

Advocacy Planning

The first step in self-advocacy is to identify what you need and want and the steps you will need to take in order to achieve that; in other words, to develop an Advocacy Plan.

It is worth spending some time on this planning stage as it forms the foundation for any self-advocacy.

This version of the toolkit focuses on accessing treatment so we will look at the steps involved in planning how to get the treatment you need. So, the first question to ask is: **what is the problem or issue?** And here we're looking at a situation where the problem/issue is: **I need to take action against my OCD.**

The next question might be: **what is my goal?** And here we'll look at: **I want to access treatment for my OCD.**

So, what information might you need to achieve that goal? Where might you find that information? Who can you ask that might have that information?

Following our example, you might want to:

- Look at information on the OCD Action website: www.ocdaction.org.uk to see what treatment is recommended for OCD or phone OCD Action's Helpline to ask: 0845 390 6232.
- Read the NICE guideline on OCD treatment to see where you might be on the stepped-care model for treatment and what is suggested in terms of best practice, both for medication and CBT.
- Find out about self-referring to an Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service if you're in England – you can find the contact details of your nearest IAPT on the NHS Choices website: www.nhs.uk and find more information about IAPT in this toolkit.
- Identify the key decision-maker in your situation – who is the person/organisation who can give you what you want i.e. prescribe medication, refer you to the CMHT etc?

If you have had treatment in the past:

- Find the dates and details of any CBT or medication you've had in the past for your OCD and take that to your GP. (Or that information might be in your medical notes and you could make a note to yourself to remember to ask the GP for the details when you see him/her).
- Exercise your right to choose a Consultant-led outpatient service anywhere in England (including IAPT, CMHT and even the Centre for Anxiety Disorders & Trauma (CADAT)) so you could look on the OCD Action or the NHS England website for more information about how it should work. In addition, it would be good to have some idea of the service you want to be referred to – you could call OCD Action's Helpline to discuss your possible options.

The next step is to decide on your strategy; what **action** are you going to take to resolve the issue, which in our example is: **to get the treatment you need**. It's useful at this point to think about the **Self-Advocacy Skills** you are going to need.

We have put together some useful resources in this toolkit to help you with:

Preparing for/Attending Meetings

Letter Writing

Making Phone Calls

Communication

Top Tips

- Make a note of the date, time, name role and contact details of everyone you speak to; ask for decisions to be put in writing and if your request for treatment is being refused ask for a written explanation as to the reasons for this – although your health provider does not have to comply with NICE guidance if it is a quality standard (as it is in the case of OCD & BDD) they should provide reasons for not following it.
 - Be prepared!
- Try to put as much as you can in writing – create a paper trail! Use the Letter Writing Tips, Making a Telephone Call, and Appointment/Meeting Worksheets to help you put treatment requests in writing and to keep a record of decisions made/actions promised in meetings and phone calls. Ask for all treatment decisions to be put in writing to you and keep all documentation.
 - Be persistent! If you're not happy with the response you get from the person you speak to – ask to speak to their Line Manager to resolve your issue with them. The NHS is a hierarchical structure – make use of it!
 - Or, if your GP feels they can't help – see someone else! If it's a group practice, you can see any GP and there may be one with a particular interest in and knowledge of mental health conditions.
 - Get some support – don't be afraid to ask for help and information from others.
 - Be organised!

And don't forget – you are the expert on you and your condition.