

# Advocate Toolkit: Public Speaking Handbook



A toolkit for advocates and volunteers to use in preparation for public speaking engagements.

**Oregon, Washington, Vermont and Montana advocates:** before using this guide, please contact your state outreach staff to coordinate with ongoing activities.



Care and Choice at the End of Life

# Public Speaking and You

As an ambassador for Compassion & Choices, you have a unique and important role in educating your community and building support for the organization and the movement.



Although a good video, a great website or strong print pieces like the quarterly magazine are excellent communications vehicles to tell our story, there is simply no substitute for a personal presentation by a passionate and knowledgeable supporter like you!

Throughout this guide you will find helpful tips for preparing your presentation and best practices for public speaking. You will also discover resources for staying up-to-date on the always-changing legal, social and political landscape of death with dignity and end-of-life choice.

**Even if you consider yourself a pro, this guide can serve as a helpful reminder of how to put your best foot forward!**

# Messaging 101

At the end of the day, public speaking is about delivering a message. When you are speaking on behalf of Compassion & Choices, that message should combine fact-based arguments about end-of-life choice and aid in dying with details about Compassion & Choices as an organization. Be sure that you are delivering accurate information and a consistent message. Information on state campaigns, national news stories and organizational developments is available on the website at [www.CompassionAndChoices.org](http://www.CompassionAndChoices.org). Your main C&C contact is also a good source for the most recent updates.

## Top-Tier Messaging Points:

*These are the most convincing and compelling points to support the importance of access to aid in dying.*

- Americans are free to choose how they live – and when the time comes, how they die.
- End-of-life choices should be left to the individual, their family and their doctor. The choices should be guided by medical standards, not by the whims of politicians.
- Support for end-of-life choice is consistently strong – in red states, in blue states, across demographic groups and religions; this strong support has held steady for two decades.

### A tip for every occasion: Language Matters!

It's important to use the correct terminology to help ensure that everyone clearly understands what we are trying to achieve.

“Death With Dignity” and “Aid in Dying” are the preferred terms for referring to a terminally ill, mentally competent adult who receives a prescription from their doctor for a patient-controlled death.

We are careful to avoid emotional or hurtful words like “suicide,” “doctor-assisted suicide” or “euthanasia.” These terms are inaccurate and inflammatory.

Compassion & Choices clients want to live, but as that option is no longer available to them, they are instead seeking to manage their death in a way that causes less suffering to them and their families.

# Tips from Toastmasters

## 10 Tips for Public Speaking

Toastmasters is widely considered one of the best resources for improving public speaking skills. Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and even beneficial, but too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here are some proven tips on how to control your butterflies and help you give better presentations:

- **1. Know your material.** Pick a topic you are interested in. Know more about it than you include in your speech. Use humor, personal stories and conversational language – that way you won't easily forget what to say.
- **2. Practice. Practice. Practice!** Rehearse out loud with all the equipment you plan on using. Revise as necessary. Work to control filler words; Practice, pause and breathe. Practice with a timer and allow time for the unexpected.
- **3. Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
- **4. Know the room.** Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
- **5. Relax.** Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything. ("One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand. Pause. Begin.") Transform nervous energy into enthusiasm.
- **6. Visualize yourself giving your speech.** Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and confident. Visualize the audience clapping – it will boost your confidence.
- **7. Realize that people want you to succeed.** Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They're rooting for you.
- **8. Don't apologize** for any nervousness or problem – the audience probably never noticed it.
- **9. Concentrate on the message – not the medium.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and concentrate on your message and your audience.
- **10. Gain experience.** Mainly, your speech should represent *you* — as an authority and as a person. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need in a safe and friendly environment.

Visit the Toastmasters website for additional resources: <http://www.toastmasters.org>

# Best Practices

Everyone has a different approach to, and a different comfort level for, public speaking. Whether you are an old hand who's comfortable in front of a crowd, or new to the art of presentation, these best practices are designed to give you confidence in putting your best foot forward. While these pointers are pretty reliable, there is an exception to every rule, and sometimes an event will require a different format. Check with a Compassion & Choices staff person or senior volunteer if you have any questions.

## **Format:**

Most often, Compassion & Choices speakers will either be part of a panel discussion with a few speakers, or will be making a solo presentation to a group. For both these formats you will generally be relying on the same content. The main difference is that when presenting solo, you are in control of how and when you deliver each point. If you are speaking on a panel, you will make your points as they become relevant to the conversation.

## **Running Time:**

For solo presentations, the two most commonly requested formats are 20 minutes and 45 minutes. Presentations longer than 45 minutes risk losing the audience's attention and are generally not as effective as shorter presentations.

