



SKILLS





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Let's begin!

WHAT ARE SKILLS?

Now you know how to access information and build your knowledge, next we need to look at the skills you need to self advocate.

Skills are things you learn. You will have gained certain skills throughout your life, such as at home, school, work or other activities. You should think about what your current skills are and what you may need to develop.

To start thinking about your own skills to start your self advocacy journey; try to answer the following questions:

What are your biggest strengths?

What are your biggest weaknesses?

What are three things that you do well in self advocacy?

What are three things that you need to improve in self advocacy?

PREPARING FOR MEETINGS, PHONE CALLS, EMAILS OR LETTERS

The key to a successful meeting, phone call, email or a letter is preparation. You need to be sure that you have the most important things about the issue that you want to sort out. Avoid telling a story and think about short sentences that make up the issue you have.

EXAMPLE

Amy has a problem with getting the right care provider.

The important parts of the problem are –

1. There isn't a care provider nearby.
2. Other companies don't have any available carers.
3. The ones that do, Amy doesn't like as she has used them before.

There is a story here for Amy, but she has thought about the most important parts to her problem. This is a good way to prepare, it means you deal with the problem and don't lose focus on details that aren't important or may confuse you.

If you think about the most important details that you need to talk about, you can be sure that they aren't lost in other parts of the conversation. As well as using this during the meeting, it is always good to recap them at the end as well.

To be well prepared for a meeting think about the following:

- Whom am I speaking to?
- How many people will be there?
- Do I need someone with me?
- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- What do I need to say?
- What do I want from the meeting?
- What can I be flexible on, what can't be changed?
- What next if things don't go well?
- What information do I need?

Remember any meeting about you, is your meeting. So it needs to be easy for you to understand, clear in what the results are and what you can expect next.

HOW TO HOLD A MEETING

Meet somewhere comfortable and safe

A meeting might be in your own home, at an office or at your doctor's surgery. It is important to feel comfortable in a meeting. This will help you say what you need to say and listen to what is being said.

If the meeting can be held in a place that makes you feel more comfortable, like your own home or another place that you know well, you have the right to ask for that.

Preparing for a meeting is really important. With good preparation you will be able to get the best you can out of the meeting and not feel like you missed an opportunity to be heard and understood.

You can ask to arrange a meeting to discuss your health and social care needs with a professional

Find out who will be there

Find out who is going to come to the meeting and why they are there. You can ask for people not to come if they upset you, or you find it hard to meet them. This might mean the meeting will have to happen at another time.

Meetings don't have to be stressful, but sometimes they are. If you need someone with you, make sure they can come and give them plenty of notice or ask for the meeting to happen at a better time.

Take a break if you need to

In a meeting it is important that you feel in control and able to stay calm and collected to others; this will enable you to listen and speak up for yourself. If you find yourself becoming stressed or uncomfortable, ask for a break, get a drink, go to the toilet or get some air outside.

Think about what you need to do next and refer to your notes if you need to.

Take your time, take a break and don't be afraid to ask if you need to know more or don't understand.

