

# Your Voice Matters

## Tips for Communicating with Medical Providers & Finding Support

Advocating for yourself can feel intimidating, especially when dealing with medical providers and navigating other areas of your life. However, your voice matters, and your needs deserve to be heard and addressed. This handout was created to provide you with practical tips and examples to help you advocate for yourself.

### Utilize the Buddy System

It can be overwhelming to go to doctor's appointments alone. Consider bringing a companion to your appointment like a trusted adult, family member, or advocate. They can offer support and help make sure your concerns are heard and understood.

**Example:** If you have a chronic illness and struggle to remember all your symptoms during appointments, having a buddy present can help provide additional perspective and ensure nothing gets overlooked.

**Example:** Also, your buddy can help by asking questions that you might not have thought about and can take notes about what was discussed during the appointment.

### Take Notes

In the rush of a medical appointment, it's easy to forget important questions or concerns. Before your appointment take notes about what you want to discuss with your doctor/provider. Write

down symptoms, questions about treatments or medications, and any other relevant information you want to talk about.

**Example:** Before your appointment, write down questions like, "What are the potential side effects of this medication?" or "Are there alternative treatment options we can explore?"

## Seeking Referrals

If you believe you need to see a specialist or require additional services, don't hesitate to ask your primary care doctor/provider for a referral. Explain your reasons clearly and advocate for the care you believe is necessary for your well-being.

**Example:** You might say, "I've been experiencing constant/frequent symptoms that I think may require a specialist. Can you refer me to a specialist on my condition? What type of specialist would you recommend?"

## Requesting Records

You have the right to access your medical records. If you're switching providers or seeking a second opinion, request copies of your medical records. This will help you make decisions based on the information you know and will ensure that your medical care is not disrupted.

**Example:** You might say, "I'd like to request a copy of my medical records for my personal records and to share with my new doctor. Could you please guide me through the process?"

### How to request records:

- **Call Your Provider:** Reach out to your current or former medical provider's office either by phone, email, or in person.

- **Identify the Process:** Inquire about their process for requesting medical records. They may have a specific form to fill out or department that manages this type of request.
- **Complete Necessary Forms:** If required, fill out any necessary forms accurately and completely. Provide specific details such as your name, date of birth, the timeframe for the records you need, and where you want them sent.
- **Submit Request:** Submit your request via the preferred method by the doctor/provider. Be sure to keep a copy of the request for your records.
- **Follow Up:** If you don't receive a response within the expected timeframe, follow up with the provider's office to ensure your request is being processed.

## Seeking Second Opinions

If you're not sure about a diagnosis or treatment plan, seeking a second opinion might give you clarity and peace of mind. You can ask your provider's office for recommendations or contact your insurance provider for a list of potential options.

You can choose to have a direct conversation with your doctor/provider about wanting to explore a second opinion; however, if you are uneasy discussing this with them, you can consider talking to a family member or someone you trust for guidance on your options. They can help find and connect you with a doctor/provider that can offer you a second opinion.

### How to seek a second opinion:

- **Research New Doctor/Provider:** Look for specialists or

doctor/provider who specialize in your condition or area of concern. You can get recommendations from your current provider or consult with advocacy groups, like the [ADA National Network](#).<sup>1</sup> If you have medical insurance, ensure that they are covered by your insurance. You may contact your insurance provider to ask. The new doctor/provider may also be able to provide this information.

- **Schedule Appointment:** Contact the new provider's office to schedule a consultation or second opinion appointment.
- **Prepare Important Information:** Gathered your medical records, labs, imaging, test results, or notes from previous doctor/provider to share with this new provider.
- **Ask Questions:** Do not hesitate to ask questions about your condition, treatment options, and any concerns you may have.
- **Consider Your Options:** After receiving the second opinion, carefully consider the recommendations provided by the provider. Compare them with those of your primary provider and make an informed decision about your next steps.

### **Building a Support System:**

It is essential to build a support system that can help you not only with the practical things in life but also provide you with support during difficult moments. A support system can be a group of people, family members, friends, and others who can bring real and lasting help and support to you. These people

<sup>1</sup> The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-National Network: <https://adata.org/find-your-region>.

(your support system) will be there in tough times or significant moments in your life (good and bad), to support and provide you comfort.

### **How to build your support system:**

- **Your Support System:** Identifying those who make up your support system is step number one. It does not have to be your family and friends. If you do not have family support or if your friends are few or far away, consider your neighbors, classmates, teachers, school counselor, church members, or other trusting members of the community that you live in.
  - Write down the names of those who make up your support system.
  - Using the names you have listed, write down what supportive role they play (e.g., emotional support role, encouragement role or their role is to provide you with advice on your social and personal life).

**Advocating for yourself is not always easy, but it's  
incredibly empowering.**

**You can use these tips and examples to help you advocate  
for your needs, make informed decisions, and take control  
of your health and well-being!**