



TEACHING SELF-ADVOCACY TO FAMILIES: TIPS FOR OMBUDSMEN

As a means of empowering family members, long-term care ombudsmen provide problem-solving skills so they can advocate on their own behalf and that of their loved one.

1. Explain that your role will be that of a “coach” to guide and help them try to resolve the problem on their own.
2. Go over the **Problem-Solving Process for Families** handout. Explain that this document provides a framework to help guide them when trying to resolve a problem. Review the problem-solving stages and steps with them.
3. Direct the family member’s attention to the **Problem-Solving Worksheet for Families** and explain that this worksheet is the problem-solving table provided in a format that allows space for notes and documentation. Share the Problem-Solving Worksheet-EXAMPLE document and remind them that they can refer to this document as an example of the problem-solving process in the future.
4. Using the **Problem-Solving Worksheet for Families**, guide families through Stage 1.

Tips for guiding family members through Stage 1:

- Ask families to describe their problem with as much detail as possible.
- Ask questions to draw out relevant information. If families have kept a journal, they can pull details from their notes.
 - Depending on the problem, families might not have enough facts. It may be appropriate to encourage them to do some more observation and information gathering; and to document what they see and what occurs before moving forward.
- Explain the importance of a written statement:
 - Ensures family members have facts and details that will assist in resolution
 - Focuses on facts, not opinion
 - Provides a written statement that supports their complaint and can be submitted to the state survey agency or other entity if necessary
 - Gives family members talking points based on fact, not emotion, for when they discuss the problem with nursing home administration and staff
- Share the **Documentation Tips for Family Members** resource.
- Encourage family members to prepare **a written statement of their own problem**.
- Offer to review their written statement and provide feedback regarding the statement’s objectivity.
- Inform family members that they do not need a law/regulation that relates to their concern; however, connecting a problem to the relevant laws or regulations can:
 - Strengthen their case that the issue needs to be resolved
 - Provide increased leverage
 - Help them respond when a facility staff member says, “the State won’t let us do that.”

- Give them more confidence because a law/regulation supports their advocacy

5. Guide families through Stage 2 of the problem-solving process.

Tips for guiding family members through Stage 2:

- Discuss the need to honor their loved one's wishes about what she would like to have happen and come up with a goal that is acceptable to both the resident and them.
- Use your experience to give family members feedback regarding the goal (e.g. make sure the goal benefits the resident).
- Share the **Strategies for Addressing Concerns in Long-Term Care Facilities** handout and, if necessary, work with family members to generate possible approaches that would be appropriate given the nature of their problem and the steps they have already taken. Review the approaches they generated for their problem, identify the pros/cons for each approach and discuss which approach may be the most appropriate for their concern.

6. Explain that their next step is to address their concern using the approach they've chosen. To help them prepare for taking action, you may consider the following:

- Review the following handouts with the family member:
 - **Guidelines For Presenting The Problem**
 - **Coaching-based Communication**
 - **Recommendations for Meeting with Facility Administration and Staff**
- Discuss potential resistance they may encounter from facility administration and staff regarding their concern and how to respond.

7. Encourage the family member to document what happens when they address their concern and to contact your office if they need additional assistance after trying to resolve their concern.