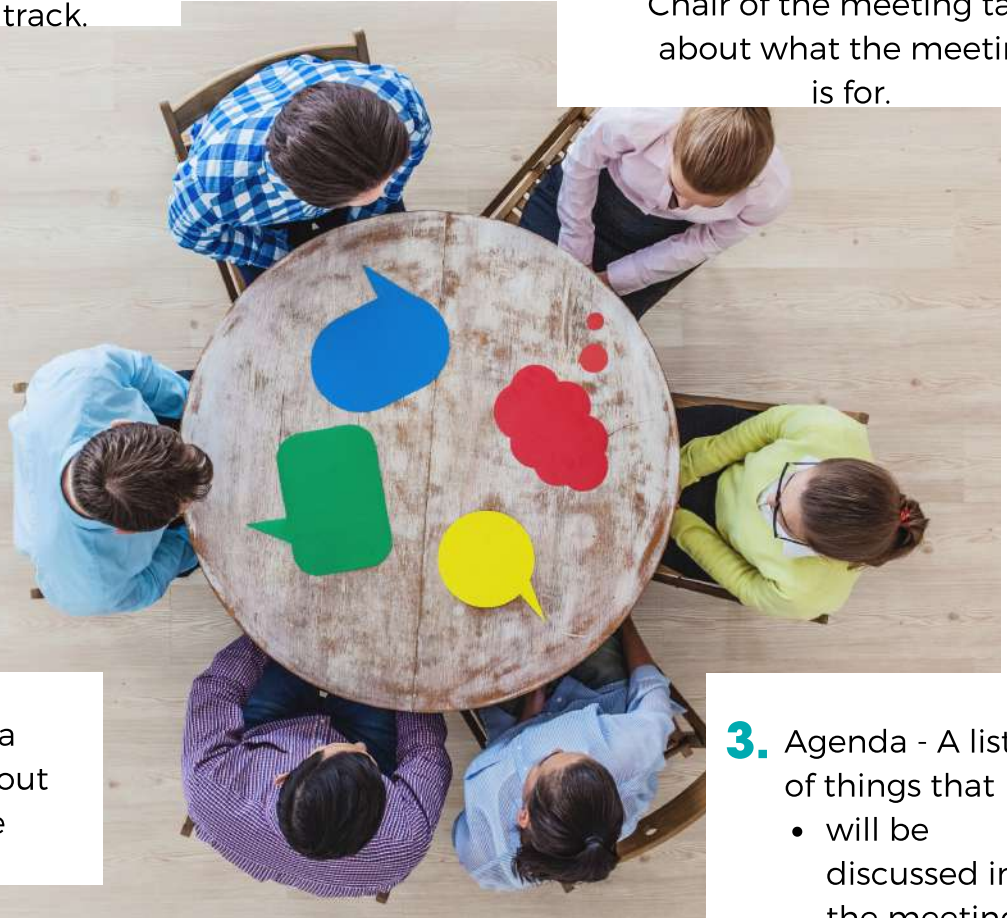
Everyone is different and has their own strengths; it's important not to compare yourself to anyone else and learn at your own pace.

Formal meetings nearly always go like this:

1. There is a meeting
 Chairperson - This is the person who keeps the meeting on track.

2. Introduction - People say who they are and why they are there and the Chair of the meeting talks about what the meeting is for.

5. A decision may need to be made, this is usually after everyone has spoken.



4. Everyone will get a chance to speak about each issue on the agenda.

3. Agenda - A list of things that will be discussed in the meeting.

In the Tools section on page 42, you will find lots of helpful tools to help you before, during and after meetings.

WEEKLY PLANNER ✕

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sunday	None	

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MEETING NOTES ✕

What's important?

What needs to be done?	Who's got it?	When?

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MEETING PREPARATION SHEET ✕

Date: _____
 Topic: _____
 Place: _____
 Who's there: _____
 What's on the agenda: _____
 What's to be discussed: _____
 What's someone else's role? _____

What's something else I want to add?

_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS



Communication is about how you get your message across and how you listen to what someone is saying. Communication can go wrong when these two things aren't done right.

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

Some people find it hard to speak up or may have a disability, which can make communication more difficult. If you do have a barrier to how you communicate, it is important that you let people know what you need so that they can make the right changes for you to be heard.


Make sure that anyone meeting with you or wanting to see you is prepared to communicate in a way that you are used to. This could be asking someone to speak without jargon (plain English), using text phone, using email or meeting in person.

Use whatever tools you have to make sure you have the chance to be heard, however you communicate. If you are able to communicate properly, you can get your message across in the way you want to and with the most impact.

Communication is much more than what we say; your body language can also communicate how you feel such as a simple nod or a shake of the head.

LISTENING

Listening is an important skill. Listening well will help build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding and reduce upset or distress.

A close-up photograph of a person's ear, showing the ear canal and the outer ear. The person has long, dark hair. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown color.

Concentrate and listen to what the person is saying.

This is about you so if you come away confused, don't be afraid to ask for another meeting.

Ask for time to think if you need it.

If you don't understand something, ask for the information to be explained again or in a different way.

Take your time. You can repeat back what someone has said to make sure you understand.

TOP TIPS

1. Take your time.
2. Think about what you want to say.
3. Practise beforehand.
4. Keep it simple – focus on what's important to you.
5. Be candid, open and honest.

TIME KEEPING AND GOALS

Most people are limited by time and the things they have to do. This means that time keeping is really important. If you or someone else is late for a meeting this can mean you may not have enough time to get your message across.

Time keeping for a meeting isn't just about making sure people are there on time, it is about knowing:

- How long have you got to discuss your issue?
- How much time do you need for each thing you want to say or talk about?
- Will you have the opportunity to have a break if required or another meeting?

How long?

How long is the meeting for? This is something that can be asked when the meeting is arranged. If you know how long you have, you know what type of schedule to keep to and make sure that you say all the things you need to. That way, nothing is rushed and you allow yourself enough time to say what's important to you.

How much time do you need?

Before and during the meeting think about the things you want to talk about. Think about what's most important and what isn't as important. Some things may need more time than others. For example, finding somewhere to live is more complicated and may take more time than finding voluntary work.

- Be clear about what's important
- Make sure you have enough time
- Keep the meeting on track – stop people talking about other things that aren't important
- Have you got enough time to talk about everything you need to?
- Ask for a follow up meeting if needed.

EXAMPLE

John goes to see his GP with three problems, he has a ten minute appointment. The issues are a chest infection, numbness in his leg and ringing in his ears. At the start of the appointment, John tells the Doctor about the three issues, the Doctor agrees to look at his chest infection and check his ears, they make another appointment to look at the numbness in his leg. This gives John and the Doctor enough time to look at the problems that are more urgent and more time later to look at the other less urgent problem.

LEARNING HOW TO NEGOTIATE

Negotiating is about trying to get the outcomes that are important to you and taking the steps you are happy with to get there. It is about more than one person agreeing on what is possible. Negotiating is really important. It can make the difference between getting what you want and missing out on the chance to get it.

When negotiating, decide what is important to you and what is the least important. This will help if you need to make allowances in order to come to an agreement.

Don't be afraid to ask for what you want, it may help to make a list of those things:

Decide how important everything is, the most important being at the top of the list and the least important at the bottom.

Think about who you need to speak to and be prepared for the conversation and what options you may have.

Negotiation *noun*

the process of discussing something with someone in order to reach an agreement with them.



NEGOTIATING

In a meeting or when speaking to someone, you might find you need to come to an agreement. This could mean that not everything is possible.

Coming to an agreement means having to think about the things that you want and looking at the different options around them.

- Can it be changed? Is there a different way?
- Can it be less than you want?
- If it is different, will it change things for you?

It's important that you:

- Listen to what is being said
-
- Think about what the difference will mean to you
-
- Ask for more time if you are not sure. Don't agree until you have had a chance to think about things and whether they are right for you
-
- Ask questions about things you are unsure of, or ask if there are other options
-
- Only agree if you are sure it's right for you
-
- If you are unhappy, make sure you raise this. You can always make a complaint later on.



ASSERTIVENESS (SELF CONFIDENCE)

Being assertive means asking for what you want and being able to say what you need. It's about feeling confident about your own interests and not being frightened to say what you want to happen.

Being assertive means you get your point across in a way that is reasonable, but not aggressive. Sometimes, it's hard when you meet people to hold your own. Especially when someone else is involved in making decisions about your life.

Keep it simple

You will always get better results if you can say what you need clearly and with as little words as possible. It stops what you want to say from getting lost and will have more of an impact. You can say no and challenge decisions you don't agree with.

Keep calm

You need to be as calm as you can be. Becoming aggressive or frustrated will shift the focus to your temper and not about what you are trying to say.

Assertive *adjective*

Being assertive means that you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view.

You can disagree, you can say no, but make sure you do the following which might make sure you get what you want to say across:

- Listen to what others are saying
- Don't rush, say what you need to say
- Consider the options, if they aren't okay, say why
- If you need to disagree or say no, then feel free to do so, give reasons and be clear about these
- Try to keep calm
- Don't feel you can't say something or question something

Being assertive is really hard and takes practise, perhaps you could practise with family and friends?

Like all of the tips in this toolkit, practising them makes doing them so much easier.

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS

Keeping your emotions in check ensures that the focus is on what you have to say and what you want.

Sometimes being emotional just can't be helped, emotions are things that we feel and can't just be switched off.

We can learn to control them a little to avoid being upset or angry. Sometimes we may later regret saying things or doing things in anger or frustration.

The key to learning to control your emotions is finding a way that helps you to stay calm. There are a lot of different ways to do this:

- 1.** Play with something in your hands, such as a stress ball
- 2.** Controlling your breathing can help, take slow, deep breaths
- 3.** Think of something you really like or which makes you really happy
- 4.** Ask for time to think or take a break
- 5.** Close your eyes and gather your thoughts for a moment
- 6.** Think about what you want to say before you say it

These tips aren't a guarantee that you will be able to control your emotions. We are only human and can not always control how we react. However, remaining calm and giving yourself time to think about a response will help you. You know yourself best, so try and practise the things that make you feel happier or calmer.

Again, like everything practice makes you much better at it.