Be respectful of your audience's time. For example, if you are asked to speak for a half hour, keep your presentation to 20 minutes, and allow time for a Q&A session or to greet attendees one-on-one after your talk.

## **Make it intimate:**

Face your audience, make eye contact and ensure they are "with" you. Pause between your major points, and remember to pace yourself. Often, as speakers become more comfortable with their presentation and delivery style, they develop a tendency to talk faster. While speaking quickly may show enthusiasm, it can also reduce your audience's comprehension of what you are saying.

## **Keep it natural:**

Although notes are a helpful tool for delivering a presentation, it is not a good idea to read a speech verbatim from notes. Reading generally sounds stilted and unconvincing, and can convey a lack of enthusiasm for the subject. Instead, consider using index cards to remind you of your most important points. With a little practice you'll be able to deliver some of the details by memory.

# More Best Practices

## **Know your panelists or co-presenters:**

If the invitation is for a debate or panel discussion, find out who the other panel members will be. Go online to your local newspaper to find articles about the other participants or to see whether they have written letters to the editor about controversial topics. Conduct a “Google” search to expand your background check, and don’t forget to contact Compassion & Choices staff, who can access a database with information about many of the players. If you find anything of concern, consult with Compassion & Choices staff.

## **Peer-to-peer:**

A presentation is more effective when the audience can identify with the presenter. For that reason, whenever possible, we try to provide a speaker who will be perceived as a peer—a nurse may have a greater impact speaking to nurses, etc.

## **Confidentiality is key:**

Personal stories are often the most moving and effective parts of a presentation. Remember, however, that there are important limits on what can be shared publicly. It is critical to make sure that you have permission to share a personal story, a name, or any details about an individual. If you have any doubt: leave it out! Better to leave out a few details than to violate the trust of a Compassion & Choices client.

## **Stay away from personal healthcare specifics:**

### **Avoid the natural tendency to offer help when questions are asked about individual cases or situations.**

If the question involves someone who is terminally ill and is looking for information on their options they should be referred to our End-of-Life Consultation (EOLC) team at 1-800-247-7421.

### **Never discuss methods that are used to hasten death, and avoid commenting on whether one method is preferred over another.**

Instead, tell the audience that our EOLC team works one-on-one with our clients, helping them explore the options that are best for them based on their particular situation, and that our official policy is to refer potential clients directly to the EOLC program.

# Even More Best Practices

## **Don't Take it Personally**

When a member of the audience disagrees with something that has been said, or disagrees with our organization in general, don't take it personally. Stay level-headed and be generous with those who disagree with you. Don't try to talk someone out of their position or get dragged into arguments or debates. Remember that time you spend arguing with someone who doesn't agree is time you are not spending engaging those who are open to support our cause.

Rather than belaboring a point, try this simple pivot: “We appear to disagree on this point, but this isn't the time for an extended debate on this one issue, so I'm going to take another question. Thank you for your thoughts....”

## **Always have the freshest information:**

Death-With-Dignity legislation, legal action and movement building are happening faster and faster. Before your presentation, always visit the national website, [www.CompassionAndChoices.org](http://www.CompassionAndChoices.org), and check for the latest information and developments that may be happening in Congress, in the courts, in state legislatures and even locally in your area.

### **Know your Audience:**

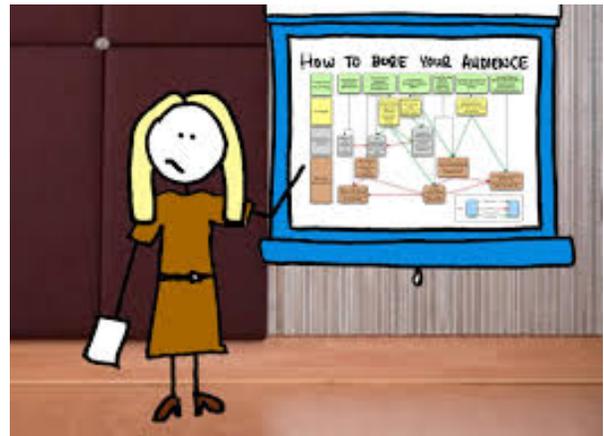
Perhaps more important than anything else, familiarize yourself with your audience! Law students are a much different audience than you will find at a Rotary Club meeting. In most cases, the venue or event at which you are presenting will come with a well-defined audience (association of nurses, assisted living facility, a church or faith group, etc.). Be sure to identify and focus your presentation on the likely interests of that audience—again, the venue or organization hosting you is the first and best place to ask.

In some instances, it will not be clear who your expected audience includes. In these cases, stick with general messaging points, and be prepared to refer more specific questions to the website or Compassion & Choices staff.

