What are the Advocate’s Roles and Responsibilities?

1. To help “clients” clarify and identify their problem(s)
2. To provide “clients” with factual information and support
3. To listen well and with respect, and to communicate clearly
4. To help explore and evaluate options
5. To help “clients” choose realistic, fair and legal solutions that are their own
6. To help plan or prepare needed action only if “clients” can’t act for themselves
7. To promote independence and self-esteem.
8. To teach assertiveness, communication and problem solving techniques
9. To make appropriate referrals and provide follow-up.
10. To help “clients” develop a positive working relationship with the workers, professionals and the systems involved
11. To strive for “win — win” solutions
12. To avoid judgment, assumption, taking over, taking credit, encouraging dependence, providing solutions, or rescuing
13. To model treating everyone involved with dignity and respect
14. To promote human rights, justice and fair treatment
15. To work within personal limits and set clear boundaries
16. To follow a clear Code of Ethics

What Might an Advocate do?

- Assist with problem solving
- Assist in communicating with government agencies and navigating the system
- Provide information or research where to get information
- Provide non-judgmental support
- Help to clarify what your goal is and to sort out the issues
- Add a social justice perspective and analysis
- Educate about rights and problem solving and prevention tools
- Provides positive feedback and hope based in reality
- Provide honest feedback
- Listen, listen, listen
- Help complete confusing forms
- Speak for those unable to speak
- Represent those without representation
An Advocate:

- Has clear and healthy boundaries
- Is sympathetic
- Does her/his research - is learning all the time
- Is fair and just
- Asks questions - doesn’t assume
- Is patient and calm
- Honours all parties’ expertise and perspective
- Is unbiased and balanced yet supportive
- Recognizes that clients are the experts of their own lives and situations.
- Plants seeds and supports clients grow at their own pace
- Simplifies, “translates” government and legal language into plain English
- Finds translation for non English speakers
- Empowers people to advocate for themselves
- Values/recognizes the client’s strengths
- Admits own mistakes and takes responsibility
- Works with realistic expectations
- Knows the resources and makes useful referrals

Goals of an Advocate

- Clarify the problem
- Provide information and support
- Listen - with respect for all parties
- Develop trust amongst all parties
- Promote and protect rights
- Encourage, teach and support self-advocacy
- Increase understanding and co-operation between agencies, systems and clients
- ‘Win-win’ solutions
- Reach the client’s goal

(The preceding lists grew out of Advocacy training delivered by Carol Ross at The Advocacy Centre in Nelson between 1988 and 2006. They reflect the thoughts and comments of trainees and students and are intended to show the various perspectives identified by all involved over the years.)