

A photograph of a person's hands forming a heart shape against a sunset background. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The person's hair is visible on the right side of the frame.

# THE ESSENTIAL SELF ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



A handy guide for anyone who wants to  
have their voice heard



**This toolkit was co-produced with The Stanleys  
Self Advocacy Consultation Group.**

Stanleys Community Centre is a registered charity that provides advocacy and self advocacy advice to people in Morecambe and Heysham. Stanleys say; "We aren't just a community centre, we are a grass roots charity, supported and led by the people of the West End of Morecambe."

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# INTRODUCTION

**In this toolkit you will find tips and ideas to help you speak up for yourself and start your self advocacy journey. It has been created by people from Lancashire, who all have personal experience of struggling to be heard when trying to get the services and information they need. The toolkit is full of tips and ideas to help anyone on their self advocacy journey.**

Advocacy Focus supports people when they have health and social care issues and don't feel they are being heard or that their views are being respected. The three steps to self advocacy outlined in this toolkit can be used in every area of your life when you feel you are not being heard.

The three steps are:

**Knowledge. Skills. Confidence.**

A unique aspect to the Essential Self Advocacy Toolkit is the Self Advocacy Charter created by the Stanleys group. The charter sets out the core principles of being a self advocate. It asks professionals to understand it, respect it, and take the views of self advocates seriously. It acknowledges that we can all get better at expressing ourselves and become more confident. The toolkit recognises that there are significant barriers to self advocacy, many of which, were identified by the individuals who supported us in creating this toolkit.

This toolkit focuses on becoming a self advocate within the health and social care world, however, the tools and approaches can help you to speak up, be heard and be respected in every area of your life.

Self advocacy and the purpose of this toolkit, is for you to decide what you want, then develop and carry out a plan to help you get it. You can take control of your own health and wellbeing and ensure that the self advocacy approach is agreed and supported by professionals you are working alongside.



# WHAT IS SELF ADVOCACY?

**When important decisions are being made about your life, Advocates stand by you to help you understand your rights and what you are entitled to. Advocates support you to make your own decisions, express your views and be heard.**

Advocates know that you are the expert of your life – they will support you to express your wishes and feelings and take control of your situation.

Advocacy is having someone on your side when important decisions are being made about you. An Advocate cannot tell you what to do, only you can make decisions about your own life. An Advocate will inform you of your rights and what you are entitled to, but cannot promise that you will get your desired outcome. An Advocate will support you to be listened to and have your wishes and feelings respected and acknowledged.

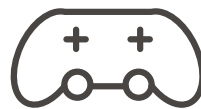
## SELF ADVOCACY IS:



*Learning about your rights*



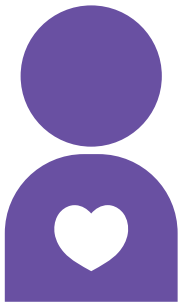
*Speaking up for yourself so that you are heard*



*Taking control and making decisions about your own life*



*Accessing the information you need*



*You are an expert in your own life and should be involved in any decision that affects you.*

Sometimes it can be difficult to speak up for yourself; especially if you are not feeling very confident, feel afraid, or are unable to communicate in a way professionals understand. See page 54 for further professional help and support.

If you would like to learn the basics of self advocacy and how to advocate for yourself, then continue reading. We will help you understand the three core principles to being your own best advocate and our Tools section will then help you practise everything you've learnt.

### ► Summary:

Self advocacy is about gaining the knowledge, learning the skills and developing the confidence to communicate what's important to you.



# BEING A SELF ADVOCATE

By Kirsty Heath

**I care for my dad and fight his corner. In my head, getting him what he needs is most important. All my attention is on him. I do find it hard to say no to him but by doing that, I'm forgetting about me.**

Being a good self advocate is going to meetings on my own, standing up for myself and fighting for my rights in any situation. Self advocacy gives me the skills and knowledge to become more assertive about my needs and things I want.

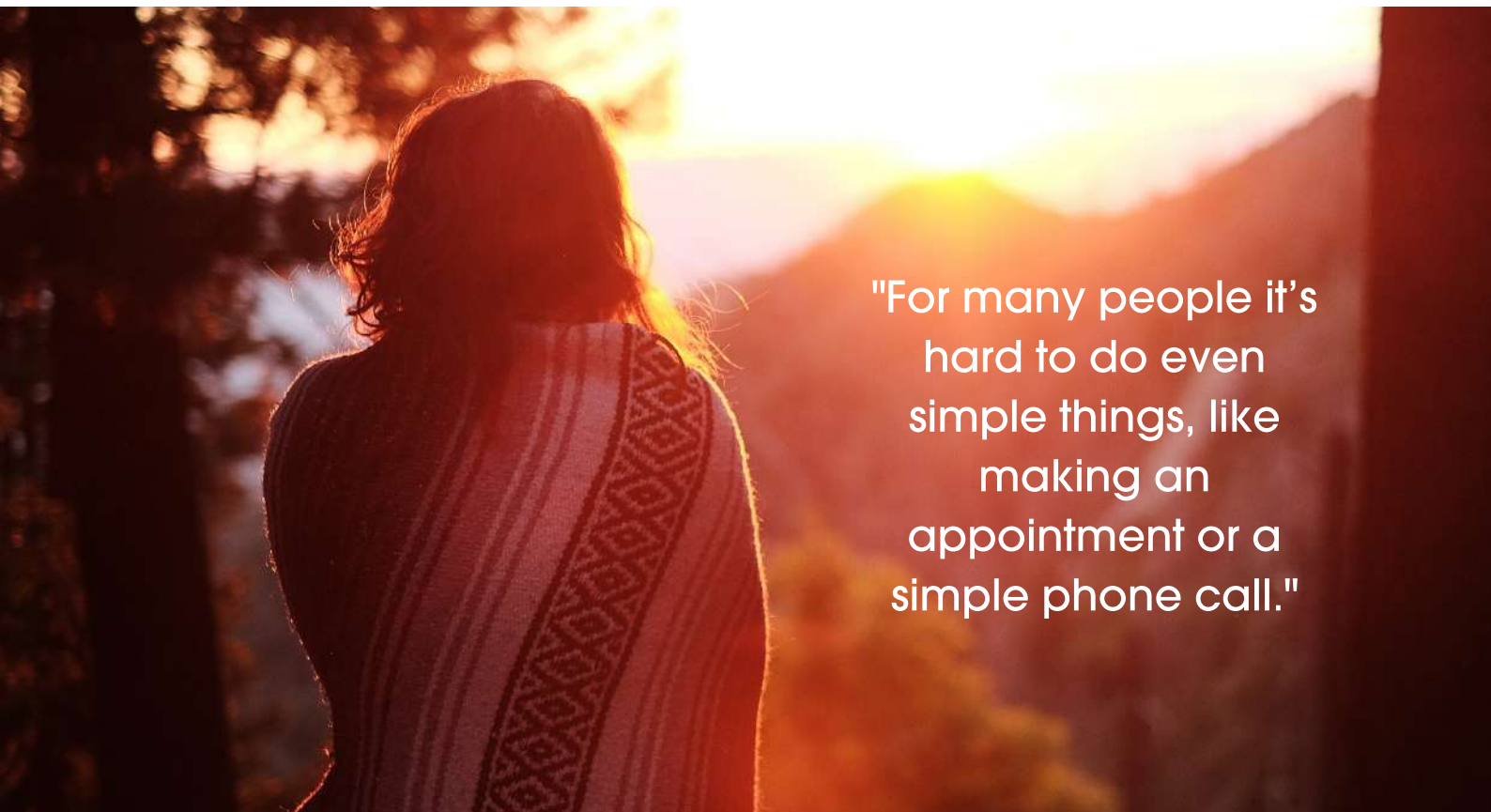
But being a self advocate isn't easy. People may say they find it easy - for them it might be. But for many people it's hard to do even simple things, like making an appointment or a simple phone call.

