Self-Advocacy

A guide to taking action, being heard & making your needs known

LIBRA PARTNERSHIP

HFAN Hammersmith & Fulham Advocacy Network

THE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP
ADVOCACY, SUPPORT & ENGAGEMENT IN MEDWAY

Self-advocacy: A guide to taking action, being heard & making your needs known

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"I learned a long time ago the wisest thing I can do is be on my own side - be an advocate for myself and others like me"

Maya Angelou

Introduction

Welcome to our self-advocacy tool-kit, designed to **empower you** to speak up, make your **needs** known and stand up for **your rights**. It has been created by professional advocates from Libra Partnership with lived experience.

We hope to support you on your journey of becoming your own advocate in the matters which are **important to you**, for example, with health, social care and housing issues, benefits, entitlements, education settings or in the workplace.

Self-advocacy can help you **achieve the outcomes** you want and assert more control over your life,

You will find useful **self-advocacy worksheets** on pages 9 and 10, which can be used to prepare and guide you through meetings, calls or difficult conversations.

Self-advocacy is not only for the big challenges - learning how to speak up means you can navigate the day-to-day things with ease - **self-advocacy is for life**.

Look out for our self-advocacy top-tips!

What is self-advocacy?

Sometimes things are not how we would like them to be. Taking action on what doesn't feel right may seem overwhelming - being heard and speaking up for yourself might be intimidating, especially when others seem powerful or if you feel like you alone and no one is listening.

Voicing your views and opinions means you are advocating for yourself, but how do we do this effectively?

Gaining the **confidence, knowledge** and **skills** to be able to self-advocate is key in being fully involved in the matters which might impact your life.

Self-advocacy results in your wishes and feelings being better understood.

Why self-advocacy matters

With self-advocacy, you are better equipped to **take action** when something feels wrong, and you'll be able to assert your boundaries to protect your wellbeing.

It helps you to **voice your concerns** and talk about things which might be difficult in a safe and contained way.

This leads to being **better supported** and having **more control** over key aspects of your life.

Good to know

Trust your feelings

One of the foundations of self-advocacy is understanding your feelings and recognising when something doesn't feel right. Worry, anger or frustration often come to the surface before we understand the reasons for these emotions.
Take a moment to be curious and ask yourself *'Why does this make me worry/angry/sad?'*

Often what is behind the emotion is the key information we need in order to make changes. If we **communicate the whys**, the emotion doesn't become a barrier in being fully understood.

"I am angry <u>because</u> I feel powerless"

By naming the issue behind the emotion, you will be able to communicate your feelings better. Even by understanding (and saying) that something doesn't feel right is a great start.

Know your needs

To be better supported and understood, why not take a moment to reflect on what your needs might be, both in the moment, and in the long-term.

- What are your communication needs? Do you need larger print? Bullet points? Do you need a translator?
- What do you need to feel well, safe and happy?
- What needs are not being met right now?
- Do your needs change day by day?
- Are you able to communiate your needs to others?

Know your rights

Knowing **your rights** helps to empower you and ensures that you are fully clued up how you are protected in the issues which you are facing.

Research the **relevant laws** that apply to your situation, for example the Care Act 2014, the Mental Health Act 1983, the Equality Act 2010, or the Health and Social Care Act 2008.

These laws **protect** people and ensure that they are **safe** and **free from discrimination**.

Find out how you might be protected under these laws and take some key notes which might help you assert your needs. Easy Read documentation about these laws is available via the Department of Health (www.gov.uk)

What do you want to achieve?

It will help to write down exactly what it is you want to achieve so that this crucial information remains at the heart of matters.

Keep it simple - Clear and concise information will amplify what matters to you most and help others to understand. Try writing down your goals in bullet points, like this:

- *I need help with food shopping - I can't carry the bags*
- *I need a carer's assessment as soon as possible*

Resources

Find out what **help is available** to you. For example, through

- your local Citizen's Advice Bureau
- local organisations with specialist knowledge
- websites such as: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Confidence & Wellbeing

Self-advocacy naturally boosts confidence by **empowering people** to communicate their needs, say what they do and don't want, and speak their minds through assertive communication.

