

This resource will guide you as you prepare for virtual or telephone visits with your elected officials.

Technical Tips

If you are meeting using Zoom video or another Platform

- **Test Your Device:** Make sure your camera is adjusted so the viewer can see your whole face and that your speaker is on and at the right volume. Take a minute to review how to mute/unmute, turn on/off the camera, etc.
- **Lighting:** Try to have some direct light on your face. Also, avoid sitting with a window directly behind you.
- **Check the Link:** Test the meeting link and have the legislator's preferred telephone number in case you lose your Internet connection.

If you are meeting over the phone (not a video call)

- **Your Phone:** Make sure your cell phone is fully charged and is getting good reception.
- **Mute Other Devices:** Mute your other devices or landline so they won't interrupt the call.
- **Location:** Find a quiet spot and let others in your home know you are making or getting an important phone call.

Starting a Meeting with a Legislator or Legislative Staff Member

- **Your Script:** Have your script or worksheet close by. Before your meeting practice with friends, family or Family Voices staff. You should be familiar enough that you don't need to read your script but can glance at it if needed.
- **What if I get emotional?** As families who have children with a disabilities or medical needs, telling our story can be emotional. One reason to **practice out loud** is to make sure you can deliver your message without crying. (If you do cry, it's okay. It's just your care and concern showing.)
- **The Ask:** Make sure that your script has a clear ask of the legislator at the end of your talking points. Remember that you want to ask them **to do something!**
- **Name of Person:** Make sure you know the full name, and pronunciation, of the person you will be meeting with. You can call the legislator's office to ask if needed. Address them as Senator {Last Name} or Representative {Last Name}. If you are meeting with a staff person, you can refer to them by Mr. or Ms. {Last Name} or by their first name.

- **Introduce Yourself:** Share your name, where you live and let them know you are a **constituent**. For example, *“I live in Senator {Last Name}’s district and have lived here for many years.”*
- **Introduce Your Child(ren):** Tell the legislator about your children with special needs. You don’t need to go into great detail about the diagnosis(es), but you can explain why you are meeting with them in one sentence. For example, *“I am the parent of a child with Autism,”* or *“I am the mom of two teens and my older son struggles with mental health challenges.”* If you have a picture of your family available, you can share it by holding it up to the screen.



Ice Breaker

If you’ve ever seen your legislator in the community, mention it or find another way to relate. For example, *“We love the 4th of July celebration in our town and it was great to see Representative {Last Name} there last year!”* Or, *“I live near Lake X. Have you ever been out on that lake?”* Or, *“Senator {Last Name}’s children went to the same school as my kids.”*

During your Conversation with a Legislator or Legislative Aide

- **Pause:** Make sure you are giving the legislator time to respond. Try to pause after each of your points or ideas. Remember that you’re seeking their buy-in and understanding of what you are explaining.
- **Read Their Interest Level:** Not being in person can make it harder to tell if the legislator is following you or whether they are paying attention. Have some prompting questions ready if you are not getting any verbal feedback during the conversation.
- **Be Clear and Understandable:** Use the name of a program or service and not jargon or acronyms. You can pause and ask the legislator if s/he is familiar with the program. For example, don’t say the *“CLTS Program.”* Instead say, *“The Children’s Long Term Support Program, often referred to as CLTS.”*
- **Give Some Context:** Explain how many other people are impacted by your issue. If you have some general facts or figures, like the total number of children on the program, or the approximate percentage of children who are impacted, share them to help make your point.
- **Thank Your Legislator:** Say thank you for your legislator’s time at the end of your call. Make sure that s/he has your contact information, say that you look forward to speaking again and getting together when s/he is in your community (after COVID).

To Learn More

Visit the [Family Voices website](https://familyvoiceswi.org) for our advocacy videos, fact sheets and other tools to help you make your voice heard. Your voice and your family stories are **powerful!** Use them to make systems and programs better for all children with disabilities!