Learning self advocacy skills helps us move forward in our lives, the skills that we learn and practise will help us become strong people. I learned about advocacy when I was getting no money at all and not taking care of myself because my dad always came first.

I came to Stanleys Community Centre because I didn't know where to turn and it was all getting too much for me. I got the help I needed and now I want to learn those skills so I can do things myself.

I have helped to create this self advocacy toolkit to help you on your journey. I hope you find it useful.

*Best wishes, Kirsty*



"For many people it's hard to do even simple things, like making an appointment or a simple phone call."

# THE SELF ADVOCACY CHARTER



## KNOWLEDGE

## SKILLS

## CONFIDENCE

**The Self Advocacy Charter is made up of three steps that can help us to improve the way we communicate. It was first drafted by The Stanleys Self Advocacy Consultation Group.**

*"I would like to be given the chance to speak up for myself and realise the more I do this, the better I will become. I am not a trained professional, but I know that I am responsible for my own actions and want to get better at using my self advocacy skills. As a self advocate, I am learning about human rights and I am committed to speaking up for myself and others."*

I will make sure I'm fully clued up so I can speak clearly for myself.

I will have a clear understanding about my issues and my goals.

I will ask you to avoid any unnecessary jargon so I understand.

## KNOWLEDGE

I will do my best to keep calm and listen to what you are saying to me. I ask that you also listen to me.

I will try to lead the process as I see myself, as the expert of my own life.

Every time I speak up for myself, I hope to build on my successes and my failures, to develop my self advocacy skills and my self-esteem.

I am aware that my personal life experience might cause me to have prejudices about people, including professionals involved in my life. Knowing this, I want to treat everyone fairly and respect that we all have different views.

## SKILLS

I ask that you are respectful and don't judge me.

I expect confidentiality and my business to be kept private.

I may wish to use self advocacy tools, such as the Self Advocacy Speaking Out Cards.

I am part of a wider network of people learning to speak up for themselves and will support others who are self advocating.

## CONFIDENCE



- 9 | Finding what you need to know
- 10 | Your rights and entitlements
- 11 | Using your rights
- 13 | Keep it simple
- 15 | Using the information

Knowledge  
is power



# FINDING WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**When people who you don't know are trying to make decisions about your life, it's good to have as much information as possible. It's important to find out as much as you can about your situation or issue.**

When we spoke to Stanleys group members, they said they didn't understand enough about health or social care processes. They didn't know where to find good, accessible information or how to find this online.

Whether you have a meeting with professionals or you need to know more about your rights, there are ways you can find information. You don't have to be a professional to understand it, as most information should be available in Easy Read format.

**1** Ask professionals for the information - Ring the people you are going to see and ask them if they can provide you with more information. Big organisations like the local authority or Department of Work and Pensions can also provide information in an accessible and easy to understand format. They should be able to tell you where to look or send you the information via email or post.

**2**

Look online - There is lots of available information online if you know where to look for it. You can go to a search engine, such as [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk), type in the subject you want to research and add 'Easy Read.' Here you should see lots of results on the information you want in a simple, easy to understand format. Easy Read isn't just for people with learning disabilities or communication problems, it's a great way to get your head around complex, professional jargon.

**3**

Advice services - Ring an advice service like Citizens Advice. They can help you find information and may be able to send you something through the post or via email.

**4**

Ask others - Such as advocacy organisations, or speak to people who have experience of what you are going through.

**5**

Try your local library - They can help you find information if you aren't sure how.

There are lots of different ways to find things out, it may seem hard at first but the more you do it, the easier it will become.

# YOUR RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS



**Knowing your rights and what you are entitled to is the basis of being a good self advocate. Understanding your rights will also help you feel more confident to say what you want or challenge decisions.**

