

# 10 STEPS



to

## Effective Self-Advocacy



### Self-Advocacy

SPEAKING OR ACTING ON YOUR OWN BEHALF TO IMPROVE YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

*Being a self-advocate means you are able to direct your employment goals with the help of your counselor, and discuss concerns and questions you may have about services and your rights.*



### Self-Esteem

HAVING CONFIDENCE AND SATISFACTION IN YOURSELF.

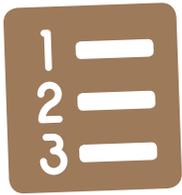
*Self-esteem, along with hard work and dedication, can help you become successfully employed and independent.*



### Self-Determination

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE YOUR ACTIONS AND ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR YOURSELF.

*Self-determination means that you use information to make choices about your goals and plan to become independent and have control of your life.*



# 10 STEPS to Effective Self-Advocacy

Your Rehabilitation Counselor wants to help you succeed in life. Following these steps to self-advocacy will help you navigate your time with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and teach you skills for employment and everyday life.

## 1. Believe In Yourself

- You are worth it! You can do it!

## 2. Learn Your Rights

- If you do not understand information or explanations provided, say so.
- If you need an accommodation, ask for it.
- Ask your Rehabilitation Counselor about your rights.
- Use libraries, the internet, e-mail groups and social networking. Put yourself on mailing lists to receive updates about topics important to you.
- Educate yourself with reliable information concerning your rights under the law.
- Attend classes or workshops.
- Use peer-run, family and community support programs, referral or crisis hotlines, advocacy groups, and service providers.
- Contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) through the Disability Law Center by calling 800-662-9080 to request more information about your rights.

## 3. Discuss Your Questions and Concerns

- Be prepared. Write down your questions or an outline of your concerns.
- Assess your position. Make sure to review the facts and come to your meetings prepared with information such as a timeline of events, an outline, etc.
- Don't let your emotions get in the way of stating your point clearly. You may need to take a deep breath and take a moment to gather your thoughts.
- Raise your questions and concerns respectfully by phone, in person, writing a letter, or email. Start the

conversation with your Rehabilitation Counselor so they are aware of your concerns.

- Schedule a meeting. Meeting with your Rehabilitation Counselor in person can be an effective way to advocate for yourself. Plan what you are going to say. Practice with friends and family, or even in front of the mirror. Dress for the occasion, be on time, and always feel free to bring someone for support. Have two-way, open communication.
- Be polite. Introduce yourself and anyone with you.
- Learn the person's name you are communicating with and ask politely for what you want or need.
- Listen carefully when explanations or answers are given. If you do not understand something, ask to clarify or to get the details in writing.
- Write down the name, and keep track of, the person you spoke with and their contact information.
- Keep a copy of any agreements for your records.

## 4. Be Effective on the Phone

- Before calling, write down the key points you want to say, along with your most important questions.
- Stay calm and be polite. Keep your message clear and focused.
- If you leave a voice message keep it brief, and make sure to include your name and a contact number where you can accept calls.
- Be willing to listen. What you hear may be as important as what you have to say.
- Always get the name and position of the person you are talking to. Ask when you should expect action, or when they will be able to get back to you on any questions.
- Thank the person for being helpful. If the person cannot help you, ask politely for someone who can.
- Keep a record of your call and follow up as needed.

## 5. Put it in Writing

- Provide information in writing by email or letter. Keep it short and to the point. Begin and end your message by stating your request or concern. Make sure you use full words and sentences (no “text talk”) so that you are clear.
- Talk to your Rehabilitation Counselor first and allow them time to respond. If others need to be involved or you want to make them aware, you may send copies to others as needed.
- Only copy your message to people who can assist you. Be cautious with sharing confidential information.
- Keep a copy for your records.

## 6. Get Information, Decisions, or Agreements in Writing

- If any decisions or agreements were made concerning your VR case, ask for it to be put in writing or to send you documentation. This way you have something to refer back to on your VR agreements.
- If you are told that a decision is based on a law, policy or procedure, ask for a copy.
- If you disagree with a decision, ask for it in writing along with the reasons for the decision.
- Remember to keep copies for your records, and that this information is personal and confidential.

## 7. Use and Understand the Appeal Process

- Remember that your Rehabilitation Counselor is your first point of contact. They may not understand your needs or concerns if you have not discussed them with him/her.
- If you feel you are not getting a straight answer, thank the person for their time and ask to speak to someone else that can address your concerns.

## 8. Know Your Appeal Rights and Responsibilities

- If you do not get a satisfactory decision, ask what you need to do in order to appeal the decision. We are able to review any decisions and walk you through the appeal process as needed. Request clear written information about the dispute or appeal process and your rights to appeal a decision you believe to be wrong.

- Be sure you understand the responsibilities you have while participating in the VR program.
- Provide information in writing by email or letter. Keep it short and to the point. Begin and end your message by stating your request or concern.
- Remember, “rights” does not mean “entitled.” You have rights and we will provide that information; however, the VR program is individualized to meet your employment and disability needs agreed upon by you and your Rehabilitation Counselor.
- If you need assistance advocating or disputing a decision made by VR, you may contact the Client Assistance Program at 1-800-662-9080.

## 9. Follow Up and Say Thank You

- Keep track of key deadlines and time frames. This is your life and your VR plan so remember to follow up.
- Remember to be polite and thank people along the way. Recognize those individuals that provided helpful information and good service.

## 10. Ask for Help

- If you need assistance, remember to ask for help. Your Rehabilitation Counselor may not know you are struggling or not understanding something unless you tell them. We want to see you succeed, so remember to advocate for yourself and understand the VR process.



Vocational rehabilitation provides services to eligible individuals with disabilities to assist them in preparing for and obtaining employment, and increasing their independence.

