

# CALIFORNIA ACADEMY of CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

Representing the California regional organizations of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry regarding legislation, public policy, advocacy, scientific knowledge, and clinical services relevant to the mental health of California's children and adolescents and their families.



## Advocacy Tips:

### *California State Legislature – Do's and Don'ts of Lobbying*

#### *The Basics*

**Be Prepared** – Do your homework. Legislators have relatively small staffs, and they depend on lobbyists and constituents for much of their information. Providing legislators with organized, useful, clear and concise information will assist them in making informed decisions. When you are lobbying specific legislation, know the bill number, bill author, proponents/opponents, and where the bill (or budget issue) is in the legislative process

**Be Reliable** – When you make an appointment with a legislator or their staff, keep it. *Be punctual* but don't be surprised if you're asked to wait. If you need to cancel an appointment call the legislator's office as soon as possible. If you tell a legislator that you will send them additional information, *do so promptly*.

**Introduce Yourself** – Introduce yourself as a constituent if you live in a legislator's district. Your opinion will have more impact if a legislator or staff know you are one of their voters.

**Be Honest** – Your word and your credibility are your bond, and your integrity will be judged by your honesty. There are *two* rules to remember:

1. *Do Not* hesitate to say: "I don't know, but I will try to get that information for you."
2. *Do Not* guess or make-up an answer.

**Be Brief** – State your views concisely and clearly:

- *Do Not Waste* the most valuable commodity a legislator (or anybody else) has: *Time*. Be sensitive to time constraints. Some legislators may have only a few minutes to meet with you, so be succinct. Avoid getting sidetracked and *stay on message*.
- *Know the Basics*, but don't worry that you're not an expert (you're not expected to be). Present your arguments from the perspective of your organization and its needs.
- *Give Anecdotes and Specific Examples* "Hook them" with a fact or personal story that creates an image. Legislators need to hear the "real world impact" of the issues they vote on.
- *Anticipate Tough Questions* Often stating a simple "I don't know" will prevent awkward situations. Remember, it's your task to advocate for your issue, not to provide solutions to the state's problems.
- *Do Not Overkill*. Recognize when you've gotten what you came for, or as much as you'll get. A legislator and/or their staff will avoid you in the future if you ramble or otherwise waste his/her time. Be an active listener and be sensitive when a legislator wants to talk.

**Be Specific** – Tell legislators exactly what you want them to do: support a bill/budget item; not support a bill/budget item; change it to make it better; or write a letter to one of their colleagues.

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**Be Respectful and Polite** – Always address legislators properly (Assembly member or Senator). If you disagree during discussions, say so in a straightforward way. Focus your arguments on facts and reasons behind disagreements – not personalities. If a legislator currently does not support you on an issue, accept that fact yet continue lobbying efforts through letters and/or district office visits. Always remember that the same legislator could be your ally on the next issue you advocate for.

## More Tips

**Select a Spokesperson and Assign Roles** – Appoint a member of your group to begin the conversation (make sure everyone introduces themselves). Plan what each member of the group will discuss, and role-play your parts prior to your meeting. Give *everyone* in the group an opportunity to speak. It's also important for each person in your group to take notes for later debriefing.

**End Your Visit With a Question** – Ask how they'll vote on an issue (something many constituents forget to do). Tell your legislator or their staff that you will monitor what happens to a bill or budget issue. If the member hasn't taken a position on your issue yet, offer to respond to any concerns he/she may have with follow-up information – *then follow through*.

**Leave Something Tangible With Your Legislator** – Leave a fact sheet, business card or a copy of a bill. Leave behind anything tangible that will visually remind the legislator of your visit and your issue.

**Debrief and Follow-Up** – Immediately following your meeting(s), members of your group should review their notes to be certain everyone knows (1) what was said; (2) what was promised by all parties; and (3) what next steps are needed to gain (or maintain) the legislator's support. Also *honestly* evaluate the group's performance before your next meeting to identify strengths and weaknesses. Coordinate your efforts so that any promises made (i.e. sending more information or arranging a district office visit) are followed through in a *timely manner*. Be certain to provide an assessment of your meeting. That will assist us in future advocacy efforts.

**Keep Them Accountable** – Follow how your legislators vote on issues. Make certain they know you're watching what they do. Write them short notes or phone them and let them know that you approve or disapprove of their actions. Keep your elected officials accountable!

## Sample Script

Hello \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Sen./Asm. Member or Staff). Thank you for taking the time to meet with us for our Joint Advocacy Day.

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*Our group is made up of representatives from \_\_\_\_\_.* [Go around and introduce yourselves including name, title/profession, organization and where you're from. Include a little bit of information on each of your organizations – [provide a “Who We Are” handout].

*We have come together today to discuss a few of our priority issues for the year, which we would like to briefly go over with you.*

***ASK: Do you think we can count on your support in this important measure?  
(Leave behind fact sheet).***

## **Conclusion**

*Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us. We really appreciate your support/perspectives. Here is a little more information about our organizations and the issues we discussed today.* [Provide leave behind packet].

*We hope that your office will consider or continue to consider supporting or authoring legislative proposals that help increase mental health awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges.*

*Do you have a card so that we may touch base with you in the future on these issues? Thanks again! We'll be in touch!*