

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

What is Self-Advocacy



This tool kit was adapted from the Essential Self Advocacy Toolkit produced by Stanley's Community Center and Morecambe Bay CCG

www.advocacyfocus.org.uk



This project is supported through state general funds (Contract #16-002A) administered by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

WHAT IS A SELF-ADVOCATE?

Self-advocacy is the ability to speak-up for yourself and the things that are important to you. It means you can ask for what you need and want and tell people about your thoughts and feelings. Self-advocacy means you can make choices and decisions that affect your life.

The goal of self-advocacy is for YOU to decide what you want! You can then develop and carry out a plan to help you get it. Self-advocacy does not mean you can't get help if you need or want it, it means that you are making the choices and you are responsible for the choices you make.

There are many places that you might want to speak-up for yourself or ask for what you want such as:



At home



At work



At school



At the hospital



Talking with a government official



At a doctor's appointment

And more....

If you are not happy with the way things are going then it is up to you to help change it. Nobody else knows how you feel or what you think- YOU need to tell people if you are not happy, or you want something to change.

You are an expert in your own life and should be involved in any decision that affects you!

Self-Advocacy is

- ✓ Learning about your rights
- ✓ Speaking up for yourself
- ✓ Taking control and making decisions
- ✓ Accessing information you need

Self-Advocacy is NOT

- ✗ Sitting around and complaining
- ✗ Only for people who can talk
- ✗ Keeping to yourself
- ✗ Putting yourself down
- ✗ Playing it safe, doing the same stuff
- ✗ Other people making decisions for you
- ✗ Not taking any chances
- ✗ Staying angry



HOW TO SELF-ADVOCATE

Knowing how to self-advocate is a skill that takes practice and effort to master. It takes understanding your rights, understanding yourself and your needs and communicating effectively.

Knowledge

When people you do not know are part of the team helping to make decisions about your life, be sure you understand and have as much information as possible about your situation or issue. Understanding your rights will help you feel more confident to say what you want or challenge decisions.

Know your rights and what you are entitled to. Whether you have a meeting with a professionals such as a physician, general assembly member or case manager you need to have as much information as possible.

Information needs to be provided to you in an easy to read format free of acronyms and jargon. If you do not understand ask questions and use what is available to you to help you understand.



Research on line or
at a local library



Ask others you trust
for help



Contact an advocacy
organization such as the Brain
Injury Association of Virginia

There are many ways to learn about your rights, it may seem difficult at first but the more you do it the easier it will become.

Skills

Have a clear understanding of yourself.

- ✓ **Be able to identify your issues and your goals.**
- ✓ **Get to know your own feelings and emotions and how you respond to situations.** This is the first step to learn how to articulate your feelings and express what your needs are, effectively.
- ✓ **Identify your strengths, challenges, likes, and dislikes –** Everyone has them, but everyone is uniquely different.
- ✓ **Know what you need and want –** An effective self-advocate must have a clear picture of what he/she needs and wants.

To help you think about your own skills, try to answer these questions:

SKILLS WORKSHEET

What are your biggest strengths?

What are your biggest weaknesses?

What are three things you do well in self-advocacy?

What are things you need to improve in self-advocacy?



Communication

Communication is about how you get your message across and how you listen to what others are saying. Some people find it hard to speak; some have a disability that makes communication more difficult. It is important that you let people know what you need so they can make changes for you to be heard.

Clear and respectful communication includes the following:

- ✓ **Active listening.** This means you have to ask questions and give feedback in a give-and-take manner.
- ✓ **Focus on what you want or need, not placing blame on others.** For example, "How can you help me in getting the support I need?" rather than "Why can't you help me in getting the support I need?"



Remember most people have a limited amount of time they can spend with you so you need to keep to the point and communicate clearly.



- ✓ Concentrate and listen to what the person is saying.
- ✓ Ask for time to think if you need it.
- ✓ Take your time. You can repeat back what someone has said to make sure you understand.
- ✓ If you don't understand something, ask for the information to be explained again or in a different way.
- ✓ This is about you so if you come away confused, don't be afraid to ask for another meeting.
- ✓ Listening is an important skill. Listening well will help build relationships, solve problems, help you understand things and reduce stress.



TOP TIPS

1. Take your time.
2. Think about what you want to say.
3. Practice beforehand.
4. Keep it simple – focus on what's important to you.
5. Be candid, open and honest.



Assertiveness

Being assertive means being confident in asking for what you want and being able to say what you need. You will get better results if you say what you need clearly with as little words as possible. Keep calm, becoming aggressive or frustrated will shift the focus to your temper and not about what you are trying to say.

The following tips may help you avoid conflict should the situation arise:

Remind others to stay calm

When one person gets upset often others will also. Try to stop a situation from escalating by asking people politely not to raise their voices.

Ask for a break

Sometimes, time out can help to calm a situation down. Everyone feels refreshed after a break.



Don't make it personal

If people feel personally attacked, this is when emotions can run high. Make sure you talk about the issue, not the person. Try not to make personal comments about someone else.

Listen to how someone feels

You don't have to agree with them, but accept their emotions and the way they feel.

