

CARER VOICE NETWORK

'BE THE VOICE' GUIDE FOR CARERS



**Co-designed
with carers**

Making your voice heard as a carer

There will be times when you need to speak up for the person you care for or for yourself as a carer. This guide, designed with carers, offers some helpful tips to support you to have your voice heard at meetings.



Meeting Stages

Whenever there is involvement with meetings, there are three clearly defined stages - before, during, after - that need to be considered.

Stage 1 - Before

Meeting Agenda: This is a document which lists, in order, the matters to be discussed during the meeting and who will be in attendance. You can request a copy of the agenda from the meeting organiser, including any previous meeting notes (also known as minutes) if the meeting is part of an on-going sequence.

Adding to the Agenda: After reviewing the agenda, if there is anything that you would like added, ensure you get in touch with the meeting organiser to put forward any additional agenda items. Some meetings can be longer in duration, so if you need frequent breaks, make this known so it is added into the meeting agenda.

Accessibility and Communication Support Needs: If the meeting is in person, ensure that it is accessible to your needs. For example, is the meeting on the ground floor or is it in a room upstairs where there are stairs to climb with no lift access. For language and communication needs, make clear if you need documents in large font or easy read, or if you need a language interpreter, including British Sign Language (BSL).

Preparing in Advance: Once you know what matters will be discussed, allow time to prepare for the meeting. This can include preparing any questions relating to the notes; gathering information or opinions from others, including any case studies; or, researching for further information that will be relevant to the meeting discussions.

Stage 1 - Before

- Understand your role in the meeting and the role of others who are attending and why (e.g. there could be staff in training present and their attendance may not be relevant or necessary).
- Plan an introductory script for yourself, that you can either practise in advance or have written down to read out.
- Write down a list of the top three things you want to discuss during the meeting. This will help you focus and maximise the time you have.
- Arrange for someone to cover your caring role, if needed.
- If you are working, ensure you have asked for sufficient time off as you may need to discuss the points raised with a friend or family member after the meeting.
- Check the travel to and from the venue and parking options (if in-person meeting). Look up the venue on Google Maps, or if local, visit or drive by the venue to familiarise yourself.
- Check the online joining instructions and link (if online meeting). Ensure your device (laptop, tablet or phone) are charged and your internet connection is stable.
- Check the meeting etiquette guidelines, if available.
- Take, or have ready, items to make yourself comfortable, especially for longer meetings (e.g. bottled water, a cushion, some snacks).
- Take, or have ready, a pen and paper for notes. If wishing to record the audio from the meeting to review later, then ask for permission in advance from the meeting organiser.
- Alternatively, see if you can bring along another person to act as note taker so you can give your full attention during the meeting.
- Take, or have ready, any requested and relevant paperwork with you, including any copies you may wish to share with those attending. Or share these in advance with the meeting organiser.
- Send apologies if you cannot attend. If allowed, arrange someone appropriate to attend in your place.

Being on Time: Arrive early, introduce yourself to others, it will help build your confidence and get relaxed and comfortable. Make yourself known to the chairperson (the person in charge of the meeting) and make clear who you are representing.

Having Confidence: Speak clearly and simply. Smile and make eye contact with everyone. Have the confidence to ask if you are not clear on a point; ensure you ask for clarification as you want to avoid passing on any vague information or even incorrect information. Feel confident to challenge but remain positive and composed and give thanks. Do not be intimidated.

Listening and Taking Notes: Think about how you can do this effectively so that you can focus on listening. Think about how you will capture the key points as you will be needing them later for feedback. If allowed, have someone with you who can make notes.

Following Up: Agree deadlines for actions (tasks from the meeting) and who is responsible to carry out those actions.

Other things to also consider during the meeting...

- Clarify that people have understood what you have said.
- Consider appropriate self-disclosure, as it may not be appropriate to share certain things.
- Be confident to ask for any clarification on terms/jargon/abbreviations/medical language.
- Calmly address anybody who might talk over you.
- Be confident to ask for a 5-minute break if needed to help you refocus.
- Be prepared to offer solutions.
- Raise any other points at the end of the meeting – there is usually an 'Any Other Business' section.
- If you are hard of hearing or have problems seeing anything written up or shown on PowerPoint (if being used) – raise this before the start of the meeting.
- Request any minutes (notes) that are taken at the meeting.
- If appropriate give feedback on the meeting to the chairperson and thank them.

Stage 3 - After

Don't assume that points discussed during a meeting will be put into action or even remembered. To ensure follow-through and accountability, consider the following steps after a meeting:

- Check whether you achieved your objectives.
- Minutes don't always capture everything, so write down your own notes on the key things discussed whilst they are fresh in your mind. You can then cross-check these against the minutes taken.
- If it was a difficult meeting talk to someone who attended (or a trusted friend) to discuss the concerns.
- Give balanced feedback and/or circulate the minutes (or your own notes) to others (i.e., family members) if needed.
- Make a note of any action points and the due dates and add these to your calendar as a reminder.
- Reflect on what worked well and maybe what you need to do differently next time (e.g. doing some further research to help prepare for the next meeting).

Helpful Tips for Communication

- Be factual about what you don't like or agree with.
- Don't judge or exaggerate, just describe.
- Use "I" messages. For example, "*I disagree*" rather than "*You are wrong*".
- List behaviour, results, and feelings. For example, "*When you failed to show up on time as agreed, I had to stay behind and cancel my plans and I felt very frustrated and disappointed*".
- Ask open-ended questions. For example, "*What do you think of this idea?*" or "*What were the reasons for deciding this was a good idea?*"
- Communication isn't just verbal. Use body language and act confident even if you aren't feeling it.



Notes

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Making Carers Count

We put carers at the heart of all we do, and by sharing your ideas and insights, you can help create positive change for carers across West Sussex.

Be seen, heard, and included in what matters to you.

Join our Carer Voice Network today!

Scan the code to find out more

Visit www.carerssupport.org.uk
Email carerengagement@carerssupport.org.uk
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