



New York Families  
for Disability Rights

**TRAINING SESSION 1**

# *Face-to-face Meetings*

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## PART 1

# *Introduction*



### **Your rights**

In New York State, people with disabilities have rights, and access to many supports and services that will help them live as full and active a life, in their communities, as they choose and as they and their families or guardians deem appropriate. However, the system of service delivery is robust and complex. People with disabilities, and their families, must educate themselves about the law and about the system of services available in New York State.

### **Meetings**

Face-to-face meetings with service coordinators, medical professionals, school administrators, teachers, government bureaucrats, and elected officials are frequent and important events when you have a family member with developmental disabilities. Much can sometimes be accomplished on line or on the telephone, but sometimes in-person meetings are necessary to obtain the proper level of supports and services for individual needs.

### **Becoming informed**

There will also be times when it will be necessary to educate government bureaucrats and elected officials about issues important to an individual or people with disabilities in general. In the past several years government pressure to reduce funding for programs that support people with disabilities and their families has created long waits for services and limited access to those services. That trend is expected to continue for years to come. Therefore, it is more important than ever for people with disabilities and their families and friends to be informed advocates for the rights and the needs of citizens with disabilities.

## *Getting Prepared*



### **A: What to expect**

Once you know your options, and the array of services available for people with developmental disabilities, you will often have to work hard to ensure that you, or your loved one, receive what is needed in your particular case. That will entail filling out paperwork, undergoing interviews and assessments and meeting with professionals at points throughout the life of the person with disabilities to create plans and access the proper services.

### **B: Getting informed**

The person with disabilities, their family member or other representative, will need to be informed, prepared and focused to achieve their goals in any in-person meeting or interview.

The techniques presented in this session can be applied in any important or even difficult or contentious meeting. This training will cover a set of useful techniques for these face-to-face meetings, including preparation, storytelling techniques and messaging, message delivery, and answering of questions.

Being prepared for any face-to-face meeting is very important.

In person interaction is more effective and more engaging. It is easier to keep another person's attention and read their facial expressions and body language.

### **C: Your story**

Your personal story is critical for justifying your request and will be more powerful if told in person.

You will be able to ask and answer questions without the delay involved in an exchange of emails, phone calls, or letters.

Tell your story about your loved one with a disability, what their life is like, how it affects you and your family, the challenges your family has faced and the support and services you and your loved one need in order for them to live as independently as possible.

### **D: Be specific**

Prepare your thoughts, in writing, before the meeting. Practice what you want to say and then say it in the same way you practice. Be prepared to ask for what you, or your loved one needs to achieve specific goals.

If meeting with an elected official, be prepared to ask them to intervene in a specific situation or to support a particular piece of legislation. You can get up-to-date information on what the issues are and who you should seek to meet with from [nyfamilyrights.org](http://nyfamilyrights.org) or [cpofnys.org](http://cpofnys.org).

# Messaging



## A: What is messaging?

Messaging is something that you always say, in an opening or closing statement, or in answer to specific questions. It is a tool that will help you stay on point and focused in any meeting or conversation. Messaging should always be written first.

## B: Stay focused

These face-to-face meetings will have time limits. Since each person's situation is unique, and can be complicated, it is important that you are prepared and focused. Allowing the conversation to drift from the primary purpose of the meeting can lead to an unsatisfactory outcome and reduced independence and opportunity for you or your loved one with disabilities.

## C: The rule of 3

Messaging follows the rule of 3; a 3 by 3 form.

Prepare exactly 3 messages – assertions or lofty goals/principles, each with 3 or more proof points, facts, statistics, or anecdotes. For example:

### Message Point #1:

My 35-year old son has been waiting for a residential placement for 13 years. That is not acceptable.

- He has been offered four placements, all inappropriate for him
- We were not offered a residential placement for him until he was 33
- All four opportunities offered in the past 2 years have been in residences with three people, over 65 who are non-verbal.

### Message Point #2

He deserves, to live in the community near family and friends, like other people.

- My son is very social but he has some complicated medical issues
- He volunteers at three non-profits
- He likes to go out with friends

### Message Point #3

- The Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision requires that he live in the most integrated setting in his community.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be made for him
- Medicaid is an entitlement program but if there aren't any supports available it only means my son is entitled to nothing.

## D: Check for accuracy

Double check your message for accuracy and understandability. by having coworkers, family, and friends review and critique it.

## E: Practice

Practice and learn your message so that you can present it without sounding like you are reciting it.

Do not rely on memory; you must have the message points on paper and practice your delivery.

## PART 4

# *Delivering your message*



### **A: Keep on track**

Once prepared and rehearsed, don't deviate from your messaging during any interview or conversation.

Your answer to any question should refer back to your prepared messaging. Don't bring in any other topics, even if youth think they might be related – don't deviate from the primary message.

### **B: Define parameters**

Begin any conversation or interview specifying what you are prepared to discuss, as well as what you cannot or will not discuss.

### **C: What kind of questions are people likely to get?**

Answer or acknowledge a question simply, usually in one sentence. Then go immediately back to your messaging.

For example:

A government bureaucrat or elected official asks: "The State can't give everyone exactly what they want all the time. Why didn't you just take one of the houses offered?"

Answer with one of your message points.

He deserves, and the law promises him an appropriate and safe place of his own. You could offer examples of why the houses were not right: Every place he was offered was inappropriate. They were miles from his volunteer jobs and friends, blocks from any public transportation, and the other residents had nothing in common with him

### **D: Flagging**

Emphasize your key points by introducing them with attention-getting phrases like "The key point I want to make..." "The most important thing I would like you to remember..."

### **E: Repeat**

Repeat your messaging and proof points. "I want to say this again because it is very important..."

### **F: Pause or stop for emphasis**

Feel free to pause or stop for emphasis after delivering a message point or proof point.

### **G: Correct misinformation**

Don't sweat the small stuff but, if someone you are speaking to makes a significant error, correct it before reverting to your messaging.

### **H: Be honest**

Don't hesitate to say, "I don't know," if you don't have the information. Politely offer to get the information and call or e-mail the person.