

Providing Advocacy

Things to think about early on



Self Advocacy

Speaking up for yourself - or self advocacy - is quite possibly the most important goal for any advocacy relationship.

When a person speaks up for themselves they get to say how their experience is for them and to tell others about their views and feelings in their own words. They not only take control but they can also develop skills and experience that can set them up to self advocate in the future (and reduce the need for representational advocacy in the future).

Self advocacy is like a positive power wheel: speaking up means the person gains experience in putting forward their views. This experience develops more confidence and self esteem. The increased confidence means they are more likely to speak up and be assertive in other parts of their life. Being assertive leads to more opportunities to find out about systems which affect their lives. Gaining access to this information leads to a better understanding of how the person wants to influence these systems Making choices and expressing them means more self advocacy and so on and so on.



How to support your advocacy partner to speak up

It goes without saying that people are individuals so you should always tailor your support taking into account their own unique goals and communication preferences. There are however some activities and considerations that can aid self advocacy:

Involve the person in all aspects of the process. Always be led by how comfortable they are with self advocacy and what they want to do. Don't put pressure on the person to self advocate if they do not want to.

During meetings the advocate can keep professionals in check and make space for them to listen to the person

Ensure the person has enough time to learn how to speak up, to practise, and to talk about how they feel about speaking up

Explore with the person creative ways to support them to speak up and get their message across such as: making a presentation, film, CD, poster, photographs, audio recording, providing a printed report (words, and/or pictures) to back up what they want to say

Develop relationships and links with local self-advocacy groups

Support the person to be well prepared, by rehearsing a meeting or visiting a venue before the meeting.

Small steps make a big difference. Advocates may suggest that a person speaks up in small ways at first, and takes on more challenging tasks over time. This means they can gain confidence from success early on.

Your first meeting



The first time you meet with your advocacy partner can be a nervous time - for both of you. They will not know you and may not be totally sure of your advocacy role. There are therefore some important things you should cover in your first meeting to make sure they have the information needed to continue to instruct you. But before we look at what you should do in your first meeting, let us take a moment to consider 'what is the aim of the first meeting'?

The answer to this, depends on your viewpoint. If you are the person seeking out advocacy you are likely to have your own personal aims which are numerous but often include finding out:

- what an advocate is
- if an advocate is the right service
- if they like/trust/feel safe with you
- if you can actually help them
- what they can do to achieve their goal
- if there are any other services that can help (signposting)
- if it costs any money
- are you independent

The advocate on the other hand, will see the first meeting as an important opportunity to establish clear expectations on how an advocate could help and is the starting point for the advocate to work out how best to provide their advocacy support.

Within that first meeting advocates need to therefore cover:

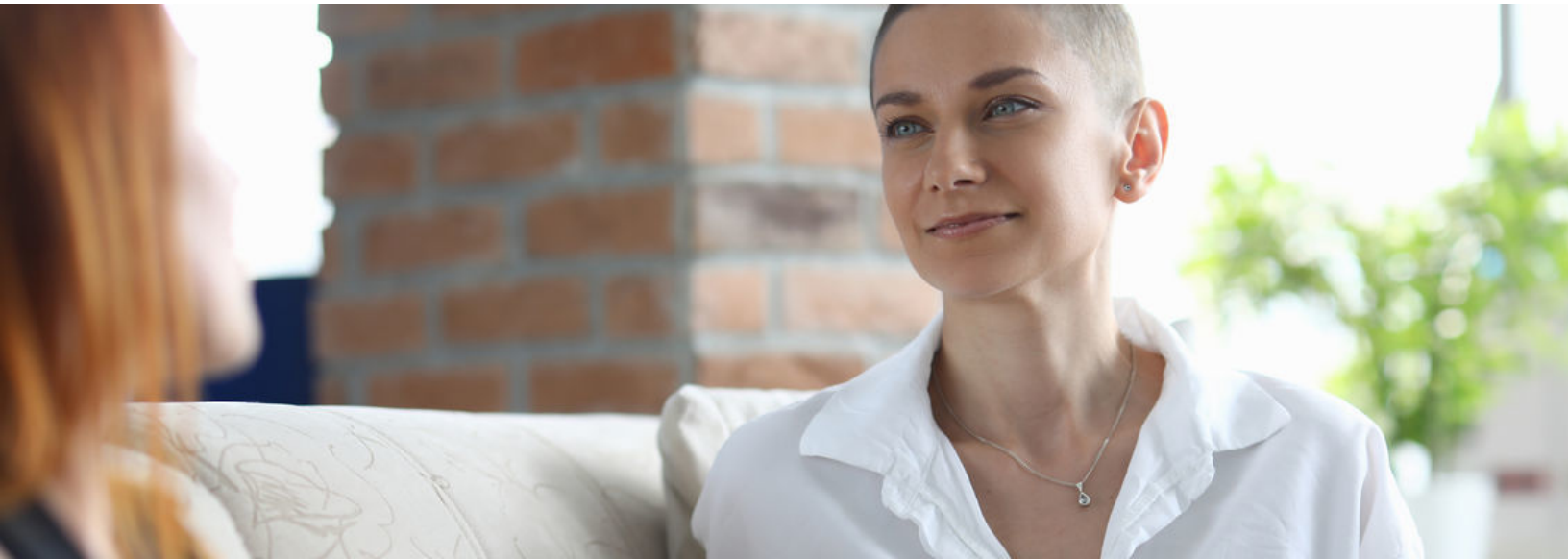
- Your role
- How to contact you
- How advocacy can help
- What advocacy cannot do
- Confidentiality levels
- How to complain about the advocate or service
- How advocacy works – the process
- Establishing if advocacy is needed

Wow, this is a lot!

