

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

How does one go about crafting their individual story for maximum impact? It is important to understand the elements of building a powerful story. Practice over and over on your own following the guidelines listed below.

THINGS TO BE CLEAR ABOUT:

- ***What is it you want the legislator or policy maker to do?***
See if you can summarize it in just one sentence. Be as concrete and specific as possible.
- ***How do you want them to do it?***
Be clear and specific about what you think the appropriate course of action entails. This should follow your summary statement.
- ***How does this issue relate to you?***
What effect has this issue had on your life and on the life of your family? Remember that the point of telling your story is to put a face on the issue and to educate the policy maker on the impact of the issue on your life or that of your family member.
- ***Are others affected by this issue? If so, how?***
Numbers always help. If 10,000 other children in your state are also affected, this will have a big impact on a policy maker.
- ***List the key points that the legislator must know to understand the issue and its impact.***
Limit your points to no more than three on any issue. Remember that your time and their interest is limited.
- ***Why is the issue important to the legislator or to other constituents in his or her district?***
Potential votes always make a difference. Other common possibilities:
 - ◆ This is an area of personal interest or the interest of a friend
 - ◆ The legislator serves on a legislative committee that would cover this issue
 - ◆ There is the possibility of getting positive press coverage
 - ◆ A large number of voters in his/her district are affected.

TURNING YOUR STORY INTO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY:

How do you turn your personal story into material that's suitable for use in an advocacy situation? Here is a basic worksheet on turning your story into letters, testimony, e-mail, phone calls, or material to discuss during a visit. The same elements are required for each type of communication.

- ***Introduce yourself and thank the policy maker for his or her time.***
- ***Give your name and where you live.***
Tell the policy maker where you live and let them know if you live in their district. If you are speaking as a member of CHADD, let the policy maker know. Even though collective action by a group with like interests can be an effective way of getting your message across, there are some instances in which speaking only for yourself can be very powerful. Speaking for yourself shows the person you are addressing that you care enough to get involved on your own. Use your judgment. What is going to be the most powerful way of getting the message across?
- ***Identify the issue you will discuss.***
Keep it simple. Know what your message is in one sentence.
- ***Briefly describe yourself or your family if this is pertinent.***
Keep it short and specific. If you are describing programs you or your family are involved in, make sure that you do not use acronyms or jargon that average people are not familiar with.
- ***Describe the services or supports you or your family currently need or receive.***
If you do not currently receive any services, it may be appropriate to discuss what services you may need in the future.
- ***Describe what you want the agency or legislature to do.***
Make the connection between your story and whatever item the policy makers are considering or what you want them to do. For example: *"Fund mental health screening for all students to help identify at risk children and alert parents of the need for an evaluation."*
- ***Thank them for listening.***
Offer to be available as a resource, or connect them with someone who is willing to do this.