We are all different and have our own ways of feeling calm. Maybe it's drinking a cup of tea or simply imagining you're lying on a beach. Think of something that helps you relax and practise it when you feel upset or angry.

AVOIDING CONFLICT



There are times when other people can get upset with you, through no fault of your own. Emotions can sometimes run high and people can get upset or angry.

The following tips may help you avoid conflict should the situation arise.

Stay calm

This can be really hard if you or someone else is upset. Try to practise the things that make you feel calm as we explored earlier on.

Remind others to stay calm

If someone gets upset or angry, it's much easier for others to do so too. Try to stop a situation from escalating by asking people politely not to raise their voices.

Ask for a break

Sometimes, time out can help to calm a situation down. Everyone feels refreshed after a break.

Don't make it personal

If people feel personally attacked, this is when emotions can run high. Make sure you talk about the issue, not the person. Try not to make personal comments about someone else.

Listen to how someone feels

You don't have to agree with them, but accept their emotions and the way they feel.

More tips on the next page

Try not to argue

You can say you disagree and say no, but try not to argue or raise your voice. When someone is upset this can make the situation worse and people don't listen as well as they should.



Don't tell someone to 'calm down'

If a situation does escalate and voices become raised, don't tell someone to 'calm down,' ask them if they are okay or if they need a break instead.



Stay sat down

Try not to stand over someone, stay on the same level as them or even lower, this will stop anyone from feeling intimidated or out of control.

Wait for the right time to speak

If someone says something that you disagree with, let them finish, but think about what you want to say in reply.

Let everyone speak

Speaking over people can make them upset or angry. Waiting to speak is important and gives everyone a chance to have their say and their voices heard.

HOW TO WRITE NOTES UP

Note taking can be a difficult skill to learn, if you write too much you might miss what is said. If you write too little, then you might not get the important information you need.

Not every meeting will require you to take notes, it is up to you. Some official meetings may have someone to take notes and distribute them afterwards. In other meetings without a professional note taker, you may want to write these yourself. This part of the toolkit will help you to make notes that will enable you to remember the important things that were said, whilst still taking part in the meeting.

There are a few different ways to take notes, which one works for you is a matter of choice.

HOW TO WRITE NOTES - TOP TIPS

- 1. IMPORTANT WORDS** - Some people find that it helps to note down important words. This can help you remember what was being talked about and makes sure you remember the most important parts.
- 2. SHORT SENTENCES** - If you feel you have time to write down more than just a word, make a short sentence about the part you wish to remember. Again, this makes sure you only record the important parts.
- 3. USE HEADINGS OR TITLES** - If you are discussing more than one point, use a heading or title to break up your notes. This helps to organise your notes and jog your memory. Make sure you put the headings in order of the points discussed.
- 4. USE A DATE** - This will help you remember what was discussed and on what day.
- 5. HAVE SOMEONE ELSE TAKE NOTES FOR YOU** - Someone can support you at the meeting to take notes for you, such as a friend.
- 6. USE A RECORDING APP** - Make sure you ask first. If you stop recording, you must always tell people when you start again. If someone doesn't want to be recorded then ask them why, they should give a good reason. You can only record things about you.
- 7. VIDEO RECORDING** - Video recording a meeting is an option if the meeting is short, however, most phones or devices may only record up to a certain time limit. Remember, you should always ask permission and let all attendees know you are recording.

FOLLOW UP FROM A MEETING

There may be things that need to be done by professionals or members of the meeting after it has finished. These are called actions. If an action is assigned to somebody, they will have the responsibility to complete it.

There might also have been an agreed time limit or date for when these actions need to be completed by. This is called a deadline. Actions can vary depending on the type of meeting you are in.

If you have taken notes, then make a special note of any actions. There may be more than one. You can record actions more easily using the headings below.

The Action

Give details of what needs to be done

Who?

Who is going to do it?

When?

When should the action be done by? (Deadline)

You can put these in a table like the example we have shown below.

What needs to be done?	Who by?	When?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social worker to contact me Arrange follow up meeting 	Sharon Me	9th August 27th August

If you have the details written down in an easy format, like we have shown here, you will find it easier to follow up. If you don't hear about any actions when they are due to be completed, then feel free to contact the person who should be doing them. If the action is not completed, make sure you agree a new deadline.

This shows why it is important to make notes and have a record of who is doing what and by what date. You will always know when things should be done by and are able to follow up if things are late or have been missed.

If the actions you noted down need to be completed for the next meeting, then you will not need to follow these up. Simply make a note to ask about them next time.