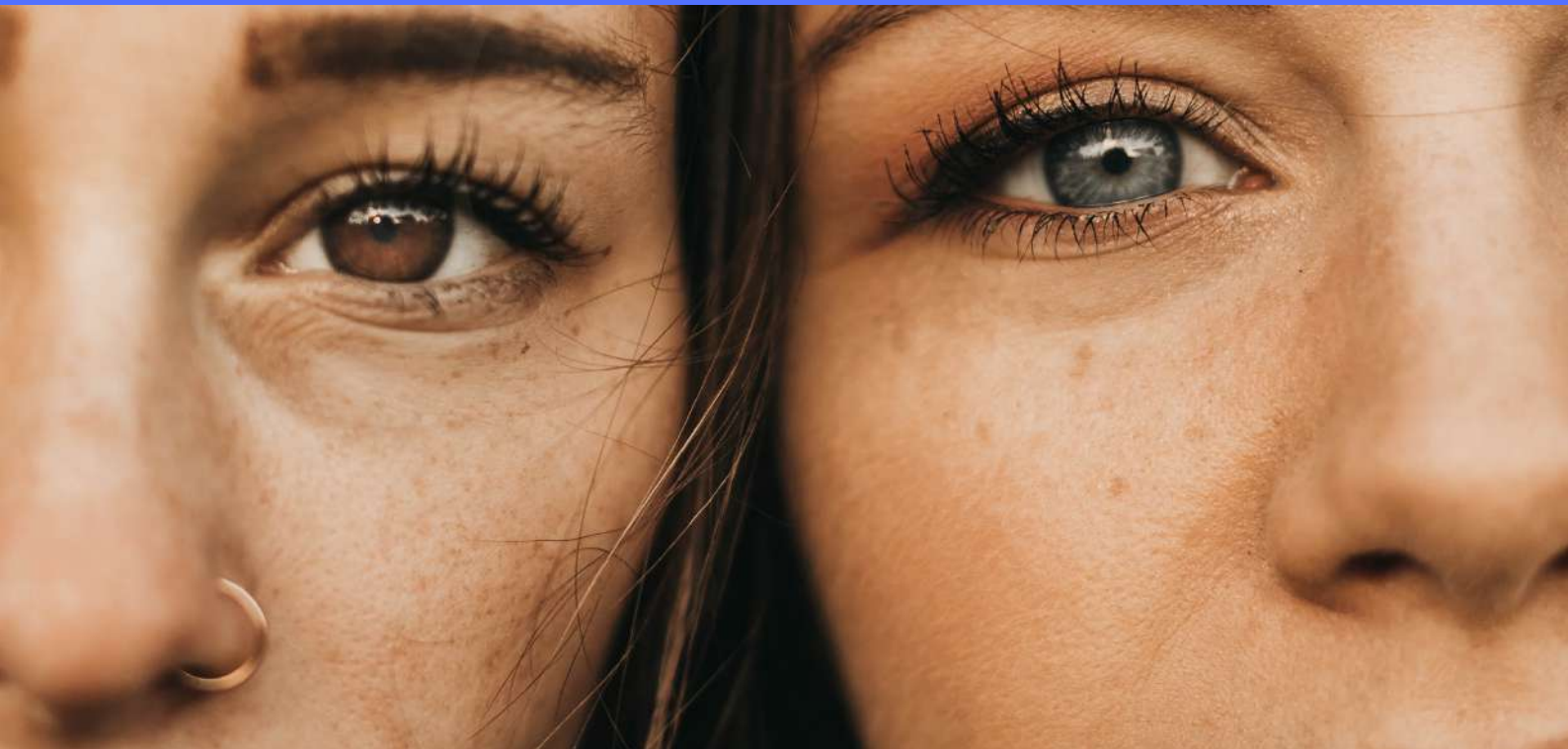
## UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS

It is impossible for everyone to know and understand every single human right that exists in our laws - there are so many of them and often they can be hard to understand. But you do have the ability to look up the information on how to use them.

Firstly, knowing who you need to contact to get that information will help. If you just look online, you may miss information that someone who has experienced the same issue could help you with. The information may also be difficult to understand. (Equally, if you just go to someone for help, you may miss something valuable that can be found online).

Usually, information about rights and the law is written in a long and complicated way. But there are lots of ways to get the information that is easier to read and understand. A good starting point would be to ask the professional involved - 'What law regulates this?' For example: Social Services would be the Care Act/ Mental Capacity Act, mental health would be the Mental Health Act and housing is the Housing Act, etc. You can then research and look for information about your rights which will help you to tackle your issue.

# USING YOUR RIGHTS



**There is a difference between understanding your rights and using them.**

If you become aware that a professional isn't working according to the rights that apply to that service, you should make them aware of this. This can be a hard thing to do but it may help to put this in writing, or prepare in advance for any meeting.

## EXAMPLE

An example of this would be the right to accessible information under the Care Act. Social Services have a responsibility to give people information in a way they can understand it. That might mean Braille, audio, different languages or Easy Read and more.

This doesn't mean that they have to have all of this ready when someone asks, but they have to make an effort to provide this. Using your rights in this case makes the professional look for a way to offer you information you can understand if they have it, or look for ways to provide it if they don't.

Remember, you can speak to a professional Advocate (in your area) or the Citizens Advice Bureau if you need more information. They will be familiar with using rights when dealing with other services and can support you to do the same.

# KEEP IT SIMPLE

**Whenever you are reading about something new or something you don't understand, try to write down the most important bits that apply to you.**

It can be tricky holding onto knowledge and information, so that you can use it and understand it.

We touched briefly on 'Easy Read,' on page 9, but this is really a great way of helping you to understand the need-to-know bits of information in a way that's easy to take in.

## KNOWLEDGE IS LIKE PIZZA...

Think of knowledge like a big pizza. Can you eat all of the pizza in one go? No, we need to slice it up into sections and eat it bit by bit. This is called making something 'bitesize.'

You might want to make bitesize points about the stuff you need to know and how it applies to you. Don't write big stories, keep it short and to the point. This also helps you remember it.



**Legislation states that information needs to be accessible to people. This will apply to you, so what do you need?**

- 1.** Information to be sent to you in a way you can read and understand.
- 2.** Someone to talk it over with you.
- 3.** A clear explanation as to what it means to you and how it can affect your life.

This is the same with any information you get, break it down to the following parts:

**What's important?** Which bits do I need to know?

**What do I need?** Which parts of this matter to me?

Make the information work for you. You don't need to know it all, just focus on what is important to you.



