

Hints for navigating the bureaucracy

Phone Calls

Keep a log of phone calls including the date, who initiated the phone call, and a summary of what was said.

Always get the name of the person you speak to on the phone and a number where they can be reached.

If you have to leave a message when making a call and the call is not returned in two to three days, call again.

Before getting into an explanation or asking questions ask the person you call if they have a few minutes to talk with you. In addition to saving you from starting to explain things just to be told the person is on another call you can be more certain that the person is giving you their undivided attention.

Phone calls can be an effective way to address minor or routine issues. If you are dealing with a more complex problem, such as one that will take some time to explain or that may require significant negotiation, it is better to set up a face-to-face meeting.

Documents and Information

Unless required, never give original copies of documents. If you must give an original copy make a copy for yourself and make sure that the agency will return the document.

Keep copies of everything that you give to agencies (i.e. applications, letters, etc.). Keep copies of all correspondence you send and receive.

When asked to supply additional documentation or information, get it to the person or agency as quickly as possible. If a report or application makes its way to a "to do" pile while waiting for something it can be forgotten or go to the bottom of the priorities.

Make written correspondence brief and to the point.

Meetings and Appointments

Bring the meeting minutes or plans from the previous meeting for reference.

At the beginning of meetings introduce yourself to anyone you do not know and ask them what their position is.

Take notes at meetings. Don't be afraid to ask a person to slow down or repeat what is said. If someone is reading from a report it may be easier to ask for a copy of the report than to write down what is said.

Review the decisions that are made at the end of the meeting to make certain that you understand what is going to be done and who is doing each thing.

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If you have difficulty taking notes and keeping up with the conversation at the same time ask a friend or family member to sit in on the meeting and take notes for you.

Organize and write down questions for meetings and appointments with professionals. If you have a lot of questions you may want to ask to schedule in additional time (i.e. with doctors who are very busy). It may also help to mention to a doctor or therapist at the beginning of an appointment that you have some questions.

Don't sign anything unless you understand and agree.

Dealing With (or Preventing) Conflicts

Know who has the authority to make a change but always work your way through the chain of command first.

If you do not understand something, ask again until you do.

When in doubt, ask for a second opinion.

Be positive. Avoid being pessimistic or criticizing. Remember that everyone involved in your child's life has unique personalities and talents.

When negotiating for an addition or change to services explain clearly what your concern is and how you would like it to be addressed. Prior to a meeting or conversation gather information to support your request. Organize the information so that you can present the information in a logical way that will not take up a great deal of time in a meeting.

Do not start out making a request by asking a yes or no question. This will limit the options and the answer might be "no." Instead ask "what can be done" to address your concern. The team can discuss possible alternatives and may come up with a more creative option or at least come to the option you prefer independently.

When the team has agreed to make a change in a service plan or to implement a new intervention strategy make sure that the agreement is in writing.