

## Tips for Accessing Resources by Phone

### Most important:

- **Be prepared** -- Don't start the process when you're rushed. Relax! Make sure you have a big pad of paper, a pen, a glass of water, and a reasonable amount of time.
- **Don't give up** – You have the right to information and respectful service. Be persistent and patient. Realize that sometimes it will take ten calls to find out what you want. No one person or organization has all the answers.
- **Try not to put people on the spot** – It makes them defensive. Try to enlist their support.

### Before You Pick Up the Phone:

- Look over a brochure or article about the agency you are calling, if possible. Underline key points, or names and phone numbers of people you want to call.
- Make a list of the questions you want to ask. Write them down.
- Record your information on a tablet or notebook. Don't put it on little scraps of paper that can easily get lost. Try creating columns or headings at the top of the page: one for the name of the person, another for the name of the agency or company, another for the phone number, etc.
- “Psych” yourself to make the calls. Do a little role-playing first; it might help calm your jitters and put you in the right mood.
- Are you a morning person? If so, make your calls then. Know when you're at your best and most alert. There's no point in just getting started when you are already tired.

### Making Your Calls:

- Be aware of the pitch of your voice. Try to make it lower. A higher voice can be disturbing to many people.
- Be modest. Tell the person on the other end of the line that you're a beginner, and that you hope they can give you some guidance.
- If you're calling someone you think you'll need to call again, try to establish a relationship. Be empathetic – “I realize it is late in the day and you must be tired, but I really need your help.”
- Avoid “yes or no” questions. They don't open people up.
- If the person you want to speak with isn't in, rather than just leaving your phone number, find out when he or she is expected. This shows you want to make things easier – and you might be surprised to learn the person just left for a two-week vacation. If you hadn't asked, the information might not have been offered. If you are transferred to voice mail, leave a short but specific message. It can eliminate telephone tag.
- Be polite, but don't allow yourself to be brushed off. You have a right to information, especially from public agencies. If you've really tried to get help but are constantly meeting roadblocks, ask to speak to a supervisor.
- Always write down the name of the person you are speaking to. It's helpful when you get conflicting information and you can say, “but so-and-so in the department of such-and-such said I should call back.”
- When one approach doesn't work – try another. Be creative.
- Remember - you don't have to find everything out yourself. Put the word out that you are looking for information or need help navigating the social service system. Ask a friend, or relative to lend you a hand – especially in a time of crisis.