

Advocating and Communicating in Healthcare Settings

Supporting someone with Functional Neurological Disorder in healthcare settings often involves helping with communication, organization, and emotional steadiness in environments that can feel rushed or overwhelming.

This toolkit focuses on **practical advocacy and communication strategies** for support persons during medical appointments. It is not a guide to diagnosis, treatment, or decision-making. Its purpose is to support clearer interactions while respecting the autonomy and capacity of the person with FND.

Understanding Advocacy as Support, Not Control

Advocacy in healthcare does not mean speaking over someone or directing care. It means helping communication remain clear and focused when capacity is limited.

Advocacy may involve:

- helping ensure key concerns are heard
- supporting clarity when symptoms interfere with communication
- reinforcing previously agreed-upon priorities

Effective advocacy is collaborative and consent-based.

Clarifying the Support Role Before the Appointment

Before attending an appointment, it can help to clarify expectations.

This may include:

- asking how the person with FND wants support provided
- agreeing on when, if at all, you should speak
- identifying key points or concerns together

Clear agreement beforehand reduces tension during the visit.

Supporting Communication During the Appointment

Medical appointments can move quickly and involve complex language.

As a support person, it may help to:

- take notes if requested
- help redirect discussion to agreed priorities
- ask for clarification when information is unclear
- notice signs of fatigue, overload, or distress

Support should aim to reduce strain, not add pressure.

Respecting Autonomy and Decision-Making

Even when symptoms interfere with communication, autonomy remains central.

Support persons can:

- ask permission before speaking on someone's behalf
- pause or step back if the person signals discomfort
- support decisions even when outcomes are uncertain

Respecting autonomy helps preserve trust and safety.

Navigating Difficult or Dismissive Interactions

Healthcare interactions may sometimes feel dismissive or invalidating, which can be distressing for both people involved.

When this happens, it may help to:

- calmly request clarification or repetition
- restate concerns using functional language
- suggest follow-up discussion if the moment becomes overwhelming

Not every issue needs to be resolved during one appointment.

Managing Your Own Capacity as a Support Person

Supporting someone in medical settings can be emotionally and cognitively demanding.

It may help to:

- notice your own stress responses
- avoid taking responsibility for outcomes you cannot control
- plan rest or decompression after appointments

Supporting someone else does not require ignoring your own limits.

After the Appointment

After appointments, follow-up may be needed.

This can include:

- reviewing information together later
- helping track next steps if requested
- allowing space for rest and processing

Support after the appointment should align with consent and capacity.

Supporting Healthcare Interactions With Clarity and Respect

Advocating and communicating in healthcare settings as a support person involves balancing presence, clarity, and respect for autonomy. Preparation, collaboration, and attention to capacity can help make medical interactions safer and more manageable.

This toolkit is intended to support steady, respectful advocacy without overextending either person.