



Self-Advocacy in Education and Life (Let's Get Empowered)

What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-Advocacy means understanding your rights and needs, speaking up for yourself or your child, making informed decisions, and taking an active role in shaping your future. For parents and caregivers of children and youth with disabilities, self-advocacy is a powerful tool that brings confidence, clarity, and results.

It's about being heard, respected, and involved, whether it's in an IEP meeting, a healthcare conversation, or a school transition. It helps you navigate complex systems, stand up for your child's best interests, and create a path toward empowerment and success.

How Self-Advocacy Empowers You

- ❖ You learn to ask for the support and services you or your child or youth needs.
- ❖ You have a say in decisions that impact your family.
- ❖ You build confidence, leadership, and reduce stress.
- ❖ You promote independence for you and your child or youth with unique needs.
- ❖ You feel empowered to act and make changes.

Examples of Self-Advocacy in Action

- “I need help understanding this report—can we go over it together?”
- “I’d like to be part of the decision-making team for my child’s plan.”
- “I have some concerns about the services being offered, let’s talk about options.”
- “I want to ensure that my child’s voice is included.”
- “Can you help me learn more so I can support my child better?”

Where Do I Start?

- Know Your Rights - Read up on laws like IDEA, Section 504, and ADA to understand what support avenues are available.
- Be Prepared - Gather documents, write down questions, and bring a support person to meetings.
- Speak Up - Don’t be afraid to voice your opinion—even if it feels uncomfortable at first.
- Get Support - Connect with other parents, advocacy groups, or organizations like WV PTI for guidance.
- Practice Self-Care - You can’t advocate effectively if you’re burned out. Take time for yourself, too.

Tips to Promote Self-Advocacy

- ✓ Encourage your child to express their feelings and preferences early on.
- ✓ Role-play conversations to prepare for IEPs, doctor visits, or interviews.
- ✓ Write down goals and track progress toward them.
- ✓ Use “I” statements to express concerns (e.g., “I feel...” or “I need...”).
- ✓ Celebrate small wins and reflect on what worked well.

OFFER SOLUTIONS: Be a Problem-Solver!

- If services aren't working → "Can we explore an alternative approach?"
- If communication is unclear → "Can we set regular check-ins to stay updated?"
- If you feel left out of the process → "How can I be more involved in planning?"
- If your child is struggling → "Let's review the supports and adjust as needed."
- If you're not sure what's next → "Who can help me understand the next steps?"

Remember: Self-advocacy is a skill that builds over time. Every time you speak up, ask a question, or express your needs, you're practicing advocacy and creating better outcomes for yourself and your child or youth.

Be Informed. Be Involved. Be Empowered.

If you would like additional information, training, or simply want to discuss your next steps, please contact WV Parent Training and Information, Inc.

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