## EXAMPLE ONE

You are meeting with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) about your benefits and not being able to work. So, where would you find the information? You could try all the options below:



The DWP Website



Citizens Advice



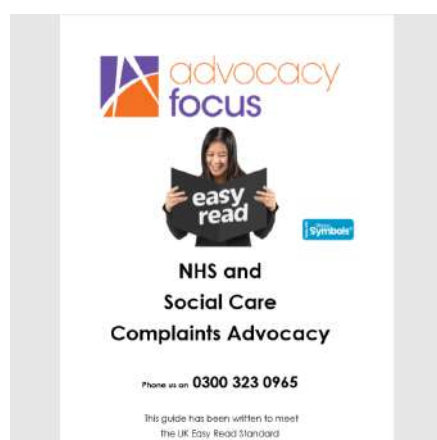
The Job Centre

## EXAMPLE TWO

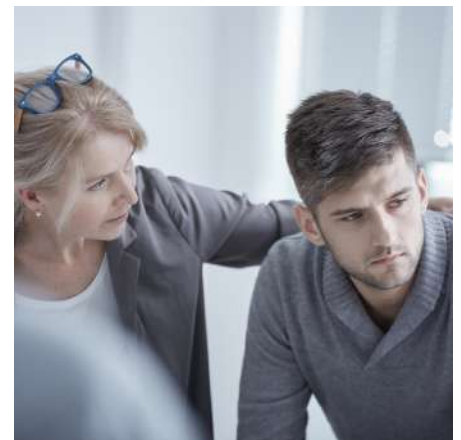
You want to make a complaint about treatment you received when you were in hospital, but don't know where to start. You don't feel confident complaining and have never written a letter before. You could try the options below to find out more information:



Google



Easy Read



Advocacy Support

# USING THE INFORMATION

**We now know that the best way to learn new information is to pick out the important parts; those bitesize pieces of information. But how do you know what to pick out or what is important? It can be hard to recognise the pieces you need to know, but we have provided an example below.**

## EXAMPLE

Think about your meeting with the DWP example we used on the previous page.

- What parts of the information are important to your situation?
- What benefits do you want to about?
- What are the rules about not working – Why are you unable to find work?
- What illnesses do you have and how do these affect your life?

Breaking it down makes it useful to you, easy to understand and keeps your focus on what you are saying. Learning to do this takes time. Use the support that is available to you until you feel able to do this for yourself in future.

**Use the information to help you to self advocate. This part takes practise and you might not be able to do this the first time you try, but don't give up!**

**Remember that self advocacy isn't about doing it on your own, you can use the help of support organisations at any time. However, the more you can do for yourself the better.**

Self advocacy is about using your knowledge, skills and confidence together to make your voice heard. This toolkit can help you but you may not get it right the first time. Each time you self advocate, you will become better and learn something new.



# SKILLS



16	What are skills?
17	Preparing for meetings, phone Calls, emails or letters
18	How to hold a meeting
20	Communication skills
22	Time keeping and goals
23	Learning how to negotiate
25	Assertiveness
26	How to control your emotions
27	Avoiding conflict
29	How to write notes up
30	Follow up from a meeting

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.

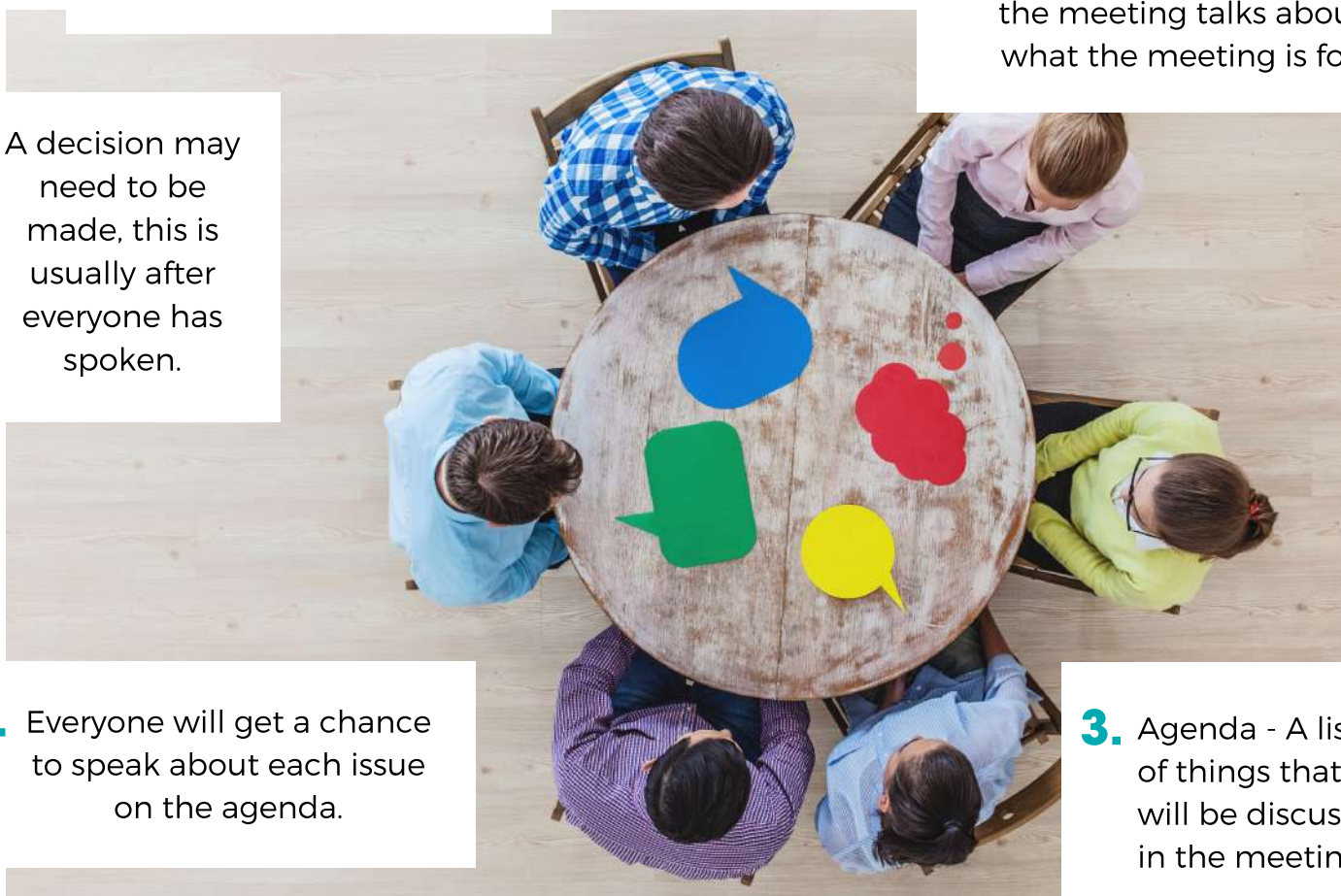
Think about what you need to do next and refer to your notes if you need to.

**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:

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	Notes	

### MEETING NOTES ✕

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?
-------------------

WHAT CHANGED FOR THE ACCOUNT?	WHEN BY?	WHEREBY?

*magnify*  
FOUNDED 1970

## MEETING PREPARATION SHEET ✂

Order:  
Topic:  
Place:

Where?  
What's today?  
What is it for?

