



Introducing your Citizens Advice Bureau

Hello, and welcome to the Citizens Advice BSL introductory video.

This is a short film to help Deaf people access a Citizens Advice bureau (CAB). It will explain the type of problems we can help with, how a CAB works and where to find further help.

There are other BSL videos on this site, so if you are looking for specific information try clicking on these films for a basic guide to these subjects:

- Debt
- Discrimination
- Employment
- Benefits
- Gender Violence
- Hate Crimes
- Consumer Issues

Alternatively, go to www.citizensadvice.org.uk for key facts and advice.

What we do

People often ask, “How can a Citizens Advice Bureau help me?” Many people from all walks of life come to see us, as we help with legal, debt, financial, benefit, employment and housing issues.

We operate under four basic principles. Our service is:

- free – it won't cost you anything. If we can't help you, we will point you in the right direction
- impartial – we are here for you but don't have a particular point of view
- independent – we are not part of government
- confidential – we will not tell anyone else about your problem.

We help with everything from parking fines to council tax and employment problems. We will also help you with discrimination problems, whether at work or with shops and services.

What makes us different is that most of our staff are volunteers who give their time freely to help advise people.

Coming to a bureau

Some Deaf people are reluctant to seek help from Citizens Advice because they worry about communication difficulties. This is understandable, as not many advisers have BSL. But there are several options to help Deaf clients.

Some bureaux have Deaf advisers who use BSL to help with your problems.

If you are not near a bureau with a BSL fluent adviser, you can ask your local bureau to pay for a BSL interpreter for you when you have an appointment. This may take a little time, as it depends on availability of staff. But we will do our best to help you as soon as possible.

You can fax, email or bring someone with you to a meeting.

First visit

When you first arrive at a bureau, you will usually find yourself in reception or a waiting room. A volunteer will meet you and ask you for your name and address. You may also be asked for an outline of your problem. It is often helpful to bring the relevant paper work with you (letters, court demands, benefit claims) so the volunteer can understand what help you need.

At your first meeting, your adviser will ask you questions so he or she can work out what you should do next. Some people are scared of talking about their problems, or are embarrassed. Our advisers are specially trained to help you, and will listen carefully to your problem without judging you. We want to help you, not make you feel worse.

After this initial assessment you will either be given an appointment with a adviser or specialist, or if we cannot help you we will refer you to someone who can.

All your information will be kept strictly confidential and we will not contact anyone without you agreeing. This means no-one in your family, no business, no local council or any business or person without your consent. So sometimes, an adviser might ask you to sign a consent form to talk about your case with the relevant people. We will not reveal any information to anyone without your permission.

Next steps

At the end of your appointment, you and your adviser will come up with a plan of action that will help move things forward.

Remember, if the problem needs further help, you might be asked to make an appointment at a later date. Don't worry if an adviser asks you to come again.

The most important thing to remember is not to ignore your problems and to try and get help. In the last year, we have helped people from every background and culture solve over six million problems, so we are a good place to start.

This information is produced by Citizens Advice, an operating name of The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It is intended to provide general information only. Please also note that this information applies only to England and Wales.