

Self-Advocacy: Let Your Needs be Known

Self-advocacy is one of the most important life skills to learn and can be taught at almost any age. It is the ability to use your voice and speak up for what you need. Self-advocacy, while important for everyone, is especially important for older adults and those living with a disability. When people do not advocate for themselves they may be negatively influenced by other people and may even feel like they do not have control over their life.

Regaining your self-control and using your voice to successfully advocate for yourself will boost your self-esteem, help you gain more confidence and let your needs be known to others. Some steps to help you become an effective Self-Advocate are:

1. Believe in Yourself

You are a unique and valuable person. You are worth the effort it takes to advocate for yourself and protect your rights. You can do it!

2. Know Your Rights

You are entitled to equality under the law. You have the same rights as others regardless of your age or if you have a disability. If you have a disability, you have the right to reasonable accommodations at school, work and other places or programs.

3. Decide What You Want or Need

Clarify for yourself exactly what you need. This will help you set your own goals and help you be clear to others about what it is that you want and need for yourself.

4. Get the Facts

When you advocate for yourself, you need to know what you are talking about or asking for. A good advocate does not use assumptions, but does their homework and knows the facts. The internet is an excellent source of information. However, you will need to check its accuracy by looking at several different references to see if they agree. You can also check with people who have expertise in what you are considering. Ask others who have had similar wants or needs to yours.

5. Plan a Strategy

Using the information you have gathered, plan a strategy that you feel will work to get what you need and want for yourself. Think about a couple different approaches you may want to use. Ask family and friends for feedback on your ideas. Choose which strategy to take action using the one that you feel has the most chance of being successful.

6. Get Support

Although you will be advocating for yourself, it is always helpful to have support from family, friends and/other people who have similar wants or needs.

7. Target Your Efforts

You will need to decide who is the person, persons, or organization you need to speak with to get action on this matter. Talk directly with the person who you feel can best assist you. It may take a few phone calls to discover which organization or person can help, but it is worth the effort. Keep trying until you find the right person. It is possible the person you need to speak to is a

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family member or someone you know. Perhaps it is the head of the local housing agency, your doctor, or a state legislator.

8. Express Yourself Clearly

When you are asking for what you want or need, be brief. Try to stick to the point. Don't allow yourself to be distracted or talk about unimportant details. Politely state your concern and how you want things changed. If the person(s) you are speaking to tries to tell you reasons why you cannot achieve what it is you want for yourself, be respectful and listen to what they have to say, then repeat again what it is you want and expect from them, until they either give it to you, help you get it, or refer you to someone else who may be able to give you what you need.

If you feel this process may be difficult for you, you may want to role-play different scenarios with a family member, friend or supporter beforehand.

9. Assert Yourself Clearly

Remember to be calm and don't lose your temper or lash out at the other person(s), their character or the organization. **Speak out, asking for what you need and want and then listen.** Respect the rights of others, but don't let them "put you down" or intimidate you.

10. Be Firm and Persistent

Don't give up! Keep after what you want, even if it means using a new strategy. Always follow through on what you say. Dedicate yourself to getting whatever it is you need for yourself.

Information was gathered from an excerpt from WRAP Plus (Copeland, M., Dummerston, Vermont)



*Self
Advocate*