



## Self-Advocacy Approaches for Residents & Family Members

Self-advocacy is an act of empowerment! Here are some principles and practical tips to put assertiveness to work in your advocacy efforts.

At the heart of self-advocacy is knowledge about one's rights. In exercising your rights, strive to maintain a calm manner. Act with assertiveness. Be persistent. Ask for honest communication. And insist on accountability.

**Rights:** Know your rights as a resident. (See CANHR's Fact Sheets on Resident's Rights and The Outline of Resident's Rights at <http://www.canhr.org/factsheets/index.html>.)

- At the time of admission, the facility should explain your rights as a resident. The facility must post and make available to all residents and visitors a copy of the resident rights and how to make complaints.
- You have a right to express concerns, to offer suggestions or to make complaints and to do so without fear of retaliation.
- Contact the Ombudsman Program to assist you in exercising your rights. The Ombudsman is your advocate. A poster with the telephone number for the local Ombudsman Program must be clearly displayed in every Residential Care Facility for the Elderly.

**Facts:** Document your concerns.

- Write down important facts by answering who, what, when, where, and how questions. Keep a small notebook to record your observations.
- Describe what happened. Be as specific as possible. State the facts and avoid making conclusions.
- Organize events in chronological order, i.e., what happened on a certain date, followed by the next date, and so forth.
- When appropriate, refer to important documents, e.g., Admission Agreement.

**Outcomes:** Clearly define the results that you want.

- Define your desired results by answering the following questions: What do you really want? What can you live with? What is unacceptable?
- State your desired results in simple declarative sentences.
- Present the outcome in positive terms.

**Options:** Create one or two acceptable options for each concern that you raise.

- Act as a problem-solver or option creator, not a complainer.
- Come with solutions or options that will achieve your outcomes.
- State your options in terms of needs or preferences.

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**Negotiation:** Plan a meeting or meetings to achieve your desired results.

- Identify the person(s) who can resolve your concern(s).
- Set up a meeting with the appropriate staff, e.g., Administrator or Manger, Activities Coordinator, cook, etc.
- Bring in allies who can support the outcomes and options that you want or who can give you moral support, e.g., family member or friend, Ombudsman, pastor, social worker, etc.
- During the meeting, focus on the outcome(s) that you want - don't get distracted. Listen to build understanding and to gain information.
- Establish a sense of cooperation. Don't personalize the argument or put down the person whom you are communicating with. This usually produces defensiveness rather than the cooperation necessary to achieve a positive outcome.
- Find points of agreement or compromise—build on these points before dealing with more difficult issues.
- Insist on using objective criteria. If applicable, demonstrate the uniqueness of your situation and ask for an exception.
- Summarize your understanding of the agreed upon outcome(s) before ending the meeting.
- Insist on a date for resolution or a timetable for changes to be made.
- If possible, put your understanding in writing. This creates a permanent record of the agreement in case there are any misunderstandings in the future. It can also be a tool to promote accountability by measuring progress against agreed upon outcomes and timetables.

**Appeal:** If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, appeal the decision.

- One approach is to go up the "chain of command" to find a positive resolution. Ask to speak with the person's supervisor or the person in charge of the department or the facility.
- If this doesn't work, call or write a letter to the owner or to corporate headquarters.
- It is best to put your concerns in writing and to insist on a written response.

**Formal Complaint:** When problems are persistent or serious, file a formal complaint.

- Complaints are investigated by persons who do not work for the facility and may be able to see the situation more objectively, offering new alternatives.
- Contact the local Ombudsman Program; and/or
- Call, write or fax Community Care Licensing, the agency that regulates Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly or Assisted Living Facilities. (See CANHR's Fact Sheet on Filing Complaints at [http://www.canhr.org/factsheets/rcfe\\_fs/html/rcfe\\_complaints\\_fs.htm](http://www.canhr.org/factsheets/rcfe_fs/html/rcfe_complaints_fs.htm).)