Plain Language Is Common Sense

Educate, Engage, and Empower

INDIANA
DISABILITY RIGHTS

Welcome!

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Learning Outcomes

- Simplify complex language in community facing documents and resources.
  - Make resource accessible to everyone.
- Develop a clear plain language method that helps people with disabilities understand their rights.
  - Learn how to make plain language resources.
- Explain the person-centered values behind creating plain language resources for everyone, with and without disabilities.
  - Learn the values of plain language.

Value and Intention

Plain language principles benefit all audiences and content areas. This presentation highlights how plain language improves access to services and rights, empowers self-advocacy, bridges communication gaps, promotes person-centered values, and fosters engagement and education.

Plain language is common sense.

What Is Plain Language? (1 of 2)

- Words that are clear and easy for people to understand.
- Short and well-organized sentence and paragraph structures.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 explicitly requires certain federal forms, including those from the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service, to use plain language.

What Is Plain Language? (2 of 2)

Communication that is clear and easy for most individuals, including those with disabilities, to understand.

Why Use Plain Language? (1 of 2)

- It facilitates mutual communication and understanding.
- It builds trust.
- It allows the reader to feel confident.
- It supports self-advocacy.

Why Use Plain Language? (2 of 2)

It can prevent reader frustration!

Value and Intention

Accessible Language

Plain Language

IDR's *Know Your Rights* Project

- Problem: Youth in residential treatment programs did not understand their rights, as determined through a five-year investigation.
- Goal: Create a plain language guide to help youth understand their rights and to self-advocate.
- Secondary Benefit: Case workers, law enforcement officers, facility staff, parents and guardians, and others can also learn about youth rights.

Know Your Rights Features (1 of 2)

- Written for youth from 5 to 18 years old
- Plenty of white space
  - Prevents overwhelming the reader
  - Allows the reader to take notes

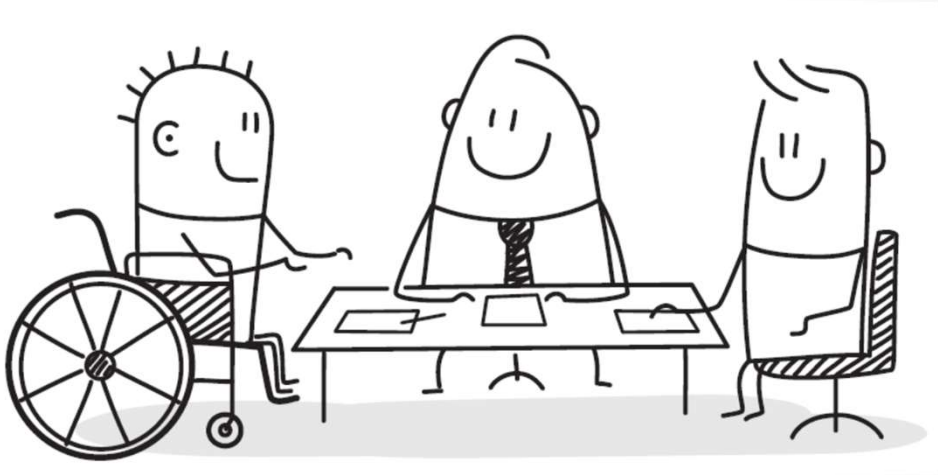
Know Your Rights Features (2 of 2)

- Graphics that youth can color.
- Puzzles, such as word games, for older youth.
- Legal citations add legitimacy and help youth create formal grievances.

Topic Area	Right	Citation(s)
Advocacy	To contact Indiana Disability Rights to ask for help or report a rights violation	42 U.S.C. § 483.356(d)
	To file a complaint with, or seek the assistance of, the DCS Ombudsman, if DCS is your placement agency	DCS Bill of Rights
	To be assigned a specific caseworker	465 Ind. Admin. Code § 2-11-66(b)(1)

The Process (1 of 7)

Feedback



- Talk to target audience.
- Identify their questions and concerns.
  - I don’t know how to file a complaint.
  - I don’t remember getting the Bill of Rights.
  - I can’t remember what my rights are.

Reviewing Audience Feedback

Do:

- Coloring is my favorite hobby and coping skill.
- I want to learn about my rights.
- I want help learning and practicing self-advocacy skills.
- Include space for my thoughts.