What resources do I need?

What evidence do I need for each?

*generosity focus*

# 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.



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"> <li>Social worker to contact me</li> <li>Arrange follow up meeting</li> </ul>	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.**



32		What is confidence?
34		How it changes and grows
35		Taking the knocks
37		Taking care of yourself
41		Keeping at it

Let's build your  
confidence

# WHAT IS CONFIDENCE?

## WHAT IS CONFIDENCE?

**Confidence means feeling good about yourself and the things you can do. This doesn't mean you have to do more than you are able to, it is simply about believing in yourself as you are.**

Confident people:

- Feel secure and able
- Know they can rely on their skills and abilities to handle things as they come up
- Are not afraid of challenges or learning new things
- Think 'I can' or 'I could' and not 'I can't'
- Feel they can be more open about what they feel or what they want

## Why does it matter?

Confidence can help you feel more ready for anything that can happen in life. When you feel confident, you are more able to deal with challenges and ask for help when you need it. If you don't feel confident, you may not say what you really feel.

People who have no confidence, may be less likely to try new things or speak up for themselves. Sometimes, self advocacy can be just about building enough confidence to say what you want. **Everyone** has the ability to feel confident.

## Has anyone ever told you that you're funny? Clever? Kind? Artistic? Friendly?

When your skills or abilities are recognised by someone, it can boost your confidence – so why not try this yourself? Sometimes, we are our own worst critics. Building confidence has to start with you and changing your own thoughts on how you view yourself.

If you often doubt someone when they give you a compliment, this can be a sign that you are lacking confidence. To really feel confident, you need to believe you are capable of whatever you put your mind to. The best way to do this is to think about all the things you are good at and your own abilities and skills. Start recognising the things you do well and write them down.

Most importantly don't give up, don't think of failing to do something as being negative, but as an opportunity to learn something new. This means success is more likely next time.



➤ **Summary:**

**Confidence is about believing in yourself and your abilities.**

**I believe in me**



Confidence can take time to develop, but just like most things, it is something that can be learned. Remember to be patient with yourself. Don't get frustrated if you don't instantly feel confident. Read on for tips on how you can become more confident.

Confidence is like a muscle, the more you use it, the stronger it gets.

# HOW IT CHANGES AND GROWS

**There are times we may feel more confident than others; confidence changes and grows, especially as we get older or learn new things.**

Keep a note of where you are now. This will help you see how your confidence changes over time. We are always quick to remember the bad things, so let's make sure we make a note of the good things too.

- 1. CREATE CONFIDENT THINKING** - Instead of 'I can't' think about changing this to 'I can' or 'I know I could learn how to do this' – This takes practice and time, it won't happen overnight.
- 2. HAVE PATIENCE WITH YOURSELF** - People are different and have all sorts of experiences and abilities. Be kind to yourself, you are on your own journey and everyone learns differently.
- 3. SHAKE OFF THAT SELF-DOUBT** - You may feel like you have things to learn, but if you doubt yourself, it will take even longer. Believe that you can, and you will!
- 4. TAKE SAFE RISKS** - Small steps build confidence. Your confidence will grow as you push yourself to try new things. Don't be afraid of taking risks, but make sure that you feel able and that it isn't too far out of your comfort zone.
- 5. TAKE A CHALLENGE** - If it doesn't go well, do something else and learn from your experience. Don't expect to rush things, but do experiment with different things and take it slowly.
- 6. KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS** - Be prepared and practise the things you're good at and continue to improve on them.
- 7. KEEP A SCHEDULE AND PRACTISE** - Practise makes perfect, as the saying goes. Sometimes just acting confident can make you feel more confident.
- 8. ASK FOR HELP** - It is important that you don't feel alone and know that there are people who can help. Don't be afraid to ask for help, once you reach out it will be easier next time.
- 9. DARE TO BE YOURSELF** - Be you. We are all different, we all look different and we have different ways of doing things. Appreciate the things that make you, you.

# TAKING THE KNOCKS



**One of the most important things to remember throughout this whole process is to be kind to yourself. It's so much easier to help someone else and ignore the most important person – you.**

You can't grow in confidence without making mistakes and learning from them. Confidence requires experience. The thing that will make the difference, is your ability to take those knocks and use them to learn how to do it better next time.

Ask anyone who has learned a new skill how hard it was at the time. What no one tells you is that once you have done something for the first time, or learnt something new, it is much easier the next time round.

You may experience some frustration along the way but this happens to everyone. Feeling upset or angry at yourself is natural, but remember to look back on how far you have come.

Use your friends and family to talk about your journey. Or you can even speak to professionals to find out how they do things, they have all been where you are.

## ► Summary:

Don't be afraid to make mistakes, mistakes are how we grow and learn.

Turn over  
for some  
top tips

Here are some tips that will help you to take those knocks and turn them into a positive experience:

- 1** Make a note of what went well and what didn't go so well. It doesn't matter if it was down to you or someone else, this will help you for next time.
- 2** When you have done something new, take some time afterwards to reflect and look back on it.
- 3** Reward yourself. When you do something new or difficult. Whether you succeed or not, reward yourself for doing it. The success is in trying, not the finished result.
- 4** Learn. Find out what went wrong and practise to avoid it happening again. You are always learning and even people who do this all the time have to work at it.
- 5** Think about what you could do differently next time. Don't fall into the trap of doing the same thing again and again.
- 6** Remember what a knock is – it is just a knock. It is rarely ever a disaster and sometimes is worse in our own mind than in real life. Knocks are part and parcel of learning.



# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



**Being able to keep going and take the knocks is easier if we are looking after ourselves. Make sure you take care of the person at the centre of this whole process - you. Think about your mental and physical wellbeing and take a note of the following steps:**

## **TIME**

Giving yourself time to get things done is really important. If you have a lot of things to do, you may need to think about how you are going to do them without feeling rushed or overwhelmed. Write a list, make a schedule, think about what time of the day you work best and even where you work best.

## **EAT, DRINK AND BE CONTENT**

Make sure that you have enough to eat and drink and make plenty of time for breaks. A full stomach ensures you have the fuel and energy you need to get things done. If it helps, aim to do a bit of work and treat yourself when you get there. For example - once I get this letter done, I'm going to have a cup of tea and a biscuit.