Congratulations! You have just come across the first tension within the advocacy role: how do you keep person led and LISTEN whilst making sure you have provided the person with all of this information about your role?

Remember, the first rule in advocacy is to be person led. It may have taken the person a lot of courage and effort to approach the advocacy service and may have information they really want to share with you. They might not want to listen to 10 mins of you setting boundaries and explaining advocacy (which they may already know about). If you approach your first meeting with a 'list' of things to cover you run the risk of the first meeting turning into an interview.

When approaching the first meeting, go prepared with the things you need to cover - but deliver the information in a *responsive* and *tailored* manner, making sure you listen first to the person.



Here are some things advocates say about the first meeting:

"The first meeting should focus on what they want to achieve / what outcome are they looking for? I had a person once who wanted to make a complaint about the treatment her late husband had received whilst in hospital and her desired outcome was: "I just want my husband back". With the best will in the world, there was no way I was going to achieve that, but we talked about what I could do to support her and she eventually got back to me to say she would not be taking her complaint any further, but that it had helped to talk about it. Looking back the most important thing wasn't sorting 'the problem out but listening"

"Sometimes the person has to tell their story to you straightaway and if you are able to sit and listen, you will be one of the few people who will have done that. You can find a way to explain your confidentiality policy by politely interrupting and saying you need a minute to say something to the person. Then allow them to continue and if you jot things down (with their permission), they will feel even more listened to

"I always start by saying 'you're my boss, I'll only do what you tell me except if you tell me someone is in harm or has been hurt. This generally covers confidentiality and sets the scene"

"I'm always careful in the first meeting not to do too much talking and take over. They have to feel in control"

"We use a template for the first meeting which has a list of things I have to cover – things like confidentiality, complaints, access to records etc. It's a quick way of going through the boundaries which we sign. I do this quickly at the beginning before putting it away and listening to the client"

"I don't have a set approach to the first meeting – I tend to vary it depending on the person. If they are quiet I do more talking! If they are talkative I'll sit back and listen!"

The first meeting - what works

There are a number of things you can do to make sure the first meeting is a success.

Prepare

Do try to prepare for the meeting in advance, consider mutual safety issues and check if there are any specific communication needs the person has that you can respond to. If the person uses non verbal communication find out how they communicate yes, no and not sure

During

- Make sure you introduce yourself!
- Check if it is still ok to chat
- Be natural - make eye contact but don't overdo staring!
- Start up a conversation, about them if possible
- Be aware that you are a stranger
- Let the person see you are listening
- Talk about people needing advocates
- Explain that you are independent
- Assure them an advocate is on their side
- Talk about confidentiality,
- Be clear about what an advocate cannot do
- Stress that they are in control of the relationship
- Find out about their situation - how can an advocate help them?

Try not to

- Sit in a position that might make you look official or in charge
- Start off by asking questions, remember you are a stranger
- Appear nervous if the conversation takes time to get underway
- Do all the talking because you are embarrassed by silences
- Turn your meeting into an interview

Never

- Walk off and then talk to staff in hospitals or residential homes. It may appear that you are reporting on your confidential conversation.
- The same applies to parents, carers and friends.
- Make promises
- Assure total confidentiality

Taking Instruction

An important way of demonstrating that the advocate is person led, is by only ever taking action following the instruction of the person. This involves identifying and confirming the advocacy instructions. All advocates therefore, need to develop their listening skills. Without good listening skills, the communication will be ineffective and it will be difficult to establish a clear lead from the client.

The advocacy relationship must be person centred, so that more time might be spent listening than actually speaking on someone's behalf if that is required. Being on someone's side and being non judgemental is part of valuing them as a person and is what makes independent advocates different from many of the other people surrounding the person.

The advocate does not ever assess need or make decisions related to the allocation of resources. In fact they never make decisions on behalf of their partner. Because advocates do not assess need or allocate resources, there is a clear distinction between their role and those whose agencies provide care and support to people . Care managers/social workers and NHS professionals do advocate for their clients, but there is the inbuilt conflict of interest due to their assessment and decision making role.



Advocates have a responsibility to bring information to their partners and to keep them informed of every development, but they do not advise people as to what they should do. It is the responsibility of every advocate to check that they have understood the advocacy need; they have presented possible courses of action (an advocacy plan) and have permission to proceed. It is vital that people remain in control of the pace and content of any advocacy.

What if the person cannot give clear instructions?

Some people may experience times when they lack capacity to make certain decisions or may be unable to give clear instructions on what they would like to happen. In order to ensure the rights of this group are protected and they are not disadvantaged in receiving advocacy support, non instructed advocacy has developed.

Many advocates who work with people with learning disabilities and dementia need to understand non instructed advocacy. There is a separate information book and webinar looking at non instructed advocacy you are encouraged to access.

Reflecting the views and wishes of your advocacy partner

Reflecting the views and wishes of the person you are working with is a serious responsibility. Being non judgemental and reflecting their views without embellishment is standard practice for advocates. However this can result in criticism from others who do not fully understand the advocacy role and may accuse the advocate of supporting people to make unwise or unsafe decisions. It is essential that advocates carefully explain that their role is to represent the choices and decisions of their partner. This does not mean that the advocate cannot help their partner explore their options and indeed to examine the consequences of their decisions.

However, advocates never make “Best Interest” decisions.



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