

Tips for Effective Child Advocacy

Be a Voice for Children!

Being a Child Advocate

A Child advocate takes action to improve the lives of children.

- ❖ Child advocates are a voice for children who can't vote or speak for themselves.

You will be more productive as an advocate if you see this work as a long-term commitment, rather than something that will be 'solved' quickly.

- ❖ Advocating for children's rights will be a long process. You don't have to and won't accomplish everything at once.

Actions for Child Advocates

Develop relationships with legislators who are important to your issue.

- ❖ The key to advocacy is relationships.

There are several ways to build relationships take action on specific issue:

- ❖ Meet with your legislator
- ❖ Call your legislator
- ❖ Write your legislator
- ❖ Email your legislator
- ❖ Write, email or call the governor
- ❖ Write a letter to the editor (local or statewide paper) on your issue
- ❖ Attend "Days on the Hill" and rallies
- ❖ Ask questions at legislators' Town Hall Forums, Candidates Forums etc.
- ❖ Get your friends and family involved!

Tips For Effective Advocacy

Be informed.

- ❖ It is important to know your facts.
- ❖ Use credible information. Some credible sources are:
 - Children's Defense Fund website: www.childrensdefense.org
 - North Dakota KIDS COUNT website: www.ndkidscount.org

Limit your message to a maximum of two issues per interaction.

Be aware of the arguments AGAINST your issue so you can better respond to the policymaker's questions.

Give straightforward and honest answers to difficult questions.

- ❖ It is ok to say "I don't know" if you don't know the answer to a question. You can offer to find out answers and get back to the legislator.

Remember, policymakers are regular people.

- ❖ Treat them how you would want to be treated.
- ❖ Expect differences in personality, level of interest in your issues etc.

The policymaker's staff is critical to your effort.

- ❖ Treat them with respect, they can be very helpful.

Ask the policymaker for her or his position on and understanding of the issue and listen to gain insight.

Ask for a commitment (e.g. to vote on a bill, to sign on to a bill etc.)

- ❖ If they decline, encourage them to think about it. Let them know you will keep in touch!

Remember: FIVE letters can win the day.

- ❖ Most policymakers don't get five personal letters on any issue. Send five letters from people concerned about the issue and you can win the argument.

Send a Thank You note for meetings.

Let lawmakers know what you think when they do take action on your issue.

- ❖ Ideas: write a letter to the editor, call, write a letter or thank you note

Communication DO's and DON'TS

Prepare what you plan to say and practice before your call or visit.

Identify yourself as a constituent

- ❖ Lawmakers respond the most to voters who can keep them in office!

Tell the policymaker WHY the issue is important and provide concrete examples.

- ❖ Speak from your heart; personalize the issue as much as possible.
- ❖ Tell your story or the story of real people are impacted by legislators' decisions.

Use bill numbers when possible

- ❖ Bills that have been introduced have a "file number"

Keep your communications short and to the point.

Bring a "leave-behind" with facts about your issue.

- ❖ Leave a "fact sheet" with the policymaker when you are finished.

DO NOT:

- ❖ Argue with the policymaker—give information calmly and clearly.
- ❖ Use form letters
- ❖ Insist on a call back