

LIGHTENING UP

The Self-Advocacy Starter Kit

For anyone speaking up for themselves for the first time, in a service, a system, a meeting, or a room where you feel small.

What you get

Six tools you can use straight away. Each one gives you the idea behind it, a worksheet to fill in, wording you can copy, a checklist, a real example, and one action to take this week.

You do not need the right words. You need a starting point.

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The five questions this kit answers

See what is happening. Understand why it is happening. Work out how to move through it. Ask for something better. Use what you have lived through so the system works better for the next person.

How to use this kit

Print it, or fill it in on screen. Work through one tool at a time. Nothing here needs to be done perfectly. Half filled in and used is worth more than blank and tidy.

Every tool has six parts

Principle, worksheet, template, checklist, example, action plan. The same six every time, so you always know where you are.

One week, one tool

Six weeks and you have a full picture of what you need, what you are entitled to, and how to ask for it.

Write it in your own words

The wording in here is a starting point, not a script you have to follow. Change it until it sounds like you.

Take someone with you

A support person can take notes while you talk. You are allowed to bring one to almost anything.

Before you start, finish this sentence

The thing I most want to change right now is

01 Start where you are

Principle

Self advocacy starts with naming what is actually wrong for you, not what you think you are allowed to ask for. The words come easier once the problem is written down in front of you.

Worksheet

Answer these four in plain words. Nobody else has to read this page.

What has been happening?

How is it affecting my life, my money, my health, my family?

What do I want to be different?

Who has the power to change it?

Template

Three sentences. Use them to open a call, an email, or a meeting.

I want to talk about my _____.

Here is what has been happening: _____.

What I am asking for is _____.

Checklist

- ☐ I can say the problem out loud in one sentence.
- ☐ I know what I want instead, not just what I do not want.
- ☐ I know the name or the role of the person who can change it.
- ☐ I have picked a day this week to make contact.

Example

Sam had been waiting eleven weeks for a call back and kept being told to be patient. Once she wrote it down it took one sentence. My review has been sitting for eleven weeks, my supports have stopped, and I am asking for a date in writing this week. She said that sentence to the team leader, not the front desk, and had a date within two days.

Action plan

Write your one sentence below and read it out loud twice before you use it.

02 Know your rights basics

Principle

Rights are promises written down. Every service you deal with has them somewhere, in a charter, a policy, or an agreement. You do not have to memorise the law. You only have to ask which promise applies to you.

Four promises that turn up almost everywhere

To be told what is happening in words you understand, and in writing if you ask.

To bring a support person, family member, or advocate with you.

To see the information a service holds about you and correct it if it is wrong.

To complain, and to keep getting the service while your complaint is looked at.

Worksheet

Pick one service you are dealing with right now and fill this in.

The service, and the name of their charter, policy, or agreement

One promise it makes, written in my own words

What is happening instead

Template

An email you can send today. It is polite, and it puts everything in writing.

Hello, my name is _____ and my reference number is _____.

I would like to understand the decision about _____.

Please send me, in writing: the reason for the decision, the policy or charter it is based on, and the steps I can take if I disagree.

I would also like a copy of the information you hold about me.

Thank you for your help. I look forward to your reply by _____.

Checklist

- ☐ I have found the charter, policy, or agreement and saved a copy.
- ☐ I have asked for the reason in writing, not just over the phone.
- ☐ I know who to go to if I disagree, and how long I have to do it.
- ☐ I have written the reply date in my calendar.

Example

Ben was told he could not bring his sister to his appointments. He found one line in the service charter about having a support person present. He sent it back in an email with one question. Can you tell me which policy this decision is based on? Nobody stopped his sister coming again.

Action plan

Find one document this week and highlight one line that is a promise to you. Write the line here.

03 Get ready before you walk in

Principle

Most of the work happens before the meeting. If you know your three points and your one thing you will not give up on, you can be nervous and still be clear.

Worksheet

Fill this in the day before, not on the way there.

My three points, shortest first

The one thing I will not give up on today

Two questions I will ask them

If the answer is no, my next step is

Template

A one page note you can hand over or send the day before. It sets the agenda for you.

Meeting about: _____ Date: _____

Who is coming with me: _____

What I want to cover: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

What I am asking for: _____

I would like the outcome sent to me in writing. Yes

Checklist

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Date, time and place confirmed | ☐ Support person invited |
| ☐ Note sent the day before | ☐ Paper, pen and water with me |
| ☐ Documents printed or on my phone | ☐ Something easy planned afterwards |

Example

Priya used to leave meetings realising she had forgotten the main thing. Now she sends the same short note the day before every time. She says the meeting starts already pointed at what she came for, and she has stopped rehearsing it at 2am.