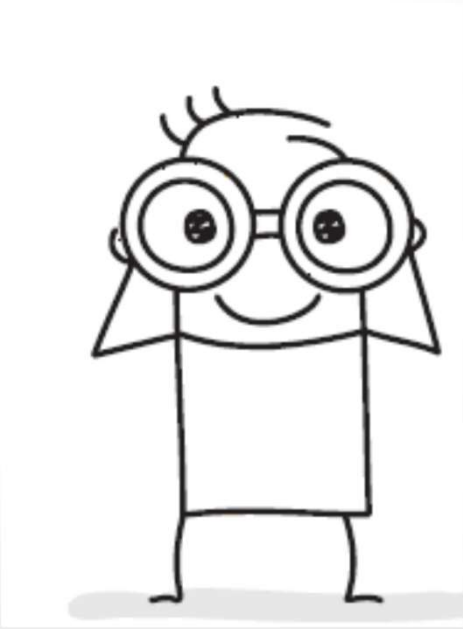
Don’t:

- Don’t crowd important information on the page.
- Don’t use big and confusing words.
- Don’t put text on both sides of a page.
- Don’t forget me, I need this information.

The Process (2 of 7)

Brainstorming

- Who should be on the team?
- What will the product look like?
- What information should be included?



Our Starting Point (1 of 2)

We, the Youth of the State of Indiana who are involved in a **Child in Need of Services (CHINS)**, **Collaborative Care (CC)**, or **Delinquency Court cases**, are **entitled** to a voice and an opinion in decisions that will impact our lives. These are our **basic rights** during our case. Safety is paramount in our case. *Reasonable restrictions, including court orders, may be imposed on the time, place, and manner in which we can exercise these rights*, if it is determined that any restrictions are necessary for safety reasons. We have **the right to be informed of these restrictions and the reasons for them in a manner that we can understand.**

Our Starting Point (2 of 2)

- Over 1800 words.
- Three pages.
- No pictures.
- And it is given to youth at admission.

https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Indiana_DCS_Bill_of_Rights_for_Youth_in_Care.pdf

https://ingov-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/personal/tfrayer_idr_in_gov/Documents/Desktop%20August%202023/Monitoring/Monitoring%20Projects/PSF%20Project%20(2016-2022)/PSF%20project/Indiana_DCS_Bill_of_Rights_for_Youth_in_Care.pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=YhJWlw

Value and Intention

Plain language does no harm.

Our intention is not to do harm. Language and expectation (spoken or unspoken) can be traumatic.

We want to be sure we are creating an environment of openness and safety and for people to express themselves freely. That is what self-advocacy intends.

The Process (3 of 7)

Technical Steps

- Break down sentences.
- Create clear and concise sentences.
- Decide order information and other components (puzzles, for example).
- Create a rough draft.

The Process (4 of 7)

Gathering Midpoint Feedback

- Share the draft with:
  - The targeted audience
  - Direct care staff
  - Clinical staff and administrators
  - Licensing agency staff
- Ask:
  - What works?
  - What doesn't work?
  - What is missing?

Creation

- Use the feedback from the end user, including support staff, family, physicians, attorneys, and judges.
- Finalize the language.
- Select graphics.

The Process (5 of 7)

Feedback

- Share the draft with:
  - The targeted audience
  - Direct care staff
  - Clinical staff and administrators
  - Licensing agency staff
- Ask:
  - Does this meet your needs?

User Comments

- “I really needed this when I was going through inpatient. You went above and beyond. This book will really help people.” – Chris, Mental Health Advocate
- “In all my 30 years of advocacy, I’ve never seen anything like this.” – Pam, Advocate
- “I think the document is great; filled with meaningful information that is often hard to locate; and is in a very user-friendly format.” – Superior Court Judge

The Process (6 of 7)

Legal Review

- Double-check accuracy
- Add any needed legal formatting, such as citations to statutes and regulations
- Ensure accessibility if sharing online.

