



## **Telling Your Personal Story**

Telling your personal story can be a bit like building a house. You need a strong foundation, walls and a solid roof. Our goal is to build a strong house and we need to be effective and efficient in our efforts.

**By being efficient**, we have a clear purpose, present information in a well-organized manner, provide information that respects the time of the listener (5 minutes maximum spoken), and suggests a solution.

**To be effective**, we need understandable key points and good examples to reinforce those points. We also need to engage the listener so he or she feels personally involved. With these points in mind, we need to practice, practice, and practice before we tell our personal story. We also can share our story with someone we feel comfortable with to get his or her feedback on how effective the story is. Now let's start building.

### **The Foundation**

First of all, you need to let the legislator know who you are and who your child is. What is working for your child or family? What is not working for your child or family? Be sure to think of specific examples of things that have happened to your family/child that demonstrate what is or isn't working. Don't be afraid to personalize who your child is (bring a picture of your child) by highlighting what they like to do, how much joy they bring to others around them, etc. Since many legislators may not know much about autism, be sure to give them some idea of how the disability looks (i.e. has difficulty in social situations with other kids, etc.). Also, don't use acronyms (such as IEP for Individual Education Program) because legislators may not know what they mean.

### **The Walls**

With a firm foundation to build upon, we next need to talk about a possible solution to the problem. If you don't have a solution, don't worry. Offer to work with the legislator to find other people to help. Be sure your personal story ties to your solution or offer of help. Focus on a solution! Most legislators will tell you they are looking for recommendations on solving a problem, not just complaints.

### **The Roof**

Lastly, you need to ask your legislator for a commitment. What will he or she do? Will he or she introduce a bill or support an existing bill? Don't be afraid to ask for a firm commitment and thank him or her.

**Helpful Resources:**

Gillard, Marni. (1995) *Storyteller, Story Teacher: Discovering the Power of Storytelling for Teaching and Living*

Maguire, Jack. (1998) *The Power of Personal Storytelling.*

Niemi, Loren and Elizabeth Ellis. (2001), *Inviting the Wolf In: Thinking about Difficult Stories.*

**Build Your Personal Story in Five Easy Steps:**

1. Introduction—Who am I and who is my child or family member with ASD?
2. What is working? And what isn't working? Give specific examples and experiences.
3. How would you propose to solve the problem? If you don't have a solution, let the legislator know you will work with him or her and others to find a solution.
4. How do I want the legislator to help me solve the problem (i.e. vote for a bill, create a bill, change a current law)?
5. Thank them no matter what they say!

***Be sure to keep it brief (3-5 minutes spoken) and practice your story beforehand.***