Action plan

Send your note 24 hours before your next meeting. Write the send date here.

04 Say it so it lands

Principle

Three parts, in this order. The facts, the effect on you, and the ask. Facts are hard to argue with. The effect is what makes people move. The ask is what stops the meeting ending with everyone nodding and nothing changing.

Facts

Dates, numbers, what was said, what was promised.

Effect

What it costs you in time, money, health, or sleep.

Ask

One clear thing, and a date you want it by.

Worksheet

Write yours out in full. You will only need to do this a few times before it becomes the way you talk.

The facts

The effect on me

My ask, and the date I want it by

Template

Wording for the moments that are hardest to find words for. Say them slowly.

When you are talked over: I have not finished. Can we come back to that in a moment.

When you do not understand: Can you say that again in everyday words for me.

When you need to check: So I understand you correctly, are you saying that

When you are rushed: I need a minute to think about that before I answer.

When you get a no: I hear that. Can you tell me what would need to change for it to be a yes.

To close: Can you send me in writing what we agreed and who is doing what by when.

Checklist

- ☐ I said the facts before the feelings.
- ☐ I made one clear ask, not four vague ones.
- ☐ I asked for a date, and I wrote it down.
- ☐ I asked for the outcome in writing.

Example

Dan used to apologise his way through every call and hang up unsure what had been agreed. He started with the facts instead. I called on the fourth, the twelfth and the nineteenth. I have missed two weeks of work waiting. I am asking for a decision by Friday. He got one by Thursday.

Action plan

Say your facts, effect and ask out loud three times this week. Write the one phrase you want ready in your pocket.

05 Keep the record

Principle

Memory fades and staff change. A record does not. Five minutes of notes after a call is the difference between I think they said and here is the date, the name, and what was promised.

Worksheet

Your contact log. Start with the last conversation you had, even if it was weeks ago.

Date	Who I spoke to	What was said	Next step and date

Template

The follow up email. Send it within a day of any conversation that mattered.

Thank you for speaking with me on _____.

I am writing down what I understood so we are both clear.

You said: _____

I am doing: _____

You are doing: _____ by _____

If I have any of that wrong, please correct me in writing.

Checklist

- ☐ I have the person's name and role, not just the service name.
- ☐ Every phone call has a date next to it.
- ☐ Letters and emails are all kept in one place, paper or digital.
- ☐ Anything agreed by phone has been confirmed by email.

Example

Marie was told three different things by three different people over five months. When she finally asked for a review she had a page of dates and names to hand over. Nobody argued about what had happened, because it was all written down at the time.

Action plan

Fill in the first row of your log today, from the last conversation you can remember.

06 Ask again, higher up

Principle

A no from one person is not a no from the whole system. Most first answers come from whoever picked up the phone, and they are often the person with the least room to say yes. Asking again, one level up, is a normal part of how services work.

Worksheet

Map the levels before you need them. Most services have three: the worker, their manager, then a complaints or review team.

What I asked for, and who said no

The reason they gave me

The next level up, and how I contact them

The outside body I can go to if that does not work

The date I will follow up

Template

Asking again, in writing, without a fight. Send it to the manager and copy in the person who said no.

I am asking for this decision to be looked at again by someone else.

On _____ I asked for _____ and the answer was no.

The reason given was _____.

Here is what has happened since, and how it is affecting me: _____

Please tell me who is reviewing it, when I will have an answer, and what I can do if I still disagree.

Checklist

- ☐ I asked for the reason in writing before I asked again.
- ☐ I know the name and role of the next person up.
- ☐ I have kept it short, factual, and about the decision.
- ☐ I have a follow up date, and I know who to go to outside the service.

Example

Jo was told her request was outside the guidelines and left it there for four months. When she sent six lines to the manager with the dates in them, the answer came back within a fortnight and it was yes. Nothing about her situation had changed. She had only asked the person who could say it.

Action plan

Put your follow up date in your phone now, with an alarm. Write it here too.

My one page summary

Fill this in and keep it with you. It is everything from the six tools on one page, so you can take it into any room.

What I want, in one sentence

The promise, policy or charter line that backs it up

Three facts, with dates

How this is affecting me

Who I am asking, and the date I want an answer by

Where to get help

You do not have to do this alone. Write your three in here so you never have to look them up in a hurry.

My service's complaints line or email: _____

A free advocacy service near me: _____

One person who will come with me: _____

You have just done the hardest part, which is starting.

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