## **LEARN TO SAY NO!**

You can't do everything - no one can. Only take on what you can manage and don't be afraid to say no. You have to put yourself first. Taking on too much can cause you to become stressed and rush things. Sometimes when we say no, it can feel like we are letting people down, but it is often necessary to let people down to look after our own wellbeing. We are not superhuman and can only do what we can. Taking on too much can negatively affect everything else you do. Most of the time, people will understand!

**BE IN THE MOMENT**

Do something that isn't active. For example, make a hot drink, sit at your window, watch the world go by in a café or switch your phone off and be in the moment. You can do this for a few minutes or longer if you like. Switch off and appreciate the things around you.

**SLOW IT DOWN**

Do the important task, take a break, take a deep breath and get ready for the next thing. Don't rush, you will find that you will actually get more done and do it better when you haven't tried to cram too many things in. Work at a pace that makes you feel productive but doesn't tire you out. Look back at your progress – remember the story of the Tortoise and the Hare? Who won in the end?

**IT'S OK TO FEEL**

Acknowledge your feelings, let them come, but try not to dwell on them or overthink them. Don't fight feelings or try to hold on to them. By doing this, we accept how we feel about something now or in the past. We allow the feeling to happen and we allow it to go away. By not dwelling on the feeling, we aren't becoming stuck. We are just letting our feelings come and go.

**BE POSITIVE – EVEN IF YOU DON'T FEEL IT**

Try to find the positive in your life and in the world around you. Whatever that is, your food, your house, your day, your kids, being in the countryside, reading a lovely story. There are amazing things happening in the world, look at one small part of that and see the good in it. This isn't about ignoring the bad or hard things, it is about finding one small part that is good and then perhaps looking for one or two more. Humans are wired to look for danger, it's how we survived thousands of years ago, we forget the nice things because they aren't a matter of life or death. We are lucky not to live like that anymore, so finding and remembering the good things makes us feel more positive.

**DO SOMETHING FOR YOURSELF**

Find something to do just for you. This could be anything that brings you that little bit of pleasure and makes you feel happy. It could be a walk, or a bit of time outside. You could read a paper or watch a comedy. Go for a drive in the country, take a bath or bake a cake etc. Take time to pamper the person that matters, you.

## HAVE SOME FUN

Remember that feeling when you were a child, the zest for life and awe you had for new and exciting things? It's important to remember that life is meant to be enjoyed. That's up to us, and only us. Make the best of the life you've been given. Do things that put a smile on your face. Laugh with friends, play games or do something active; try and get back that childlike feeling that life is for living and having fun.

## GO OUTSIDE

Walk, sit or just watch the world go by. Being outside connects us with nature and people. Whatever keeps you in contact with the world. Whether it's the countryside, your local village or town centre, just be part of it all. Speak to people, listen to the environment, hear the birds. For many people, being outside with nature brings a sense of peace.

## MEDITATE

Give yourself five minutes, to just sit, no TV, no phone or internet. Clear your mind of any thoughts. Five minutes is quite a long time to sit and do nothing. This can help some people relax and focus. The distractions that we have in our lives can be tiring and exhausting, time out can help us recharge our batteries.



## REWARD YOURSELF

The reward can be anything you would look forward to, your favourite meal, visiting a friend, going for a picnic or a day out. Anything you find special.

## BE PROUD

Keep a record of what you have done and your successes. Write a list of what you are grateful for and what you have going for you. It might be your health, your family, your friends, how good you are at art or how funny you are. We forget the good things and don't celebrate our success, so remind yourself of all the wonderful things you have.

