

About General Advocacy

Non-statutory advocacy: A guide for professionals
in Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough





Empowering individuals with General Advocacy Support

At VoiceAbility, alongside statutory advocacy we provide **General Advocacy** to ensure that everyone has a voice – especially those who may not qualify for statutory advocacy services.

Our tailored approach is designed to meet the specific needs of individuals facing challenges in navigating health, social care, and local services, including adults navigating the child protection system specifically Child Protection Conferences.*

What does General Advocacy include?

We deliver personalised, **short-term advocacy** aimed at addressing specific health, social care, or local service issues. Our focus is on helping individuals and carers make **informed decisions**, ensuring their voices are heard, and empowering them to take control of their lives.

Our approach is to provide **peer advocacy** and support individuals in developing their own **self-advocacy skills**, empowering them to represent themselves confidently in various situations. We do this by providing a range of accessible support.

Our advocacy methods include:

- **Self-help toolkits** and **online information**
- **Drop-in and group sessions**
- **Peer support** for shared learning
- **Virtual chat bot** for easy access to information
- **One-to-one support** from a volunteer or advocate may be considered in exceptional/specific circumstances
- **Telephone advice** for on-the-go support

Who benefits from General Advocacy?

General Advocacy supports individuals who may need assistance in making informed decisions regarding their health and social care, including those who face challenges navigating systems. This support is particularly useful for:

- **Adults with additional needs**, such as those with learning disabilities, autism, dementia, or mental health conditions
- **Individuals accessing adult care services or mental health services**, who require support in understanding their options and making decisions
- **Carers** with additional needs who may require support in understanding care processes, exploring options, and making decisions
- **People facing specific, short-term issues** related to health or social care, and those who need temporary support to resolve a challenge
- **Adults involved in complex systems**, such as the **Child Protection System**, especially when attending or participating in a **Child Protection Conference**

This advocacy service is designed to support individuals in gaining control over their decisions, ensuring they are fully informed and able to advocate for themselves in navigating complex care situations.



* A Child Protection Conference is a key part of the child protection process and aims to gather information, assess risks, and make decisions to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

Pre-Conference Support:

The Advocate will meet with the client prior to the conference to assess their needs and ensure they feel supported.

They will provide practical assistance to help prepare the client for the upcoming conference.

During the Conference:

The Advocate will attend the conference with the client, offering support and ensuring their voice is heard. They will guide the client through discussions and the decision-making process during the conference.

Post-Conference Support:

The Advocate will follow up with the client after the conference to clarify outcomes and outline next steps.

They will discuss the requirements of the Child Protection Plan and provide guidance on what the client needs to do moving forward.

The case will be closed once all necessary follow-up actions have been completed.

The time commitment for an advocate supporting the Child Protection Conference process will be a maximum of 10 hours. If further support is needed for an individual, a new referral will be required.

Other areas of the child protection process will be supported through self-advocacy, with guidance and resources provided to help individuals confidently express their needs and navigate the process.

Non-Statutory Support

Stage 1

Self-Help

People are empowered to advocate for themselves using the following resources:

- Self-advocacy toolkit
- VoiceAbility website
- Telephone
- Webchat
- Signposting to specialist support services for issues beyond the scope of advocacy

After these resources have been offered, case closed. However, if further support is required move to next stage.

Stage 2

Group Session

People who require further support will be offered group advocacy sessions covering a variety of topics. These sessions are delivered on various dates, locations, and topics, with an online option for flexibility. Within these group sessions one-off individual support is available with further signposting to specialist services when required.

After group support has been offered, case closed.

Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances, individuals may be offered short-term, one-to-one advocacy, with a focus on empowering them to advocate for themselves.

A maximum of two sessions will be offered for one-to-one support, which may involve either a volunteer or an advocate, depending on the referral need.

- Session 1 will focus on action planning, addressing the referral needs, understanding their rights and available options, and providing support to empower the individual.
- Session 2 will focus on reflecting on any outstanding actions and planning future steps for the individual to take in order to self-advocate.

After these sessions, case closed.

If additional support is needed for an individual, a new referral will be required and assessed to determine if further support is appropriate.

At every stage, our goal is to empower individuals to self-advocate, promoting independence and confidence in making informed decisions and in ensuring their voices are heard.



What is an advocate?

Advocates are independent professionals who work with people to help them understand their options, know their rights and say what they want.

Advocacy helps to make sure that people are involved as much as possible in decisions about their health and care.

An advocate does not:

- offer counselling or befriending
- offer legal advice
- tell the people they support what decisions to make
- tell health or social care professionals what decisions to make

In addition to General Advocacy we also provide;

- Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA)
- Care Act Advocacy
- Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA)
- NHS Complaints Advocacy
- Paid Relevant Person Representative (RPR)
- Rule 1.2
- Litigation Friend



How to make a referral

Go online to find services near you and make a referral
voiceability.org/make-a-referral

You can also request a referral form by emailing
helpline@voiceability.org

If you have questions about eligibility or advocacy types, contact us.

Freephone:

0300 303 1660

Email: helpline@voiceability.org

Website: voiceability.org



About VoiceAbility

We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.