



Self Advocacy At Work For You!

A Fact Sheet for youth, by youth!

Self-Advocacy Defined

Self-advocacy refers to an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions, (VanReusen et al., 1994).

Until recently, self-advocacy was a concept used more for adults with disabilities, but increasingly it is recognized as a skill that teens with disabilities need to develop.

History of Self-Advocacy

The term "self-advocacy" can be traced back to the late 1960's when young adults with disabilities began speaking out about taking an active role in planning their lives and the programs that supported them. One important outcome of the self-advocacy movement includes the recognition that people with disabilities are people first as well as the push for People First Language. For example: instead of saying, "disabled person", people now say "person with a disability".

Becoming a Self-Advocate

Know Yourself! - Knowing yourself is the first step.

- **What are your needs in life?**
 - Do you need assistance to go to college?
 - Do you need adaptive technology/equipment in order to do your job?
 - Do you need financial counseling to maintain a budget?
 - Do you know what supports you might need at home, school or work and who can provide them?
- **What are your wants?**
 - What kind of career do you want?
 - Where do you want to live; your own apartment or house?
 - Do you want to direct your own personal cares?
 - Do you want to make a big purchase like a vehicle or house, or go on a vacation, etc.?
- **What kinds of things interest you?**
 - Do you enjoy going to movies?
 - Do you like hanging out with friends?
 - Do you like gardening, animals, photography, etc?
- **What are your strengths?**
 - Are you artistic?
 - Are you a good writer?
 - Are you good at sports?
 - Are you a good public speaker?
- **What are your weaknesses and how can you work on improving them?**
 - Are you unorganized?
 - Are you a slow typist?
 - Do you have poor time management skills?

Be Proactive and Practice!

Once you know your likes, interests, strengths and weaknesses, practice communicating them with your friends, family or other people who are strong supports in your life. They can give you advice on how to effectively communicate your thoughts and support in reaching your goals.

Making Choices and Decisions

A big part of self-advocacy is making your own decisions and understanding the consequences of your choices. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction uses a five-step process in "Opening Doors to Self-Determination Skills: Planning for Life After High School."

Five decision-making steps:

- What is the decision you need to make? For example, is it okay to skip work to play in a basketball game?
- What decisions could I make? For example, tell my boss I'm sick and play in the game; tell the team I'll miss the game, because I have to go to work; or ask my boss if she can find someone to work for me that day, and I'll go to work if she can't.
- Evaluate each choice. What are pluses and minuses of each choice?
- Pick the best choice. Describe which choice you think is best for you.
- Evaluate. Did you make the best choice for you?

How Else Can I Improve My Self-advocacy Skills?

- Join In
 - Sign up for leadership activities in your school or community.
 - School clubs, 4-H, community organizations, volunteer and paid work experiences, etc.
- Go Online - Check out the wiyouthfirst.org website to find national and local youth leadership opportunities. This is a great way to gain confidence, experience and leadership skills.
- Plan Ahead
 - Keep a list of your activities and personal leadership qualities to include on your resume.
 - The people you meet through those activities can also make great references.

Self-Advocacy & Your Future

Everyone can be their own self-advocate, and using self-advocacy skills is a life-long process. As these skills develop, you will learn what your specific wants and needs are, how to communicate them, and who to ask for help.

Resourceful Websites:

Advocating Change Together
www.selfadvocacy.org

Kids as Self Advocates (KASA)
www.fvkasa.org

National Disability Rights Network
www.napas.org

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition
www.ncset.org

Self Advocates Becoming Empowered
www.sabeusa.org

Self-Determination Wisconsin
www.sdwisconsin.org

Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative
www.wsti.org

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