Try not to argue

You can say you disagree and say no, but try not to argue or raise your voice. When someone is upset this can make the situation worse and people don't listen as well as they should.

Don't tell someone to 'calm down'

If a situation does escalate and voices become raised, don't tell someone to 'calm down,' ask them if they are okay or if they need a break instead.



Stay seated

Try not to stand over someone, stay on the same level as them or even lower, this will stop anyone from feeling intimidated or out of control.

Let everyone speak

If someone says something that you disagree with, let them finish. Waiting to speak is important and gives everyone a chance to have their say and their voices heard.



Controlling your Emotions

Keeping your emotions in check helps you focus on what you have to say and what you want. Sometimes being emotional just can't be helped; emotions are things we feel and they can't just be turned off.

The key to learning to control your emotions is finding a way that helps you to stay calm.

Some things that may help

- ✓ Play with something in your hands, such as a stress ball.
- ✓ Control your breathing; take slow, deep breaths.
- ✓ Think of something that makes you happy.
- ✓ Ask to take a break.
- ✓ Close your eyes and gather your thoughts.
- ✓ Think about what you want to say before you say it.



We are only human and cannot always control the way we react. You know yourself best so try and practice the things that make you feel calm.

LIST SOME THINGS THAT HELP YOU STAY CALM:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Confidence

Confidence means feeling good about yourself and the things you can do and believing in yourself as you are. Confidence can help you feel ready for anything that can happen in life. Sometimes we are our own worst critics. Building confidence starts with you and changing how you view yourself. When you feel confident you are more able to deal with challenges and ask for help when you need it. Everyone has the ability to feel confident!

You may experience some frustration along the way. You can't grow in confidence without making mistakes and learning from them. The thing that will make the most difference is taking the knocks and using them to learn how to do better next time!

Here are some tips to help you do that:

1

Make a note of what went well and what didn't go so well. It doesn't matter if it was down to you or someone else, this will help you for next time.

2

When you have done something new, take some time afterwards to reflect and look back on it.

3

Reward yourself when you do something new or difficult. Whether you succeed or not, reward yourself for doing it. The success is in trying, not the finished result.

4

Learn. Find out what went wrong and practice to avoid it happening again. You are always learning and even people who do this all the time have to work at it.

5

Think about what you could do differently next time. Don't fall into the trap of doing the same thing again and again.

6

Remember what a knock is – it is just a knock. It is rarely ever a disaster and sometimes is worse in our own mind than in real life. Knocks are part and parcel of learning.

YOUR TOOLS

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MEETING PREPARATION SHEET

Date:

Time:

Place:

Where:

Who's going:

What is it for:

What outcome do I want?

What questions do I want to ask

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

MEETING NOTES

What’s important?

What needs to be done?	Who by?	When?

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Name	
Who is this?	
Phone Number	

Name	
Who is this?	
Phone Number	

Name	
Who is this?	
Phone Number	

Name	
Who is this?	
Phone Number	

Name	
Who is this?	
Phone Number	

Name	
Who is this?	
Phone Number	

CONTACT JOURNAL

Date	Time	Name	Content of Conversation

TO-DO LIST

Date	Task
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
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MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

disAbility Law Center of Virginia

www.dlcv.org

Services include information and referral, legal representation, technical assistance, short-term assistance, systemic advocacy, monitoring and training. Our services are provided free of charge. We are independent from state and local government.

Long Term Care Ombudsman

Ombudsmen advocate for older persons receiving long term care services, whether the care is provided in a nursing home or assisted living facility, or through community-based services to assist persons still living at home. We provide older Virginians, their families and the public with information, advocacy, and assistance to help resolve care problems.

Adult Protective Services

Adult Protective Services (APS) receives and investigates reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of adults 60 years of age or older and incapacitated adults age 18 or older. If protective services are needed and accepted by the individual, local APS workers may arrange for a wide variety of health, housing, social and legal services to stop the mistreatment or prevent further mistreatment. Services offered may include home-based care, transportation, adult day services, adult foster care, nutrition services and legal intervention in order to protect the adult. Services may also be arranged for individuals in emergency situations who lack the capacity to consent to services.

To report suspected adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation, call your local departments of social services or the 24-hour, toll-free APS hotline at: **(888) 832-3858**.

Child Protective Services:

The goal of Child Protective Services (CPS) is to identify, assess and provide services to children and families in an effort to protect children, preserve families, whenever possible, and prevent further maltreatment. Child Protective Services is non-punitive in its approach and is directed toward enabling families to provide adequate care for their children.

Local departments of social services are responsible for receiving reports of abuse and neglect; conducting investigations to determine the validity of the CPS reports; and providing services that enhance child safety and prevent further abuse and neglect to families and children.

Hotline Numbers

In Virginia: **(800) 552-7096**

Out-of-state: **(804) 786-8536**

If you have any questions about this Toolkit or need more information about advocacy or brain injury, please get in touch:



The Brain Injury Association of Virginia
www.biav.net

Call us at **(804) 355-5748**

E Mail us at **info@biav.net**

Brain Injury Association of Virginia Advocacy
www.biav.net/about-us/advocacy/