In the short term this can reduce stress and help achieve results. In the long term, speaking up leads to **higher self esteem** as people recognise their own value. Self-advocacy can help people feel in control, reduce resentment and enhance their **wellbeing**.

Confidence does not come easily to all - sometimes it must be learned - here's some tips to help you get started:

- Know your needs and make them known to others
- Acknowledge your strengths: Everyone has them - and you do to!
- Acknowledge your achievements: small wins lead to big wins.
- Take a break: stepping away for a moment is perfectly okay - self care is very important.
- One step at a time: big things can be achieved with small steps.
- Ask for support: can a trusted friend or family member accompany you?
- Reflection: look how far you've come

Each small step means you are moving forward

Skills & Strategies

Preparation

One of the most important parts of communicating your thoughts, feelings and needs is preparation. When you are well prepared for important meetings, calls or conversations, you message is delivered loud and clear.

- Take some time to focus on and identify the things you want to achieve. Write these down in simple terms and bring this information with you. *Use our self-advocacy planner on page 9 to help!*
- Make sure you take note of the time of your meeting or discussion, and how it will take place.
- If you are visiting an office or venue, figure out your route in advance to avoid additional stress on the day
- Make your needs known before hand - for example, if you need a translator or chaperone.
- Bring a notebook and a pen.

Research

- What are your rights in relation to this issue?
- What are your options?
- What other support is available to you?

Communication

- Be gently assertive - try to keep calm, carry on and be clear
- Listen - make sure you have understood any responses and the proposed way forward
- Ask for information to be repeated or written down if needed
- Learn to compromise - remember small wins are still wins
- Take notes - you can reflect on these notes after and keep track of what has been discussed. *Use our self-advocacy meeting note worksheet on page 10 to help!*
- Stay in the present moment and focus on your goals
- Ask for a break if you feel like you are getting upset

Finishing up

- Go over what has been discussed - this ensures that everyone is on the same page
- *"Can I think about this some more?"* - ask for more time if you are faced with a choice or decision you are unsure about
- Make sure you take note of the name and role of the person you are talking to

What's next?

- Cooling down & reflecting - this is very important, especially after difficult discussions
- Think about what steps you need to take next
- Make a list of actions to help you plan
- Remember, **small steps** lead to **big changes**

Self-advocacy top-tips

Preparation is key!
Plan, practice, bring a pen

Make your needs known beforehand

Be clear about what you want

Explore your options

Bring someone with you like a trusted friend

Know your rights

Practice self-care
Take a break if you feel you need to

Sometimes things don't go to plan
...and that's ok

Small steps lead to big changes
Celebrate the small wins

Take a look at the useful **self-advocacy worksheets** below; which will help you plan, prepare and navigate your meetings or calls, and will **encourage you** to take the actions needed to **achieve your goals**.

Self-Advocacy Planner

How do I feel?

Step 1

Why do I feel this way?

Step 2

What needs to change and what do I want to achieve ?

Step 3

What are my rights?

Step 4

What are my needs?

Step 5

Who do I need to contact to make it happen?

Step 6

Action plan

Step 7

- .....
- .....
- .....

Self-Advocacy Meeting Notes

Meeting subject:

.....

Location:

.....

.....

.....

Date and time:

.....

Name of professional:

.....

Position:

.....

Outcomes I want:

- .....
- .....
- .....

My needs:

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.....

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Meeting notes:

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Action plan:

- .....
- .....
- .....

Achieved?

About Libra Partnership

Founded in 2016, Libra Partnership are **independent advocacy specialists** and provide advocacy support (statutory and non-statutory), Rule 1.2 Representation, Litigation Friend, LPA and training services.

Libra Partnership are the lead advocacy providers of Hammersmith & Fulham Advocacy Network (HFAN) and The Family Partnership (Medway), and support people in over 50 local authorities and ICBs across England and Wales.

We are passionate about issue-focused, **trauma-informed**, needs-aware and **rights-based** support.

You can read more about the types of advocacy support we offer on our main website.

FIND OUR REFERRAL FORMS ONLINE

Contact us

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