



Being Heard

A Self-Advocacy Guide for Carers

Dumfries &

Galloway

Together is
Better


What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is about getting your own voice heard by speaking up for yourself, making choices and being independent.

There are a number of services and organisations that you may come into contact with when caring for someone. These can include social services, health services, GPs, education departments, Third and Independent Sector organisations, the Department for Work and Pensions as well as specialist teams within these organisations.

Carers often say that dealing with services and organisations can be confusing, stressful and frustrating and may not know what services are available to them when they first start their caring role.

Many Carers find that even though they have rights to be involved in the decisions around the person they are caring for, it can still be difficult for them to feel properly involved and heard.



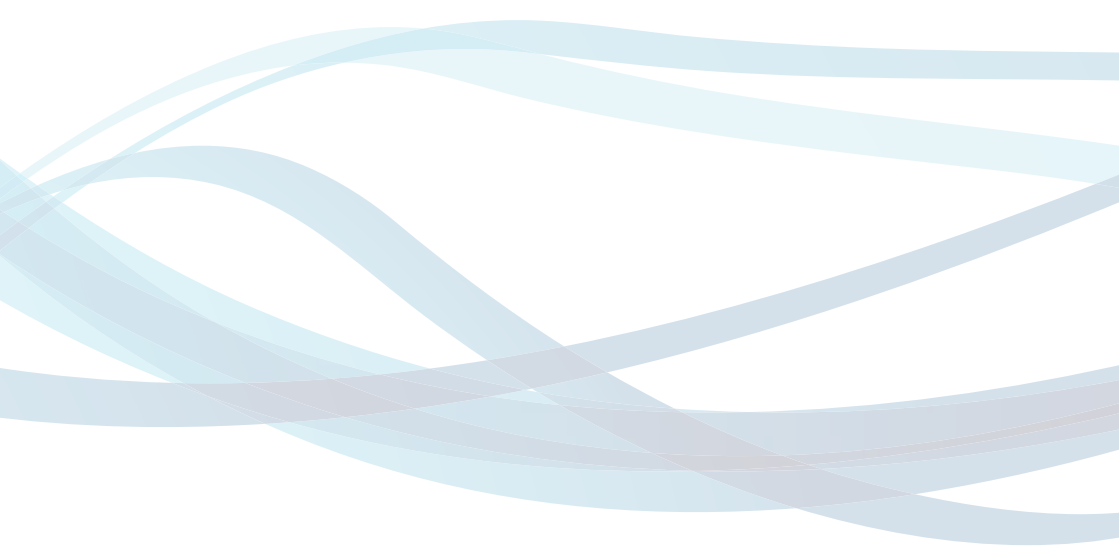
So how can you best get your voice heard?

- By being assertive
- By using negotiation skills
- By being aware of how you think and communicate

To help you be assertive it is important to recognise that you have rights. You have the right to ask for an Adult Carer Support Plan (previously known as a Carers Assessment) and you have the right to ask for an assessment of need for the person you care for.

You also have the right to ask for flexible working if you are in employment and your views and feelings should be taken into consideration.

As citizens of Scotland, everyone has rights in areas such as in education, religion, gender, consumer issues, race and disability. There are national care standards that seek to respect the dignity and independence of people receiving services.



Here are some helpful tips to be assertive:

- **State what you want clearly** – so instead of, “I feel I can’t cope” you could say something like “I really need respite in the next month or I really feel I won’t be able to carry on.”
- **Express your opinions honestly** – if you disagree with someone, do not pretend to agree. You could say something like “I don’t see it like that because....”
- **Use ‘I’ not ‘we’** as this is more direct and open. “I would like you to arrange an Adult Carer Support Plan.”
- **Be specific** – “I would like go on a managing stress course as soon as possible” provides a clear picture about what you are looking for.
- **Keep it objective** – so leave out personal comments and judgements and stick to the facts. “I was not satisfied with the quality of hospital food my Mum received” rather than “the food was disgusting...”
- **Confirm what has been agreed** at the end of meetings, so ask for action points or make your own and summarise them at the end of a discussion.

Using negotiation skills

Negotiation is a dialogue between at least two parties that agrees a course of action. We all negotiate in our day to day lives with our families, friends, school and workplace and also as consumers of goods and services.

The important thing to remember is that all parties must gain something of value to make a negotiation successful.

Preparation

The secret to good negotiating is preparing your case beforehand. So write down:

What do you want? Be as specific as you can and do as much research around the topic as you can. For further information and advice contact your local Carers organisations (see back page for details).

What do you need? What is the minimum from the discussion that you would be willing to settle for?

How is the other person/party likely to respond? Based on what you know about the other person/party, how are they likely to respond?

During the negotiation

If you can, take someone with you for moral support or to take notes. Give yourself enough time to put your case forward, to explain the situation and your request.

Try not to speak for too long as people may stop listening to you:

- Listen to the response and look for areas of agreement.
- Are there any concessions you have come armed with that could be offered?
- Does this still mean you are going away with something worthwhile?

Also, remember the assertiveness tips:

- be specific
- objective
- clear

Very often Carers put their own needs to the bottom of the list which means that their needs are not even spoken about!

However, as Carers are vital for the well-being of the person being cared for, it isn't selfish asking for things for yourself, it's sensible and necessary.

- Ask for time out if things are getting too much. Five minutes time out can help you process what has been said. You could ask that a meeting be re-scheduled when you have had the chance to consider what has been discussed.
- Focus on your breathing and try to 'step back' from the emotion, as if you are sitting next to the emotion, rather than it occupying you.
- You can try being open, but objective, about how you are feeling "I am feeling frustrated right now as I feel that you are not taking on board what I am trying to say".



You can get more information on self advocacy by accessing the Carers Scotland Carers Self-Advocacy Toolkit

www.carerscotland.org/scotland/training-resources

As an unpaid Carer you may be entitled to free short training courses. If you would like training around assertiveness, self advocacy, attending meetings or any other topic that is relevant to your caring role then please contact Care Training Consortium
Email: info@caretrain.co.uk

If you feel that putting these Self Advocacy tips into practice is too much for you to deal with, you can access the Independent Advocacy service at

Dumfries & Galloway Advocacy Service

9 Church Crescent, Dumfries, DG1 1DF

Tel: 01387 247 237

info@dgadvocacy.co.uk

www.dgadvocacy.co.uk



Further Resources and Support

Dumfries and Galloway Carers Centre

2/6 Nith Street Dumfries DG1 2PW 01387 248 600

Young Carers Project

Young Adults and Adult Carers Centre

Hospital Support Project - Support and Advice Centre

Carers Centre 2/6 Nith Street Dumfries DG1 2PW 01387 248 600

Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary Main lobby 01387 241384

Drop-in sessions with dementia nurse consultant, fourth Monday of the month (excluding public holidays)

Carers for Adults with Mental Ill-Health

Support In Mind Kaleidoscope, Mountainhall, Bankend Road, Dumfries. DG1 4AL 01387 249513

Carers for those with Alzheimer's or Dementia

Alzheimer Scotland, 1 Gordon Street, Dumfries. DG1 1EG
01387 261303

Carers for those with Dementia, Mental Ill Health and Learning Disabilities

User and Carer Involvement (UCI)

81-85 Irish Street, Dumfries DG1 2PQ 01387 255330

Carers for Children with Disabilities - Parent Inclusion Network

The Hub 24 - 26 Friars Vennel Dumfries DG1 2RL 01387 252683