



## Meeting with Officials and Professionals

It isn't always easy to get what you want when dealing with other people. Most people will be helpful and will try their best to deliver an efficient service. Unfortunately they will not always succeed. Sometimes people avoid answering questions because they don't know the answer or because they feel it's better not to worry you, or they think you will not understand.

### Planning and Preparing: Introducing the Caring with Confidence DICE Plan

It's a good idea to get a few things clear before you start:

- What do you want to change?
- What do you want to happen instead?
- Are you sure this is possible?
- Do you need more information?
- Do you know where to get the information you need?
- How will you go about making the change you want?
- What might happen as a result?

Remember, it's not always a *person* you need to influence – it might be an organisation or a committee or a policy (a way of working). The **DICE Plan** can help you find out what you need to understand about important decisions:

- **D** is for **Decision**: Where is the final decision made / who makes it?
- **I** is for **Influencing**: The person or thing people listen to who can unlock the situation or make things happen.
- **C** is for **Contacts**: The first thing you need to do or the person you need to contact to make this happen.
- **E** is for **End Result**: The change or single thing that will really benefit you or the person you care for.

Start with the end in mind and work up the list. Make a plan to get to where you need to be. Why not try this out with a real issue to see if it works for you? Ask for help if you get stuck. As you work through your plan you should get a better understanding of who the Influencer and the Decision-maker are. So you might need to change your plan.

## **Think Ahead**

Keep a journal (a simple note book is far better than loose bits of paper which might get lost). Make sure your note book records are always up to date. Work through your DICE Plan and jot down some key points before you make a telephone call or attend a meeting.

Write down medical symptoms and events, incidents or problems when they occur.

## **Using the Telephone**

- Have a pen and your note book ready by the phone so you are ready to make a note of every call.
- Ask the full name and the job title of the person you speak with. A first name is not enough. Also remember to ask and record where they are located – they may be based in a remote call centre. You may be automatically connected to one of several call centres.
- Always add the time and date of your conversation and write down the contact telephone number you used. This is another way of tracking down the person you spoke with just in case you have to call again or you are asked to prove that you made the call.
- Make a note of the main points of what is said and ask for things to be repeated if you are not clear about what you have been told.
- Always make detailed notes straight away.

## **Preparing for a Meeting**

Do you need help from an advocate, a friend or a relative? If you have to post an important letter use recorded delivery post; email works too. You can also obtain proof of postage when you post a letter at the Post Office. Ask for a receipt when you deliver important documents by hand. Ask officials to photocopy documents on your behalf.

Carefully read any information you have been sent and if you can, do some extra research. Visit your library or use the internet; get someone to help you if you need help with this too.

Ask questions if you do not understand something. You can prepare these before the meeting, together with points you want to make.

Find out if there are other sources of help locally - there usually are (Omega collects feedback from carers about the places the care-givers we work with go for help). Seek advice from others. People you know might have had similar experiences; be prepared to ask organisations like your local Citizens Advice Bureau, or specialist nurses and other professionals working in the community. Are there special circumstances? If your health has suffered as a result of a problem, seek medical advice.

If you need help with English, ask before your meeting. Ask what information will be needed in advance of a meeting. When you need important information, think

carefully about the words you will use. Collect evidence to support any issues you would like to raise. Take photographs or make a short video.

Prepare some questions. Are you sure you know the right questions to ask? Remember to do your homework or ask an advisor.

If you think you will face a long wait, be prepared. Make sure someone can step in to help you with your caring role or ask in advance if you can be seen as soon as you arrive and negotiate the possibility of splitting a long meeting into two to make sure you will not be away from home for too long.

### **Establish the Facts**

If there is anything you are not sure about, why not say something like:

- Can I check that I've understood what you said?
- Can you explain it again?
- What does that mean?
- Please send me a letter about this.

If someone tells you something can't be done, you should consider asking for a written explanation. This might help you work out whether the person you are dealing with fully understands the problem.

What is the legal basis for a decision? What does the law say? Establish whether there is a statutory duty (this is where someone has to do something by law) and remember to get help if you need it. If a particular regulation or law applies, it is reasonable to ask the person or organisation referring to it for a copy.

### **During the Meeting**

Have a list of questions and important points in front of you at the start. Write down what you want to happen and tick off items as you cover them to make sure you don't forget anything.

Keep asking questions. Make sure you clearly say what you feel, think, need or want without putting others down. When you ask a question listen carefully to the answer. Was the question you asked answered correctly? Did you understand the answer? Why not ask the question 'have I overlooked anything?' If you are not sure about anything remember to ask again. It is up to you to make sure you don't leave until you are certain you understand what has been said.

You can say something like: "Can you say that again? I still don't understand". You can say this more than once. You must understand why every important decision which affects you or the person you look after has been made.

Find out what happens next. What is the next stage and when will you hear the outcome?

## **When Things Go Wrong**

Stay calm. When a decision is reached that you do not understand or do not agree with, ask for an explanation. Ask for unfair decisions to be reviewed. Find out how to appeal. Find out how to complain if you think you have been treated unfairly. Seek legal advice.

You might contact a specialist advisor you trust, the Community Legal Service (CLS) Helpline 0845 345 4345, or your local Citizens Advice Bureau, or you can write to your Member of Parliament.

If you read “The Selfish Pig’s Guide to Caring”, an easy to read book by Hugh Marriott, you quickly realise there isn’t always a proper system - just an unconnected set of people trying to help, but often just as confused as you are.

## **Some Things to Look Out For**

This is a list of some useful things that it might be helpful to find out more about. Ask for help if you don’t understand what they mean to you and your situation.

- Eligibility criteria
- Are there any safeguarding issues? Will vulnerable people suffer harm as the result of a decision?
- Do you fully understand how a service works?
- How do you complain?
- How can you appeal?
- Do time limits apply?
- Examine service standards.

**A DICE Plan** is just one of many useful tools Omega facilitators can help you to use. Contact Omega to find out more.

## **Top Tips**

- Make notes
- Ask for help when you need it
- Do your homework
- Be prepared to list questions and key points
- Always make sure you understand
- Stay calm
- Listen carefully

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