



Build a Relationship with Your Legislators

You are an expert! Every day you deal with issues as a family member of someone with an intellectual or developmental disability. Your representatives need to learn from you about what the issues are and ways government can help. The key to having your voice heard is to build a relationship with your representatives.

1. Know your legislators and their staff.

- If you haven't met them, set up a meeting or write a letter to introduce yourself. This is especially important if the lawmaker is newly elected and may not know the issues. Legislative schedules can be tricky, so be patient when trying to make an appointment.

2. The information you provide your legislators should be understandable, accurate, and persuasive.

- Sharing personal stories about your family's experiences related to the issue is a good way to put a human face to a problem. When talking about services or programs don't assume your audience knows the lingo.

3. Don't be afraid to ask how they intend to vote on specific issues and why.

- *If they do not intend to vote your way*, continue to build your relationship and share information that may sway their opinion.
- *When legislators do support your position*, give them credit. Send them letters of thanks and share them with the editor of your local newspaper, comment on their support publicly. You would hate for them to feel unappreciated the next time you asked for their help.

4. Work with a legislator's staff.

- Staff members conduct research, draft bills, make recommendations on amendments and develop expertise in areas in which their legislator cannot devote the time.

5. Attend town council meetings, school board meetings, rallies, and other forums that are open to the public.

- This will give you the opportunity to meet key people involved in the issues, keep up to date on developments related to the issues, and voice your opinion.