

Doctor Communication Scripts:

How to Speak Up -

Even When You're Nervous

A direct self-advocacy guide empowering teen girls and families to navigate clinical appointments, counter diagnostic overshadowing, and push for evidence-based care.

How to Use These Scripts

When sitting on an exam table or feeling unwell, pushing back against a provider can feel intimidating. Keep these scripts on your phone, inside your "Her Health" App, or printed with your Patient Passport to read directly to your doctor.

Actionable Self-Advocacy Matrix

Common Clinical Scenario	What You Are Experiencing	Actionable Self-Advocacy Script
1. Dismissed as "Just Anxiety" or Stress	The provider attributes physical symptoms (racing heart, fatigue, GI pain) entirely to mental health without investigating.	<i>"I understand anxiety can affect the body, but I want to ensure we aren't experiencing diagnostic overshadowing. Can we run a differential diagnosis and test for (iron levels / POTS / autoimmune markers) before assuming this is purely psychological?"</i>
2. Medication Offered Before Diagnostic Testing	The doctor prescribes psychiatric or symptom-masking medication without performing baseline bloodwork or physical evaluations.	<i>"Before starting a new medication, I'd like to run comprehensive bloodwork and diagnostic tests first to make sure we aren't masking an underlying physical condition."</i>

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3. Refusal to Order Requested Tests or Referrals	The physician declines to order a test, scan, or specialist referral that you or your family feel is medically necessary.	<i>"I understand you don't believe this test is indicated today. Could you please document your specific clinical justification for declining this test in my medical chart?"</i>
4. Symptoms Labelled as "Normal" Teen Fatigue or Drama	Severe pain, exhaustion, or lightheadedness is minimized as typical teenage growth, diet, or school stress.	<i>"These symptoms are severely impacting my daily life, academic performance and attendance. This is a significant drop from my baseline. I need help identifying the biological cause, not just managing assumptions."</i>
5. Feeling Overwhelmed, Nervous, or Put on the Spot	You struggle to verbally explain complex symptoms under time pressure during the appointment.	<i>"It is hard for me to explain everything verbally today, so I brought my structured symptom log. I would like us to review these documented patterns together."</i>
6. Seeking a Second Opinion or Specialist Referral	You feel your current provider has reached a dead end or is unwilling to investigate further.	<i>"Thank you for your time today. To ensure a comprehensive or holistic assessment, I would like a referral to a specialist (e.g., dysautonomia clinic, cardiologist, rheumatologist) for a second opinion."</i>

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7. Normal Labs Despite Ongoing Severe Physical Symptoms	Standard basic bloodwork comes back "normal," but you are still experiencing debilitating physical flares.	<i>"I see these basic screening labs are in range, but my physical symptoms persist. What additional specialized testing or diagnostic pathways do we take when basic panels come back normal?"</i>
8. Provider Interrupts or Rushes Through the Visit	The appointment feels hurried and you haven't been able to share your full symptom record or ask key questions.	<i>"Before we wrap up today, I have two remaining symptom patterns I need documented in my visit summary to ensure we have an accurate history."</i>

Key Power Terms Used in These Scripts:

- **Diagnostic Overshadowing:** Misattributing physical symptoms to a pre-existing psychiatric label without testing.
- **Clinical Justification:** Asking the provider to officially record *why* care or testing was withheld.
- **Baseline:** Comparing your current functional limitations against your normal daily health state.
- **Differential Diagnosis:** The list of alternative physical conditions a doctor should consider before settling on "stress."
- **Holistic Assessment:** A comprehensive evaluation that considers the entire person rather than focusing on isolated parts. For accurate personalized care it is necessary to look at interconnected physical, emotional, social, and environmental factors.