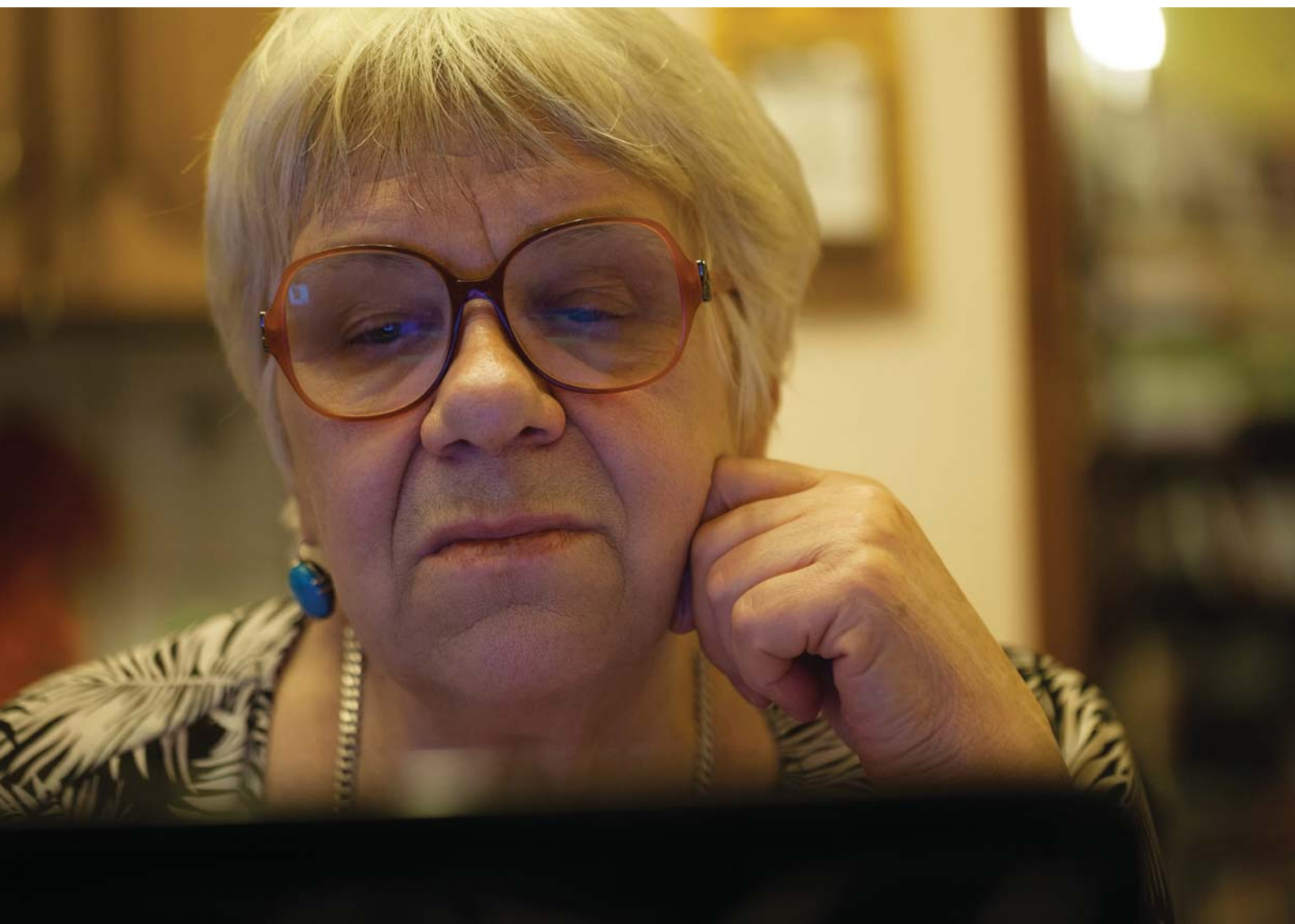


Carers' Self Advocacy Toolkit

# Email etiquette



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Email is a fast and efficient way of communicating and it enables you to track written discussions with professionals. However, there's a catch. It is very easy to mis-communicate when using email. Because of the way we use language in emails it's surprisingly easy to give the wrong impression of your tone.

For example, you can come across as angry when you are just seeking more information. Here's an example of a carer contacting her Son's care manager Angie:

***"Angie I've received your self-assessment form today but it makes no sense. I can't do it."***

If you said this on the phone, you could use the tone and pace of your voice to moderate the feeling of these words and you would probably enlarge on this statement by explaining why it makes no sense. However, Email doesn't allow for this, so the statement, written like this may look negative. Instead of Angie being able to respond and explore the carer's perceptions, she may be more likely to respond negatively.

Also, avoid using capital letters to write an email, this is the equivalent of shouting at someone:

***I'VE RECEIVED YOUR SELF ASSESSMENT FORM TODAY BUT IT MAKES NO SENSE. I CAN'T DO IT."***

**So what should you bear in mind when writing an email?**

## **When to use email**

Emails are most effective when you want to address questions or feedback to one person in particular and it can be effective in 'getting to the right person' in 'the system'. Email also gives you a communication trail and of course gets things down in writing, which can be very useful. An email can carry a number of points quite effectively, as long as they are clearly written and demarcated, say with bullet points. However 'less is more' and it is best if emails are as succinct as possible.

If you want an immediate response, email may not be the best means of communication, as people can ignore emails or at best respond to them in their own time. In this situation, a phone-call may be a better option. If you have one issue to pursue, again phone or face to face discussion may be a better means of asking.

## Timing

It's a good idea to wait a while before you write an email about something that has upset you. It is more likely to be emotionally loaded if you write it immediately which may not be helpful. Similarly, if you are very tired it is easy to get things out of proportion, as well as being more likely to make spelling mistakes etc.

## Tone

When you have had the chance to calm down, write your response and read it back to yourself. Ask yourself how you would feel if someone wrote this to you? If there's a strongly-worded phrase, re-word it to make it more neutral, however much you want to feel like saying exactly what's on your mind.

Here's an example of a carer contacting home care about a service coming in to her Father:

*"Dear Georgie*

***The care workers have been in today and they've left used-teabags on the counter again – this is nothing short of abuse."***

Understandably the carer is angry at the carers not tidying up after themselves again. However, the statement that this is "nothing short of abuse" is disproportionate to the behaviour and may make Georgie more protective of her staff. The carer could say something like:

*"Hi Georgie*

***I'm contacting you again about the care workers – they have left used teabags on the counter again this morning. I know they are busy but I find this behaviour disrespectful to my Father and I have enough to do without cleaning up after them. Please could you speak to them about this?"***

*Thanks very much"*

## Quantity

Try not to 'bombard' professionals with lots of separate emails asking for different things. This can be confusing and time consuming to the receiver of these messages, especially if a lot of recipients are involved and the 'strands' of messages are long and complicated.

Try and keep it to as few emails as possible, summarising each issue and asking for a response within a given time period before you email again or phone up to speak to someone.

## Unintended recipients

It is not unheard of for emails you send to end up being sent to people you never intended. For example, an email conversation you had with a professional may be forwarded on up the line of management, which you may not have wanted. If the content of your email is confidential, mark the message up as 'private' or 'do not forward' and don't write anything in an email that you wouldn't want others to see, if you feel there's a chance of your message being passed on.