

Tips For Self-Advocacy



Take a moment - what does feeling heard mean to you?

As a young person there may be times that you feel you have not been listened to. You may think the reason for this is because someone is older and more knowledgeable, so is in control. For example, teachers or doctors. It may not always be one person but could be a large group of people or a system, such as the government. This can leave you feeling upset, frustrated, or even wanting to give up. In moments like this, it's important to remember your experience is valid, your voice is powerful, and you matter.

This guide is here to support you to self-advocate. Or, if you are supporting someone else, you can share this or complete it with them.

Throughout our lives all of us need to ask for things or speak up for ourselves. This doesn't always mean you have to shout or be the loudest person in the room to be heard. The word 'heard' is very important here. We all want to be listened to AND heard. We want to feel that our thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences matter.

What Is Self Advocacy?

According to the charity MIND, self-advocacy means **“speaking up about the things that are important to you”**¹.

It also includes asking questions, asking for what you need, and asking for help.

Why Is It Important?

Self-advocacy is a great skill to learn because you can use it now and in the future. It can help others understand your experience and how they can best support you. It may also help you become more independent, curious, confident, and empowered when making decisions or facing problems.

Advocating for yourself may not always be easy. There are some communities who are more likely to be ignored just because of their identity. For example, due to skin colour, ethnicity, and gender. That's why it's important to encourage and support a person to speak up if they feel comfortable to BUT also to continue to amplify their voice by being an Upstander and Ally. You can check out our [guide on promoting diversity](#) to learn more.

How Can I Learn to Self-Advocate?

It might surprise you, but you may already have started to do it! Examples of advocating for yourself include asking your parent/carer to have something specific for dinner or asking your teacher for extra help with your homework.

Below are some ideas to help you build your self-advocacy skills. At the end of the guide there is an activity sheet that might help you plan or think about some of the steps you can take. You can go through this on your own or with someone you trust.

1 Identify

To start, think about a particular situation or issue that you want to raise. How has it made you feel? What do you need? Are there any changes you hope to see? Make sure you are being clear and specific – focus on one issue at a time.

It can also be helpful to do some research into your rights if you feel it is relevant. A useful place to start is [here](#)*. Remember, even if the situation doesn't clearly violate one of your rights, it doesn't mean that your feelings of being treated unfairly or ignored don't matter. You can still raise these issues.

2 Seek Support

Remember the pressure is not all on you to solve the issue. Just because you're speaking up for yourself doesn't mean you shouldn't have support to create a plan, especially if it is a difficult or sensitive situation. Reach out to someone you trust, who will listen and be supportive. For example, your family, peers, or a teacher. If you can't think of someone, don't worry. You could try a helpline like Diana Award Crisis Messenger, Childline or The Mix.

3 Be Brave

You can do this! It is not easy to speak up, but you matter and deserve to be heard. If you are worried you could try breathing exercise or write down or practice what you want to say. You can ask someone to come with you.

Remember, sometimes speaking up may not always lead to you instantly getting the result you want, but it's a step in the right direction.

4 Speak Up

When you are ready, speak to the person who you think can help you solve this issue and take action. If it is in school, it could be a teacher or pastoral care staff. Think about the best time and place to have the conversation, for example in a quiet space during lunchtime. Try to:

Be specific – focus on how the situation made you feel.

Be respectful – you may feel emotional and want to convey this but it's important to remember shouting or being rude probably won't help. Try to speak calmly and slowly.

Include solutions – if you have an ideal outcome, it's good to mention this during the conversation.

5 Reflect

You've done it! Make sure you check in with yourself or someone you trust afterwards. Think about how you felt and what you learned. Are there any next steps you can take?

What Can I Do If I Still Feel Unheard?

If you've done all the above and still feel unheard, know you are trying your best. If it is not an urgent issue one thing you could do is take some time away from it. Look after yourself and do things that bring you joy, such as hanging out with loved ones or watching your favourite show. You can always come back to it later. If it is an urgent or complex issue, you

may need further help or advocacy. Consider speaking to a parent or carer to support you to take it further.

You're never alone - there are so many people in the world who have been told no so many times before being told yes. It could be helpful to connect with (in person and online) those who have had similar experiences.

Here are some quotes from some famous figures and our young people at The Diana Award that might inspire you to keep going:

“
**WIN or LEARN —
YOU NEVER LOSE**

— NELSON MANDELA
(PRESIDENT AND ACTIVIST)

**NO FEELING
IS SILLY.
IT'S VALID 😊**

— Young Person
at The Diana Award

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
(POET and ACTIVIST)

**THERE
IS
SUPPORT
OUT THERE,
DON'T
STOP
LOOKING**

— YOUNG
PERSON
AT
THE
DIANA
AWARD

**DON'T BE AFRAID TO
ASK FOR HELP ♡**

— YOUNG PERSON AT
THE DIANA AWARD

”
**DON'T LET ANYONE
TELL YOU THAT YOU CAN'T
DO SOMETHING. ESPECIALLY
NOT YOURSELF.**

— MINDY KALING
(ACTRESS)

ACTIVITY SHEET

Here are some helpful prompts you can use to get started on your self-advocacy journey. If you ever have an issue you'd like to raise. Feel free to write down as much or as little as you'd like.

What is the issue and what do I need?

Remember try to be specific!

Who or what can help me?

*Is it one person or a group of people?
Do you need other support?*

How did it go?

What went well? What could I do differently?

What would I like to do?

Think about what you'd like to do about the issue

What information do I need?

*This could be research you need to do
e.g. on your rights*

Other Notes