

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH DECISION-MAKERS

A face-to-face meeting with a decision-maker and his or her staff can be a powerful opportunity to advance your children's health agenda. The meeting can also position you as a reliable expert on children's health issues and an important ally for the decision-maker, if it's done right. Follow these steps for a successful visit.

PLAN YOUR MEETING: Decide whether you are going alone or with a group of people. If you go as a group, identify someone to lead the meeting and what each person is going to contribute to the discussion. This will help eliminate awkward silences or repetitive messages and will ensure that you hit all the key points you want to cover. Knowing ahead of time how much time you have will help you plan effectively.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: Do a little research about the decision-maker if you don't know much about him or her. Refer to the Tools and Support section of Chapter 3 to access contact information for your state and congressional legislators. You may be able to talk with the decision-maker or someone who knows them, or do other research to find out what their experience is with children's health, if they have any, and how they view their role on the issue you're addressing. Your chapter may be able to provide you with information about your decision-maker.

DEFINE YOUR MESSAGE AND TELL YOUR STORY: Plan 2 or 3 points that get at the heart of your position and share your personal experience or the experience of others in your group to illustrate your points. Touch both the mind and the heart of the decision-maker.

MEET IN YOUR HOME COMMUNITY: Meetings in the community are a good way to make connections if you have never met before and are sometimes more comfortable for all concerned. For elected officials, meetings in the home district are often less hurried than meetings at the capitol, and they provide the "home turf" advantage. Consider inviting decision-makers to meet in your professional setting. That way, they get the opportunity to see firsthand how your issue affects children and pediatricians.

BEGIN YOUR MEETING BY FINDING SOMETHING PERSONAL THAT YOU HAVE IN COMMON WITH THE DECISION-MAKER: Have you treated their children before? Does something in their office suggest an interest that you share, such as art, sports, or music? Engage in a little small talk to break the ice, but keep it brief.

STATE THE REASON FOR YOUR VISIT: Be clear about why you are there, why they should be interested, and what you want them to do.

INVITE COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS: Engage in dialogue. This will make it easier to educate your decision-maker on children's health and well-being issues in general and your issue in particular. Listen to what they have to say and invite their questions.

ASK FOR A COMMITMENT: If you don't ask for action, you won't see any. If they decline, encourage them to think about it and let them know you'll keep in touch.

HAVE A LEAVE-BEHIND: When applicable, provide a brief, 1-page piece of written information for further reflection. Make yourself available for future conversations. Make sure your leave-behind includes your name and contact information on it or give them your business card.

FOLLOW UP: Send a handwritten thank-you note. Let them know that you appreciate their time. If you promised to get them additional information, attach it or let them know how and when they can expect to receive it.