

TURNING YOUR STORY INTO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

You may want to become active in policy issues, but how do you turn your personal story into material that is useful and has maximum impact in an advocacy situation? Speaking for yourself can be very powerful and shows that you care enough to get involved. Your personal story puts a face on an issue and educates policy makers on the impact of these issues on your life and/or that of your family member(s). To be effective, personal stories need to be tied to policy objectives and options, not presented in isolation. The same elements are required whether using personal stories in letters, testimony, e-mail, phone calls, or discussion during a visit. The following exercise will help you to understand the elements of building your personal story and provide an opportunity to practice them. Remember, credibility is your biggest asset, so never embellish or exaggerate your story.

DEVELOPING YOUR STORY

- ***Identify the issue you will discuss:***

Keep it simple... state the message in one sentence. Cover only one issue per contact.

- ***How does this issue relate to you?***

In what way has this issue affect, or may affect, you and/or your family? Be specific, and keep it short, on topic, and honest. Don't use acronyms or jargon.

- ***How does, or will, this issue affect the services and supports that you and/or your family need or receive?***

- **Are others affected by this issue? If so, how?**

- **Why is this issue important to the policymaker and/or to his/her constituents?**

- **List the key points you want the policy maker to understand or know about this issue and its' impact.**

- **Describe what action or position you want the agency, legislature, or policy maker to take in regards to this issue.**

Focus! Summarize it in just one sentence being as concrete and specific as possible.

- **What suggestions do you have for how the policy maker could accomplish your agenda?**

Formulate suggested solutions and/or identify possible areas of compromise. Be clear and specific about what you think the appropriate course of action entails.

UTILIZING YOUR STORY

- ***Introduce yourself and thank the policy maker or staff person for his/her time.***
- ***Give your name and where you live.***
Let them know if you live in their district. Always present your case in a professional, credible, and positive manner, whether in writing or in person.
- ***Present your personal story and the issue as outlined in the exercise above***
Remember, be concise. For in person visits, keep your story time down to 2 to 3 minutes.
- ***Thank them for listening.***
Offer to be available as a resource or to connect them with others who are willing to be a resource.
- ***Provide brief written comments and contact information for follow up and future reference at the conclusion of personal meetings with policy makers or staff members.***