

7 Steps of Self-Advocacy

1. Connect with self-belief & personal support:

Start by reminding yourself that you are a valuable person who deserves the positive outcomes that speaking up for your rights and needs can lead to. If you are struggling to find confidence and self-belief, try finding someone in your life who you trust to support you. Your support person should be someone who wants what is best for you, respects your views, and has the skills to help you with your self-advocacy; such as being organised, ability to research, problem solve and communicate well.

2. Identify your needs and wants:

Develop a clear understanding of the issue, what your needs are and how you would like things to be different. It can be helpful to get specific with ideas about potential solutions. Even if these ideas don't eventuate they could lead to creating an achievable outcome.

3. Research your self-advocacy pathway:

Ensure you have accurate information about the right process to raise your concerns, where and how to do this, and who is the best person to help you. The process to raise a concern will differ depending on the organisation, so it's important to research the correct course of action.

4. Clarify your rights:

It's important to determine whether what you are seeking aligns with your rights. If this is challenging to do alone, perhaps ask your support person to help you. Researching your basic human rights is a good place to start. If your issue relates to a certain organisation or system they may have information on their website about your rights as a client accessing their service.

5. Make a plan:

Take the time to plan what you would like to say and how you would like to say it. Make notes to help you remember. There are numerous options for communicating your issue for example by letter, email, phone call or face to face. It's important to consider and be guided by your own strengths when choosing how to communicate. For example, if you feel very nervous speaking to someone you don't know, email or letter may be a better choice for you. Even considering the environmental setting, time of day and your frame of mind are important parts of setting yourself up for success in a self-advocacy interaction.

6. Communicate clearly and respectfully:

Even if the issue is very challenging and emotional it is important to communicate clearly and respectfully. This will help create feelings of respect and teamwork with the person you are communicating with and likely lead to a better outcome. If you are concerned you will struggle with this it can be helpful to practice the interaction with your support person, or if it is a letter or email have them read over it before you send it. You could also ask your support person if they would be happy to be present in the in the interaction with you if it is happening by phone or face to face.

7. Document and follow up:

If you are meeting by phone or face to face, take notes during your conversation. You could also ask your support person to do this. Having notes to refer back to is helpful if you need to follow up on agreed actions. Make sure you note particular details such as: who you spoke with, the date, what was discussed, what was agreed upon moving forward, and who is responsible for what and by when. These details are important to help ensure people do what they promised in helping to achieve positive changes for you. The other important part of follow up is remembering that self-advocacy takes persistence. You may not get what you need straight away, in fact it may take a long time to get someone to really hear you and commit to helping you improve things, but it is important to keep speaking up for yourself until things do get better.

It's important to acknowledge that different life situations will always have different self-advocacy pathways. However, these steps can be applied to any self-advocacy situation to help you achieve a successful outcome.