



Webinar: Working for Change Using the Power of a Personal Story

PACER Center

Agenda

You will learn:

- What advocacy is and why it's important
- Why changing systems is important
- How to use the power of a personal story to make positive changes

What is an Advocate?

Advocates speak up for themselves or others to make things better.



An Effective Advocate:

- Has a strong knowledge base
- Organizes information
- Listens
- Asks questions
- Respects others
- Works with others
- Shares own experiences

What is Systems Advocacy?



Changing policies, laws, or rules (regulations) that determine how services will be provided to families of children with disabilities.

Systems Advocacy: Terms To Know

- Law
- Rules
- Policy



Systems Advocacy: Why Do It?

“Be the change you want to see in the world.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

Parents can:

- share “real world experience” on how a system is working or not working
- suggest ideas for improving services
- encourage other parents to participate

Influencing a System: Does It Make a Difference?

- "People do have an impact. Elected officials can examine statistics, but it's the stories told by individuals that have the potential to move elected officials by appealing to the heart." -**Pam Rykken, school board member**
- "Our constituents' concerns are important to us as we consider and make decisions that impact them and our community. We welcome their input and find it extremely helpful in thoughtful decision making." -**Cynthia Bremer, city council member**
- "Nothing matters more to elected officials, like myself, than hearing real stories from real constituents." -**Mindy Greiling, state representative**

Who Do We Talk to About Making Things Better?



- School board
- City council or park board
- County boards
- Elected officials (local, state, federal)
- Medical staff
- State commissioners

“Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. It is the only thing that does.”

-Margaret Mead

The Power of the Personal Story



Why Use a Personal Story?

**“Tell me a fact, and I’ll learn.
Tell me a truth, and I’ll believe.
But tell me a story, and it will live in my
heart forever.”**

- Indian Proverb

Personal Stories are Powerful!

Personal Stories:

- Hold attention
- Trigger feelings
- Are memorable
- Influence others



Personal Story Tips

Be brief and clear

- Time is limited
- Choose one thing to talk about
- Keep sentences short
- Use words, not acronyms



Story Outline: the Beginning

- Who are you?
- Who is your child?
- What is working?



Story Outline: the Middle

Problem

- What isn't working?
- Define the problem clearly
- Give specific examples

Solution

- What do you think will help?

Story Outline: the End

Say thanks and ask:

- Will they agree to try to solve the problem?
- Do they need more information?
- Are they not willing to work on solving this problem?

You Can Do It!

- Practice in front of a mirror or with a trusted family member or friend.
- Be yourself. Your story is unique!
- Try to remain calm.
- Stay flexible.
- Find a supportive person to go with you.
- Breathe and speak “your truth.”

Who Should Hear Your Story?

Find the right audience. Ask:

- Who makes decisions in this “system”?
- Who has the power to support the changes I want to see?



Other Ways to Share Your Story

- Tell your story to an advocate and give permission for her to share it
- Join a focus or other small group and share your story
- Write a letter to a publication using your story to make a point
- Other ideas?

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see in the world.”**

~Mahatma Gandhi

Contact Information

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Thank you!

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