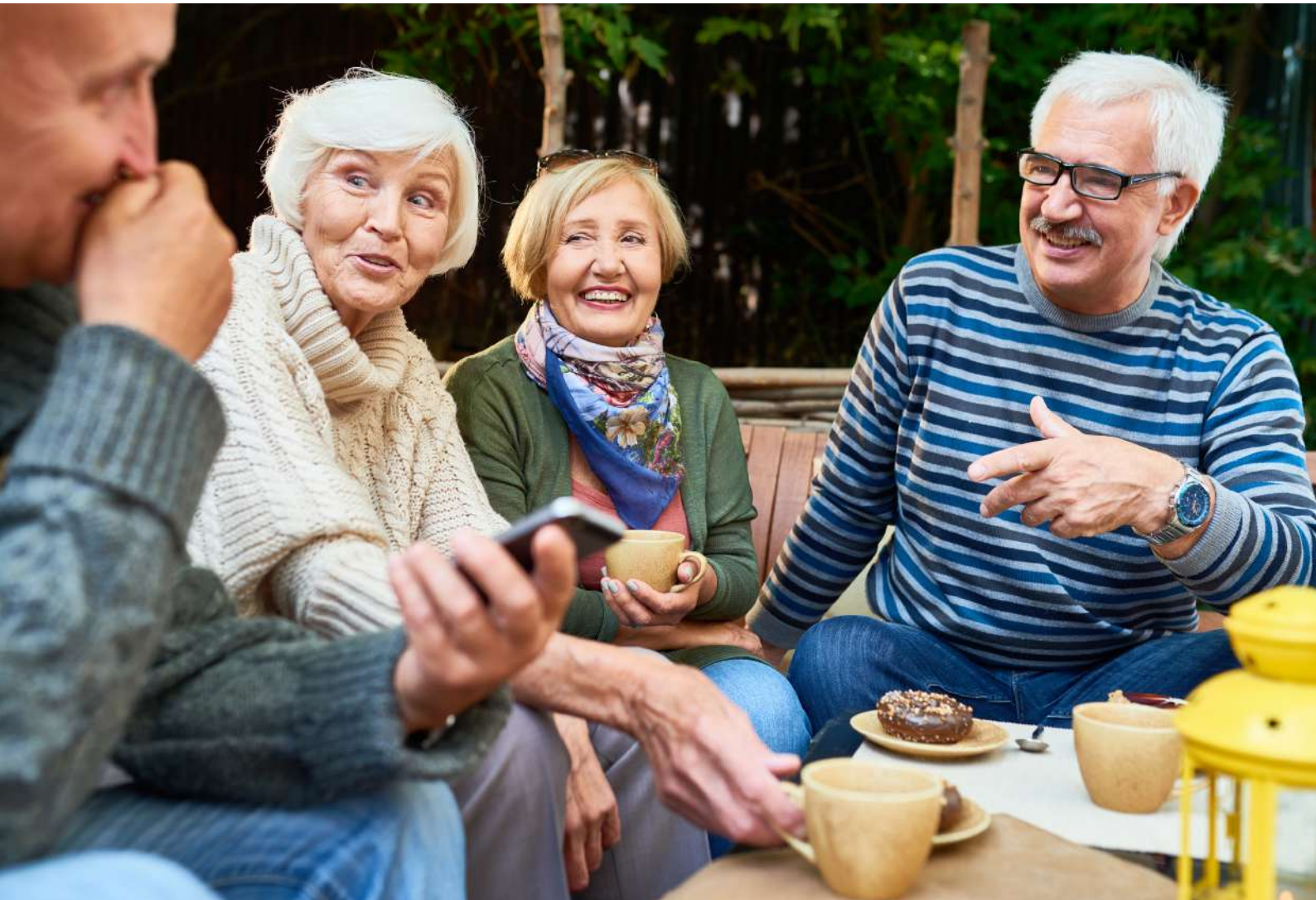


### CONTACT PEOPLE YOU MISS

Did you lose contact with a childhood friend or someone you got on with because life got busy? Talking about the past really helps us connect with who we are. Other people can bring up happy memories and also remind us of how far we've come. Reach out and start a conversation. If you have lost touch, there are many ways we can find people, such as using social media.

### MAKE IT A LITTLE MORE SIMPLE

Don't try to have too many things on the go. When we have too many plates spinning at one time, we will often drop one of them. If we give ourselves less things to do, we are able to focus on getting them done before tackling the next thing. This is called prioritising. Focus on the most important thing or the things that need to be done now and leave the rest until later. Trying to do too many things at once might mean nothing gets done or that you're likely to make mistakes. Keep it simple, do one thing at a time and you'll find you actually get more done.





# KEEPING AT IT

**It is natural for everyone's confidence levels to go up and down as we go through life. Some days we will feel more confident than others.**

It's important to keep going. Even if it gets hard, or if you feel like you're not getting anywhere. Keeping at it is the best way to achieve it.

Don't be overly critical on yourself. There is nothing wrong with looking at what went wrong, but being hard on yourself won't help.

Remember why you are doing these things. You are doing it to get more confidence, try new things and get your voice heard. You are most likely doing something new, something scary that you never would have thought about doing before. That in itself is something to celebrate and feel proud of.

Always remind yourself of how far you have come, every little thing counts. Don't take your new skills for granted. No matter what knocks you get, get back in the game, think about how things could have been different; this mindset will set you up for success.



# YOUR TOOLS

**In the tools section, you will find helpful worksheets and space to write things down to help you on your self-advocacy journey.**

44	Meeting Preparation Sheet
45	Meeting Notes
46	Cue Cards
47	Important Contacts
48	Contact Journal
49	To Do List
50	Weekly Planner

# MEETING PREPARATION SHEET

Date:

Time:

Place:

Where:

Who's going:

What is it for:

What outcome do I want?

What questions do I want to ask?

# MEETING NOTES

What's important?

What needs to be done?	Who by?	When?



# CUE CARDS ✂

✂ <b>I am the expert of my experience</b>	<b>Please take my requests into consideration</b>
<b>Please help me to create my best possible future</b>	<b>I am trying to get my point across but don't feel you are listening</b>
<b>Please can I speak</b>	<b>I don't feel you are listening to me</b>
<b>I need a break</b>	<b>Please slow down. Tell me again</b>
<b>I don't understand. I feel confused</b>	<b>STOP!</b>
<b>I am struggling to explain myself</b>	<b>I feel frightened</b>

# IMPORTANT CONTACTS

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Who is this?</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Who is this?</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Who is this?</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Who is this?</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Who is this?</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Who is this?</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	

# CONTACT JOURNAL

Record your conversations in the table below.

Date	Time	Name	Content of Conversation

# MY TO DO LIST

Date

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐



# WEEKLY PLANNER

*Monday**Tuesday**Wednesday**Thursday**Friday**Saturday**Sunday**Notes*

# 10 TIPS FOR SELF ADVOCACY

## CHANGE HOW YOU LOOK AT THINGS

1

Try and view your situation as something you can change and take control of.

**Example** - Joe doesn't get on with his doctor and feels as though he doesn't understand him or his needs. Joe has felt like this for quite a while now. Joe wants to take charge of the situation and get the support he needs. Joe asks for new doctor.

## FIND WHAT YOU NEED

2

You are the expert in your own life and you know what is best for you. Sometimes people will think they know better and you will disagree. It's important to remember that nobody knows you better than you do. Search for information about your rights and support groups that can help you get the outcomes you need.

**Example** - Jane has to meet her social worker, Jane isn't sure if she can have a friend with her who knows her well. Jane asks her local advocacy service for help. They let her know that she can have someone supporting her, whether that's her friend or an Advocate.

## BE PREPARED

3

In any conversation or meeting preparation is key. By using these tools you will have a clear plan of the issues you want to raise and the best way to get them across.

**Example** - Alisha has had a social care assessment and her social worker wants to arrange a care package for her. Alisha knows that she can ask for direct payments so she can employ her own personal assistant (PA). She contacts her local independent living service for information about how she can manage her money and employ a PA. Alisha gets her direct payments.

## DO IT FOR OTHERS

4

You may find it is easier to help others before you help yourself, many people do. It's good to help others but not at the expense of your own health and wellbeing. Self care is very important and can improve our mental, emotional, and physical health, and can reduce anxiety. Once you have mastered good self-care, you are in a better place to help others. Getting involved in your community will help you connect with others who may have had similar experiences. You don't need to be an expert, but if you wish to help others yet don't know how, why don't you become an Advocacy Friend via our online training course? Head to [www.advocacyfriends.org.uk](http://www.advocacyfriends.org.uk).

**Example** - Shezad has completed his Advocacy Friends course. He now feels confident to speak up for himself but wants to help others. Shezad uses the information sent to him from his training and starts to work with local people he knows. He learns about different issues he hasn't experienced before and starts to build on his own knowledge and resources. Shezad is able to speak up for himself and others as a result.

It's hard to ask for help sometimes and you may not always feel able to self advocate. There is support out there for you, whether that be a family member, friend, community support group, professional advocacy, or online resources. Don't be afraid to seek out help, ask someone you feel comfortable with to get the ball rolling for you'.

