

HOW TO SPEAK POWERFULLY

Learn how to talk persuasively about children's issues so that you can be ready whenever an opportunity arises. Speaking powerfully is a skill that you can use if you are meeting with your member of Congress or their staff, or if you bump into them in your community.

If you have ever heard of an “elevator speech” you know that it is often used when interviewing for a job—the idea is to capture who you are, what you want and why—all in the span of 30 seconds or less (about the amount of time it takes to ride an elevator with someone). This same tool can be an effective way to structure your meeting with your elected officials. And the good news is that an elevator speech is not difficult to deliver, it just takes some preparation and practice.

Use this sheet to develop your own elevator speech and then take some time to rehearse, making sure you have memorized it and that it is succinct, clear, and compelling. Remember to keep it short, it should be no longer than 30 seconds during an unexpected run-in with your elected official, and just a few minutes during a scheduled meeting.

Once you have written out and practiced your elevator speech and you feel comfortable with it, think about what else you will do to connect with your lawmaker or staffer when you are delivering it. For example, you will want to smile and look in their eyes and provide them time to respond once you are done.

Key components your elevator speech:

Who are you in the community?

Share your name, where you live and a little bit about yourself but make it short (for example: “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Congresswoman. My name is Jane Doe and I live in Farmdale with my husband and two teenage sons. I work for Prudential in their accounting department.” Or perhaps: “I am Samantha Smith and I live in your district. I just graduated from school and volunteer at the local library.”).

Why are you advocating for children?

Share something personal about what led you to become a child advocate. (For example: “Thank you for your time today. I am here because as a parent, I believe that all children deserve good nutrition and health and protection from abuse and neglect, and I am concerned that our country is not doing all we should for vulnerable children.”).

What is the problem you are seeking to address?

Perhaps turn this into a question to pull the listener in to your argument. Pull from First Focus fact sheets to make your problem statement or question. (For example: “Did you know that children make up roughly X percent of the U.S. population but that we traditionally invest less than X percent of our federal budget in their wellbeing?” Or, “our foreign assistance budget, which is already less than one percent of our overall budget, only invests X percent of foreign assistance in children’s programs, despite children being nearly 30 percent of the global population.” See [here](#) for current statistics.).

What is the solution you are proposing?

Share how you would like our government to prioritize children and why. (For example: “Our government should be prioritizing children in its funding and policy decisions. In addition to being the right thing to do, investing in children produces the greatest return on investment because children who have access to health, nutrition, protection, early learning and nurturing care grow up healthier, live longer and earn higher wages than those who don’t.”).

What is your specific ask?

End with a specific request for your elected official—one that you will be able to follow up on and track. Reach out to **Leila Nimatallah** at leilan@FirstFocus.org for a strategic request for your MOC. (For example: Please cosponsor X bill which supports children by doing Y.”).

Or, if you do not have a specific policy ask at the ready or if you are talking to someone who is already a [champion for children](#), think about [thanking them for their leadership](#) and asking something like: “where could fellow local advocates learn more about the work you are doing on behalf of children?” This lets them know that there are more of you in their district and draws attention to the fact that there might not be a “kids” section on their website.

Remember

In most cases you will not receive an immediate “yes” or “no” to your request. Often, an elected official will want their staff to research the issue and get back to you with an answer. They often will say something like, “we will consider it” in which case you can thank them for their consideration and their time.

Follow up

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of your elevator speech is what you do afterwards: your follow-up.

Right after your meeting be sure to send an email to the staffer who was present at the meeting to thank him/her and the member of Congress. Reiterate your request and state you are looking forward to hearing from them when they have had a chance to consider it.

Give the office a couple of weeks and if you have not heard back from them, reach out again to the staff to follow up. Remember to be friendly and grateful for whatever response you receive—even if it is a “no”. You want to be welcomed back the next time, after all! Also, even if your MOC does not become an active “supporter” due to your elevator speech, perhaps your efforts will ensure that he/she does not become an active opponent.

And lastly, **do not** forget to let us know about this interaction!