# Using Technology Wisely

Although visual aides, video, and audio amplification can enhance our presentations, they require management before and during a speaking engagement. Some use of visual tools, like a Powerpoint presentation, is recommended, but try and stick to these basic guidelines:

1. **Don't write your script on the slides.** Only include the basic points and headlines (this will also help you avoid "reading" your slides).
2. **Use primarily images and pictures in your slides...**people came to listen and learn, not to read.
3. **Always look at the audience,** not at the screen, while you are speaking.
4. **If you are using video,** either embedded within a presentation, or as a stand-alone piece, be sure to **properly introduce what you are about to show,** and **manage the transfer of attention** from you to the screen, and back again.



Using a microphone:

Some speaking engagements require the use of a microphone, specifically if the auditorium is large or if the presentation is being recorded. Here are a few pointers for using a microphone effectively:

- To gauge your correct speaking volume in an informal engagement, ask the audience (through the microphone) if you are too loud or too soft—they will tell you!
- Put your lips as close to the microphone as possible; your audience will hear you much more clearly that way.
- If the microphone is on a podium, remember to speak directly into it.

# Public Speaking Checklist

Here is a basic checklist with steps to consider for a good public speaking experience. Your own personal touch is indispensable, but if you can check all these boxes you can be confident you are ready to go.

- Make sure you have the necessary background about the speaking opportunity:** Be sure you understand the context, format, and purpose of your appearance, along with the duration of your presentation and any other details you can learn in advance.
- Logistics:** Double check that you know where the event is located—including directions for parking—how you will travel to and from the site, and what your total travel time should be.
- Technology:** Be prepared with any video assets you may need (DVD, Powerpoint or other presentation, etc.), and be sure that video assets are desired and appropriate for the particular event. In advance of the presentation, verify that the required equipment will be available to you onsite. Ask if you will be using a microphone or if a microphone is required.
- Learn about your audience:** Consider who will be in the room and what they are most likely to respond to. An audience of nurses or medical students will have different interests than residents at a senior's center. Make a list of the main points likely to be of interest to this audience.
- Customize your presentation:** Most speakers have a standard go-to presentation that they are comfortable giving. This is an important beginning, but your presentation should always be customized to include specific information to suit each audience and the particular location (relevant information may change by city or state).
- Top three points:** Whatever the context or format, you should be clear on the main thrust of your presentation. Identify and articulate three main points that are a good fit for a particular presentation, and refer to those points throughout the presentation.
- Local connection:** Always try to include specific information with a local connection—a story about someone from the local community or a recent update that has significance to the area or group you are addressing.
- Personal stories:** Including a personal story is a powerful tool in any presentation. Whether you are talking about Brittany Maynard, Barbara Mancini, someone else you may know about, or yourself, real life stories will keep your audience connected to the issues. Remember to tell other people's stories carefully, and check that it's OK to share details.
- PRACTICE!:** Even if you have given your presentation many times, each situation is unique. Do at least one run-through to incorporate your local connections, personal stories and your top three points.
- Materials from Compassion & Choices:** Always bring some materials to offer to your audience: Quarterly Magazine, Palm Card, local/state flyer or brochure or promotion for upcoming local events.

# Considering an Invitation

Whether Compassion & Choices has asked you to fill a speaking request they have received, or you are pursuing a speaking opportunity on behalf of the organization, always review the specifics of the event and verify that you are the right person for the job. **If you have any doubts or concerns, discuss them with Compassion & Choices staff. Here are some good questions to ask:**

1. Do you have the knowledge and expertise necessary for this particular presentation?
2. Do you have sufficient time in your schedule to travel to and from the event AND to adequately prepare for the presentation beforehand?
3. Is somebody else obviously better positioned for this particular presentation than you are?
4. Do you want to do the presentation, or would you rather pass? (Don't let guilt lead you to do something that isn't a good fit for you.)
5. Is there anything about the event, the organization, or other presenters that could be damaging or awkward for Compassion & Choices?
6. Are you speaking to your peers? Most people are more open to a message from a peer than from someone outside their circle: For example, a nurse is best positioned to speak to an audience of nurses.

## The Right Balance for Using Humor

Humor is a very important tool in public speaking. It puts people at ease, makes the content more accessible and is a great way to keep your audience engaged.

Because of the subject matter that we deal with, it is critical that you take extra care in deploying humor. While humor remains an important tool that you are encouraged to use, make sure that you avoid offending your audience or making light of someone else's difficult experiences.

If you have a funny line or story to use, try it out on a few friends or family members first to see if anyone has a negative response. Their feedback will give you a good read on the appropriateness of your joke.