

## WHAT IS SELF-ADVOCACY?

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself and taking charge of your life so you can handle your own problems and make sure you get what you need.

Many people face serious legal problems such as eviction, credit problems, problems with Medicaid or Medicare, and utility shut offs. As a self-advocate you will know what needs to be done to take care of these legal problems and many other problems before they become too serious.

There are four simple steps to self-advocacy:

- 1. *Be organized;***
- 2. *Develop a Plan of Action;***
- 3. *Take Action; and***
- 4. *Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help.***

Following these steps can help prevent mistakes which lead to serious legal problems, resolve problems before they become too complicated, and recognize when legal help is necessary and know where to go to get help for both legal and non-legal problems. Above all, after reading this brochure, you should come away with the sense that self-advocacy is a process which takes time and effort, but that by getting organized and taking action you can take charge of your life and problems. However, if you are not able to resolve your problem on your own, you can ask for help.

## HOW CAN YOU BECOME A SELF-ADVOCATE?

### **Step 1: Be Organized**

► Keep all important papers. Make sure to keep:

- Papers from a court or a lawyer
  - All pieces of paper sent to you by a welfare agency
  - All rent receipts
  - Any contract you've signed
  - Bank agreements
  - Records of money you paid
  - Tax returns
  - Marriage licenses
  - Birth certificates and social security cards (for yourself and your children)
  - Pay stubs
  - Copies of letters sent by you
- Keep a record of all important phone calls. Make sure to write down the:
- Name of the person (very important!)
  - Date

- Name of the organization
- What the person told you to do or what they promised
- Mail a follow-up letter to the contact person which outlines what was decided in the conversation. Should the contact person fail to follow through, you will have proof of the promise to convince that person to act or to convince a supervisor that the contact person had not done as promised.

► Keep your papers and records organized. The best way to be organized is to use a file folder. To keep your folder organized:

- Group your papers and records under names (like Housing or Medical)
- Within each group organize your papers by date, starting with the most recent.

### **Step 2: Develop a Plan for Action**

- Focus on the problem and what you need to happen.
- Write down the possible solutions to the problem that will get you the results you need.
- Choose the option that works best for you to get you the results you need.

- Keep a calendar of important deadlines and meetings. By keeping a calendar you will be able to stay on top of the situation so that you can act quickly before the situation becomes a serious problem.

### **Step 3: Take Action**

**BE PREPARED!** Before you call or meet with someone about your problem identify the issue that you want to resolve; write down your issue and the goal that you want to achieve; and list the resources that you may have or will need to overcome any barriers to achieving your goal.

Focus on why you are taking action and what you need from the person you are contacting.

Have the important papers and records with you that the person you are contacting will need in order to help you resolve your problem.

Know what your next step will be if the person you contact cannot get you what you need.

**BE CALM!** Don't let your emotions get in the way of getting what you need. Don't yell, accuse, or insult. You will be able to convince the person you are contacting and get the results you need only if you are willing to listen and remain calm while explaining your problem.

*The information in this flyer is effective as of June 2016*

**DON'T GIVE UP!** Speak up and ask your questions. Make sure you will get what you need. If you are not getting what you need, ask to speak to a supervisor, and if the supervisor is not helping you, speak to the supervisor's supervisor.

*Speaking up and voicing concerns are an essential part of self-advocacy. However, when no one is responding make use of other community resources.*

### **Step 4: Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help**

Problems can affect people on all levels—emotionally, economically, legally — and when the problem becomes serious or complicated, it may be necessary to make use of the community support network that exists in Connecticut. Think of your support networks—family, friends, church, community organizations, and community service providers like energy assistance programs and crisis intervention.

Good decision making can be achieved by thinking through a plan for action.

**For more assistance contact  
Connecticut Legal Rights  
Project, Inc.  
Toll Free 1-877-402-2299  
TTY 860-262-5066  
[www.clrp.org](http://www.clrp.org)**

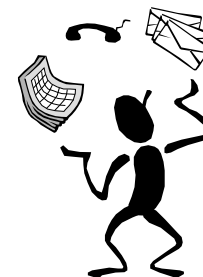
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## HOW TO BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE



**GET ORGANIZED, MAKE A PLAN, TAKE ACTION, AND GET RESULTS!**

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*LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS*