

## **SELF-ADVOCACY**

P&A's mission is protecting and advancing the disability rights of people with disabilities in South Carolina. One of the ways that we carry out this mission is by helping individuals be effective advocates for themselves.

These tips can help you in working with agencies, facilities or schools. These tips will also help you in other situations where you must advocate for your rights, such as with employers, landlords, restaurants, stores and medical care.

Have you or a family member experienced discrimination as a result of a disability, or been illegally denied services by an agency or program? If so, it is **IMPORTANT** that you take control of your situation from the beginning. Follow these steps:

### **#1 GETTING STARTED**

- √ Keep track of ALL letters, e-mails and records regarding the problem.
- √ Keep all information in one place. For example, store all letters in a notebook. If you have a computer, keep notes and back them up.
- √ Be able to ask direct questions to solve the problem. It may help to write out questions before making phone calls or attending meetings.
- √ Make sure that your questions are answered. If you do not get an answer the first time, ask your question again. Take notes when you talk to someone. Write down the date and time you talked, the name of the person you spoke with, where he/she works, and what you talked about.

- √ Never give away your records or documents. Make copies as needed, but keep your own records.

### **#2 KNOW WHO CAN HELP**

- √ Make a list of service providers or persons who may be able to help you with your situation.

### **#3 KNOW WHAT YOU WANT AND MAKE A PLAN**

- √ GET and WRITE OUT THE FACTS of your situation!
- √ Learn your legal rights. Attend public trainings, read books, search the internet or contact P&A.
- √ Be sure you ask questions when you do NOT understand.
- √ Write out questions you need answered.
- √ Know what you would like to happen with the situation.
- √ Know AHEAD of time what your next step will be if you are not satisfied with your situation or the outcome of a meeting.

### **#4 TAKE ACTION**

- √ Request a MEETING with the people who may be able to help you or who can answer your questions about the problem.
- √ Ask for important information in writing. Send copies to all persons involved and ALWAYS keep a copy for yourself.
- √ Make sure that you have all the necessary information WITH YOU when talking to the agency or person about your situation.
- √ Remember to write down basic facts about your meeting. Include the date, place, and names of people who were there. Also, write down what you asked for and what people said they would do.

- √ Stay calm and speak clearly. Be willing to listen because what you hear is usually just as important as what you say.

- √ Be courteous, do what is required, and always say thank you, even if you are frustrated.

### **#5 GET IT IN WRITING**

- √ Before leaving a meeting or ending a phone conversation, make sure both you and the other party have the SAME idea of what is supposed to happen.
- √ Set a completion date for any goals.
- √ After the meeting or call, send a short e-mail or letter to the other person and say what you agreed should happen next.

### **#6 FOLLOW THROUGH**

- √ Follow through with your part of the agreement as soon as you can.
- √ Stay in touch with the agency until the services you requested have been provided.
- √ If you feel that you are getting nowhere, contact P&A.

### **#7 DO NOT GIVE UP!**

- √ Ask and ask again. If you do not get what you want the first time, do not be shy about asking again. You can create change.

## HOW DO YOU CONTACT P&A?

Call toll-free statewide:

**1-866-275-7273 (Voice)**

**1-866-232-4525 (TTY)**

in Columbia area:

**803-782-0639 (Voice & TTY)**

or

Visit our website at:

**[www.pandasc.org](http://www.pandasc.org)**

or

Send us e-mail at:

**[info@pandasc.org](mailto:info@pandasc.org)**

or

Write us at:

**3710 Landmark Drive, Suite 208  
Columbia, SC 29204**

P&A does not charge for services. Our services are provided statewide and are NOT limited by income, disability, race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, citizenship, age, religion, veteran status, sex or sexual orientation, or any other class protect by law.

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*The Protection & Advocacy System for South Carolina*

# 7 TIPS

**ADVOCATING**

**FOR YOURSELF**

**AND FAMILY**