

Factsheet 5: Communicating Effectively

As an advocate you want to communicate your message effectively. Face to face meetings are important opportunities to discuss your concern but you may find that you need to use phone calls, emails and letters as well. There are important things to keep in mind as you prepare to communicate using any of these tools.

Face to Face Meetings

- Arrange an appointment with the person in advance.
- Arrive for your meeting on time.
- Identify yourself and the person whose needs you wish to discuss.
- Be timely in bringing your concern forward. Don't let problems grow and grow before discussing your concern with the health care staff or service provider.
- Be clear in the facts you are presenting and in your request for action.
- Be polite. Avoid sarcasm and anger.
- Be aware of your body language. Make eye contact and have good posture. Avoid gestures that could appear threatening.
- When expressing your feelings use "I" statements rather than 'you' statements.
- Listen carefully and clarify things you may not understand.
- Say "no" when solutions presented are unacceptable.
- When a plan of action is reached, restate the plan or write an email or letter that summarizes the conversation.
- Remember to leave your contact information.
- Thank the person for meeting with you and arrange a follow up meeting where you will monitor progress on the issue of concern.

Phone Calls

- Introduce yourself; identify whose needs your call is about and your relationship to that person.
- Do not tape record a phone call without the other person's permission.
- Plan ahead for your conversation. Write down the things you wish to bring forward. This will help you to remember all the things you wish to discuss and will assist you to feel more confident if you are nervous.
- Avoid rambling in the conversation as the extra stories you tell may distract the person from the main points you wanted to make.
- Ask the person you are speaking with how they decided on the course of action they are following. Avoid asking why they decided to do as they are doing as "why" questions often result in a person defending their actions rather than considering how they can work with you toward a new solution.
- Ask the person you are speaking with how the problem can be solved.
- Request an appointment with the person to have a more detailed conversation if talking further about the issue might help in finding a solution.
- If you call and the person is not in, leave a brief message that includes your name, phone number, the date, time and reason for your call. If there is a "best time" for them to return your call, leave that information too.
- Remember that being courteous will build a relationship with the person you are speaking to and will help you to move your concern forward.

Emails

- Include your name and contact information in your email.
- State who you are writing about and the reason you are writing in the subject line of the email.
- Keep your message brief and to the point.
- Include your personal story and concerns as you would if you were meeting in person, calling or sending a regular letter. Suggest solutions that you think are appropriate.
- Instead of sending attachments, include all the important information in the body of the email, remembering to be as concise as possible.
- Send your email to the person who is most able to respond to your request. Avoid cc'ing others who are not involved in the situation.
- Do not send email everyday as eventually your messages will be viewed as "spam" and will be ignored.
- Be sure to keep a record of emails you send.
- Use good email etiquette. Remember that if you capitalize complete words, it is seen as shouting. Avoid using social media abbreviations (e.g. ttyl, plz, wdyt.)
- Proof read your email for organization, spelling and grammar.

Subject Line: Alma Delorme's Meals on Wheels Service

Attention: Joan Nelson, Meals on Wheels Coordinator

My mother, Alma Delorme, has recently been diagnosed with high blood pressure. The dietitian has recommended that my mother be placed on a low sodium diet. Please update your records about my mother's dietary needs and begin providing her with meals that meet this request.

If you need further information about my mother's recommended diet, please contact her dietitian, Sandra Green at (204) 456-1234.

Please confirm that you have received my message and let me know the date on which delivery of low sodium meals will begin.

My mother greatly appreciates her Meals on Wheels and enjoys meeting the volunteers who deliver to her door each day.

Sincerely,
Catherine MacKay
Alma Delorme's daughter
(204) 345-6789

Letters

- An advocacy letter should be no more than 2 pages in length. One page is even better.
- Use a business letter format that includes your name, address, phone number and if you wish, your email address.
- Learn the name of the best person to receive your letter and address the letter to that individual. Check that you have the correct mailing address.
- In the first paragraph explain who you are, the reason for your letter and what you would like to happen. In the second paragraph, tell how the matter that concerns you is affecting the person for whom you are advocating and yourself as a family member or friend. Your personal story has great power to influence the change you are requesting. In the closing paragraph restate the action you would like to take place. Remember to proof read your letter. Consider having someone else read your letter as well.
- Keep your letter courteous and respectful as threats are not appreciated and can make the reader less receptive of your proposed solutions.
- Set a time by which you wish to see action or receive a reply.
- Keep your letter neat. If your handwriting may be difficult to read, consider having someone type your letter. Use plain white paper rather than coloured stationary.
- Print 2 copies of your letter. Keep one for your records and send or deliver a copy to the person you are asking for assistance.
- Send copies of your letter to other people or agencies who would be interested in your situation.

For help in preparing effective advocacy communications, contact the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba at 204-943-6622 or 1-800-378-6699 or the regional office nearest you. For other factsheets in this series visit www.alzheimer.mb.ca

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