5

## ASK FOR HELP

**Example** - Mike has a meeting with a personal independence payments assessor, he's never done this before. Mike contacts Welfare Rights who are able to tell him what he needs to know to get ready for the assessment. As a result, Mike feels more confident and prepared for his meeting.

**BE CLEAR****6**

People don't need to know everything about you, just what you need them to know. Make sure you clearly voice your concerns, wants and needs so people can help you to the best of their ability. If people don't understand you the first time, think about a different way of doing it.

**Example** – Marissa had a lovely meeting with her nurse, and had a nice general conversation with her but nothing really got done. Marissa wrote down her key points and called her nurse to make sure that her important issues were dealt with.

**IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND - ASK!**

Don't end a conversation with a professional until you are sure you have understood everything. If you don't understand something - ask. If you don't feel able to, use the cue cards in your tools section to help you.

**Example** – Josie always feels tongue tied with her doctor, he speaks too fast and she doesn't have time to think about what he is saying. Josie doesn't feel able to get her words out. She uses the self advocacy cue cards and asks her doctor to slow down. The doctor speaks more slowly and Josie then has time to think and ask questions.

**7****LEARN TO NEGOTIATE**

You need to work out what's important to you. Can you compromise on what you need or want? Can professionals? Write down what can and can't be changed and begin to negotiate if you can't reach your desired outcome.

**8**

**Example** – Arthur really needs support to help him get out to the shops. He likes to go swimming three times a week, but social services can't manage this. Arthur agrees to let one swimming session go, so that he can get to the shops with help.

**KEEP GOING - BREATHE**

Speaking up for yourself can be really hard but remember to keep going. As you practise your new skills, your confidence will grow. You may have the odd set back but don't let this stop you. Remember to take a break if you need it, ask for more time and follow the 10 steps again until you reach success.

**Example** – During meetings, Francis gets upset. She asks for time to go out of the room, takes her time to calm down and manage her feelings. Francis looks at the points she needs to communicate. Francis goes back into the meeting, with a fresh view of things. Francis makes sure she is heard.

**9****10****ARE YOU CONFIDENT?**

Confidence is just a feeling. Like a muscle, it needs exercise to get stronger. When you feel under pressure, sometimes you don't feel strong enough to speak up about the things that are bothering you. Confidence needs time to grow; be kind to yourself and allow it to happen naturally.

**Example** – Mary had never spoken in a meeting before she learned to self advocate, Mary practised with her friends and family and for the first time in her life she asked two questions!

# WHAT OUR SELF ADVOCATES SAY

“

**"Self advocacy is telling those who support me how they can best do it!"**

"These skills should be taught in schools. There are so many problems in schools it would help the kids."

"Nothing stops me talking confidently, but I need support with reading and writing."

"My husband would struggle to be a self-advocate. He's intelligent and articulate, but he can't read. Even when he's prepared, he struggles to keep calm when professionals talk to him, then he can't say what he wants. He has loads of confidence but when there's an authority figure, he melts. He would struggle to do a six week course because he would forget it straight away. I am his advocate."

**"Be strong, stand up for yourself."**

”

"I'm a dyslexic and I have to tell people. I've got voice recognition for my computer. I had a breakdown because of the pressure and I didn't know where to go for support. GP didn't help. When I needed to do an Occupational Therapy assessment I was told I couldn't take someone with me. I wasn't allowed any support from a friend or anyone."

**"Self advocacy is speaking up for myself."**

"A client I worked with is a father with learning difficulties, the issue was guardianship of his children, he has speech difficulty and this gets worse when he's agitated. I was on the 'other side' but I had to help him calm down and help the professionals understand him. He was bombarded with information.."

**"Knowledge is power."**

"Gives me the chance to be who I want to be."





# MORE INFORMATION & RESOURCES

## Health and Social Care Complaints Self Help

Our self help guide takes you through the steps of making a health or social care complaint and how to advocate for yourself during this process.

## Resources and Factsheets

We have a full library of Easy Reads for advocacy services and a range of easy to understand factsheets on our website.

## COMING SOON - Informal Patients / Independent Mental Health Advocacy / Community Treatment Order Self-Help Guides

Our self-help toolkits provide practical help and support written in plain English, for people experiencing or recovering from mental ill health, under the Mental Health Act.

## Justice for LB Toolkit

The Justice for LB Toolkit is a resource aimed at helping those with learning difficulties become more involved with their care assessments. It also provides important information and guidelines about working with people who have learning disabilities and communication or cognitive issues.

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focus

JUSTICE FOR LB TOOLKIT



Advocacy Focus has developed this toolkit for professionals who work with people with learning disabilities and communication or cognitive issues.



## Communication Toolkits

Our Communication Toolkits can help anyone who struggles to communicate verbally with a comprehensive guide of symbols and pictures.

## Becoming Your Healthy Self

A new monthly mental health and wellbeing toolkit that will help you tackle a range of emotions and disorders.

## COMING SOON! The Advocacy Focus, MyFocus Self Advocacy App

All the tools from this toolkit in interactive format, plus more tips on how to self advocate!



Download these and more from our website at [advocacyfocus.org.uk](http://advocacyfocus.org.uk)

# FURTHER HELP AND SUPPORT



**If you, or someone you know needs further help and support, here are some helpful organisations below:**

<b>Local advocacy service</b>	Type in advocacy and your county, town or city into a search engine i.e. 'advocacy in Lancashire.'
<b>Citizens Advice Bureau</b>	Can provide you with advice about money, legal, consumer issues and other problems you may be facing. They will know of specialist services in your area that will be able to give you the information that you need
<b>Shelter</b>	A housing and homelessness charity.
<b>Welfare Rights</b>	Usually a service run by your local council that will help with information about benefits.
<b>Samaritans</b>	Support for anyone in emotional distress or mental health crisis.
<b>Hub of Hope</b>	A free app that searches mental health support based on your location.

Helplines and charities for your condition or situation – There are lots of national free advice services that are issue or condition related, such as Parkinson's UK and Alzheimer's Society. You can type in any medical condition or issue into a search engine, followed by the words 'helpline UK' to find a number to call. Don't be afraid to call, these kind of advice services talk to hundreds of people everyday and are there to help.

## Get in touch with Advocacy Focus

If you have a question about this Toolkit or need some more information about advocacy, please get in touch.

**T: 0300 323 0965**

**E: [admin@advocacyfocus.org.uk](mailto:admin@advocacyfocus.org.uk)**

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