life - and some strategies to use to avoid any compromise in independence.

Why work closely?

Working closely with (rather than in opposition to) professionals and family member is important when nurturing respect. Where there is a culture of respect and trust for advocates and their roles, children and young people are likely to be heard and to feel understood.

It is therefore essential that as an advocate you are able to engage and communicate well with adults as well as with young people.

Working with professionals

You may want to work closely with professionals to:

- learn more about a child's situation (especially when using non instructed advocacy)
- learn more about how a non verbal child communicates
- gather information about options and choices available
- influence decisions and seek change

Working with professionals

You may also want to develop positive working relationships with professionals you engage with on behalf of the young people you support, because they are also potential referrers to your service. They are, in fact, potential gatekeepers in that advocates will rely on them to provide information directly to young people or make a decision about whether to mention an advocate to them.

Today you may be helping a young person to express their dissatisfaction and to raise thorny and difficult issues with their social worker, tomorrow you might be relying on that social worker to steer the child to the advocacy service.

Working with parents and carers

In some circumstances you will also want to work closely with parents and carers.

This could be because:

- the child or young person has asked you to speak to their parents or carers
- you are using non instructed advocacy and need to gather information from the parents or carers about what the young person wants
- you are using non instructed advocacy and believe the young person would want you to liaise closely with their family.

But be careful!

But the danger of course, is that if you work too closely alongside the professionals, or become too aligned with family members, then you can compromise your independence.

If you work 'too' closely together you invite the risk that:

- the young person you are there to support, can feel you are 'one of them', just another professional there to tell them what to do
- you become sucked into decision making and best interests (instead of promoting wishes and feelings)
- you step outside of your boundaries

"I tend to consider my advocate just that. MY advocate. It can be hard to see an advocate being too friendly with my social worker as it makes me feel like they are just another person who is 'pretending' to help you"

young person

Working with professionals

When working with professionals it is useful to understand that over the last 20 years, the children's workforce has changed.

Rather than working in traditional 'silos' both specialist and non-specialist professional disciplines are now expected to work more closely together than before within an integrated model of service delivery that allows for faster information sharing and a more coordinated support plan.

Working with professionals

This means that professionals will often view the advocate as 'another professional' to consult with and involve. They may invite you to contribute to the decision or even ask you to make decisions or recommendations.

Always always always, be clear that you are NOT there to be part of the professional team but there to support the young person, their voice and their goals.

Working with parents and carers

Remember that you should always be clear that you are there for the young person. Any threat (or potential threat) to your independence should be taken seriously and you should be proactive in explaining your role so that the parent or carer understand your role.

Sometimes, a parent or carer is entitled to their own advocate - this can be useful to know and access where you feel the parent needs advocacy and is drawing on you for support.

Avoiding threats to independence

Advocates can use the following strategies when maintaining and protecting independence:

- Clearly explain your role at the beginning
- Only share information with professionals and family members with the explicit consent or instruction from the young person
- Remind professionals that any information they give you, you will share with the young person (unless this is about risk)
- Align yourself with the young person (not the professionals)
- Remain young person led throughout everything you do!

Please return to your
e-learning for the
next section of
learning