The Process (7 of 7)

Design, Format, and Disseminate

INDIANA
DISABILITY RIGHTS
Equality Through Advocacy

T	X	B	U	G	M	G	C	D	C	R	A	Y	S	H
H	A	P	P	Y	Y	F	E	Z	O	H	K	L	E	W
G	D	A	E	J	R	N	F	C	Y	O	L	H	J	Y
I	Q	U	V	O	I	S	O	L	A	R	P	Q	W	E
R	Q	D	G	H	B	K	U	T	W	S	W	S	N	L
B	P	Q	S	A	E	C	T	G	X	A	J	L	L	L
E	C	N	X	B	M	H	S	R	R	F	V	S	K	O
W	U	D	H	E	C	H	I	M	K	D	F	M	D	W
S	V	S	M	B	U	O	D	S	H	E	Q	I	L	E
P	S	U	G	Y	C	H	E	E	R	F	U	L	S	A
M	H	N	K	D	I	E	O	F	M	C	I	E	A	T
M	E	R	D	J	V	O	O	P	V	G	D	P	R	H
Q	L	I	G	H	T	N	H	F	U	E	V	S	B	E
P	J	S	E	N	T	C	I	S	Y	G	F	J	K	R
J	F	E	J	Y	D	E	N	A	T	N	U	S	X	Y

Internal Support

"Navigating mental health treatment can feel overwhelming and too often, patient rights are misunderstood. We want to change that. We want to shift the focus from passive receipt of care to active participation and self-advocacy."

"This tool is more than just a list of rules and rights. It is a guide to reclaim your voice. We believe every individual should have the opportunity to participate in their care, and this resource provides practical help to empower people to do just that."

–Melissa Keyes, Executive Director

Value and Intention

Getting it Done

Getting it Right

Focus on quality and usefulness rather than “getting it done.”

See the Difference (1 of 2)

Bill of Rights

"We have the right to nutritious food, appropriate shelter, appropriate medical care, a public education, and sufficient clothing that fits us and is weather-appropriate."

Know Your Rights

You have the right to wear your own clothes, unless you are unsafe with them.*

See the Difference (2 of 2)

Bill of Rights

"We have the right to be safe in our homes, placements, and communities. We have the right to be protected from all types of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, whether physical, verbal, emotional or sexual and to be supported in reporting and combating abuse."

Know Your Rights

Value and Intention

You have the right to receive an education.

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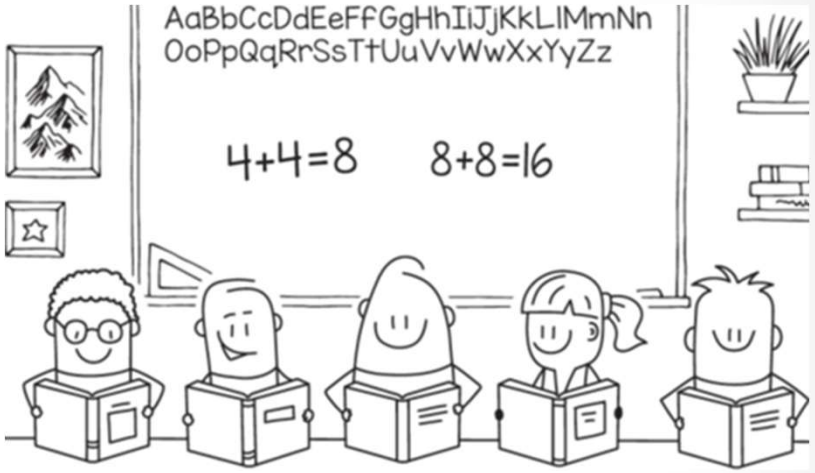


Be aware do not to use images/graphics could lead to unexpected consequences.

Brain Break

“Your Rights as an Indiana Voter (2016)

You have the right to **assistance**.

- Assistance is available to those with a disability or who cannot read or write English. Assistance must be requested before entering the voting booth.
- A voter may choose anyone to assist him or her, except his or her employer or union representative. If a voter does not choose someone, two poll workers—one from each party—will assist. The assistant(s) must complete a form provided at the polls before entering the booth.

You have the right to an **accessible polling location**.

- All locations must have at least one accessible voting machine in an accessible facility in addition to meeting accessibility guidelines

You have the right to **cast a provisional ballot**.

- If your right to vote is challenged for any reason, you may complete a provisional ballot. This is a ballot you can fill out with your planned selections, but will be counted later on, after your issue is resolved.

“Your Rights as an Indiana Voter” (2018) (1 of 2)

You have the right to vote absentee.

- Absentee-in-person (early voting): You may vote at the county election board office in the weeks leading up to the election. To find your county’s office, visit IndianaVoters.com and click on “Contact my County Election Office.”
- Absentee-by-mail: Those who are eligible may submit a request for an absentee ballot by contacting their County Clerk or the Secretary of State.

Continued next slide.

“Your Rights as an Indiana Voter” (2018) (2 of 2)

- Absentee-by-traveling-board: Those who are eligible may have a bi-partisan absentee voter board bring them a ballot. Contact your County Clerk or the Secretary of State to submit a request.
- Resources available to you at the polls:
  - Magnifiers for voters with visual impairments.
  - Tape to hold ballots in place for voters unable to hold them.
  - Chairs for voters unable to stand for extended periods of time. This includes while waiting in line and while casting your ballot.

Value and Intention

Intent Practical

Let's Practice (1 of 2)

How would you change this statement to make it better?

Absentee-in-person (early voting): You may vote at the county election board office in the weeks leading up to the election.

Let's Practice (2 of 2)

How would you change this statement to make it better?

A voter may choose anyone to assist him or her, except his or her employer or union representative. If a voter does not choose someone, two poll workers—one from each party—will assist. The assistant(s) must complete a form provided at the polls before entering the booth.

Plain Language Final Draft (2026)

- You have the right to vote. You can vote if:
  - You are a U.S. citizen and live in Indiana
  - You are 18 years old by Election Day
  - You have lived in your voting area for 30+ days
  - You are not in prison
  - You are registered to vote
- If you have a guardian, you still have the right to vote!
  - A judge must say you cannot vote for your rights to be taken away.
  - Your guardian cannot stop you from voting.
  - Your guardian must help you vote if you need help.
- Getting Help to Vote – You can get help from:
  - A poll worker
  - A friend or family member
  - Someone you trust (not your boss or union leader)
    - Ask for help before you go into the voting booth.
    - The helper must fill out a form at the polls.

Plan-Language Draft Graphics (2026)

Your Voting Rights In Indiana (2026)

Your Voting Rights in Indiana: A Voting Guide for Hoosiers with Disabilities

You Have the Right to Vote

You can vote if:

- You are a U.S. citizen and live in Indiana.
- You are 18 years old by Election Day.
- You have lived in your voting area for 30+ days.
- You are not in prison.
- You are registered to vote.

If You Have a Guardian

You still have the right to vote!

- A judge must say you cannot vote for this right to be taken away.
- Your parents or guardians cannot stop you from voting.

Getting Help to Vote

You have the right to vote privately and independently. If you need assistance, you can get help from:

- A parent, guardian or family member
- A friend
- A case manager, social worker, or therapist
- A poll worker
- Someone you trust (not your boss or union leader)
    - Ask for help before you go into the voting booth
    - The helper must fill out a form at the polls

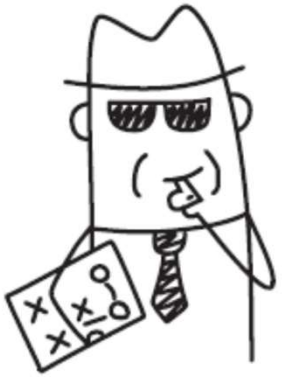
Accessible Voting Places

Voting places must:

- Be easy to get into
- Have a clear path to the voting area
- Have at least one accessible voting machine

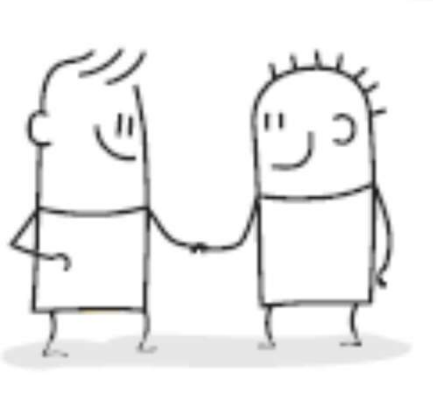
Barriers

- Limited time
  - To select graphics
  - For a busy team to meet regularly
- Limited resources
  - Small team working on a BIG project
  - Printing costs
- Finding the balance between plain language and legal nuance



Addressing Barriers

- Set goals early
- Continue working outside of team meetings
- Collaborate with others
- Discuss challenging language



- Add a glossary to define important terms of art and/or legal ideas that cannot easily be explained in the body of the document

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Questions