

Become a Self-Advocate



Photo Credit: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

*“You have to take action and stand up for yourself—
even if you’re sitting in a wheelchair.”*

– Christopher Reeve

TIP:

Resist the tendency to isolate yourself or turn inward. Reach out to find people and organizations who can help you.



What is Relational Self-Advocacy?

One of the most important skills you can learn is how to speak up for yourself and articulate your needs while you also take into consideration what others' needs around you are too. Through relational self-advocacy, you can take charge of your life, work out your problems, stand up for your rights and make sure you get what you need because you stay responsive to others as well and don't get too self-absorbed.

Whether you need to self-advocate with a medical professional, insurance company, employer or family member, it is important to remember that your opinions and desires matter and understanding theirs is what allows you to problem solve. Everyone is entitled to communicate how they feel. With focus and practice, you will be amazed at the positive outcomes you can achieve with a little time, effort and courage to listen to others and then to speak up for yourself.

FOUR STEPS TO SELF-ADVOCACY

Follow this list of important skills to learn to advocate for yourself.

1. Identify the issue you need to resolve

- Know yourself and your disability: what are your strengths and preferences?
- Set a goal for your desired resolution: what are your needs and desires?
- Understand all the possible solutions: what will get you the results you need?

2. Investigate the issue thoroughly

- Learn your rights and responsibilities: what legal and medical services are available?
- Keep yourself organized: what paperwork will help support your case?
- Clarify your desired outcome: what is most important to you and who is best to help?

3. Create a plan

- Focus on the problem and anticipate potential barriers: what do you need to happen? And what are the next steps?
- Develop a list of action items: whom do you need to communicate with and when to stay ahead of the problem to prevent it getting worse?
- Create a timeline to complete your list: what is a reasonable schedule to complete each task?

4. Take action

- Be prepared with your goal in mind: what do you need for each task and what are next steps?
- Use your time wisely: how can you plan ahead to stay on track?
- Engage with confidence while asking for help: what are your questions and concerns?
- Keep good notes and stay grounded and open so you can respond to what comes up: how will you respond to new information?
- Stay focused and clear about solving your problem: ask others to problem solve with you, and ask again and again.



Louise Phipps Senft and her son Archer
Photo Credit: Maggie Seybold

“You know best what you need. Go get it.”

Long before Louise Phipps Senft’s son Archer sustained a spinal cord injury in a 2015 swimming accident she had built a successful career and business helping people mediate amicable resolutions to conflicts. Now, in addition to her role as a principal at Baltimore Mediation, she has adapted her skills and experience to help her son and others find their voices to advocate for their needs.

“I think the most important advice I can offer is to never lose hope or belief in what is possible,” said Senft who works hard to collaborate with the people and facilities who care for her son. “Small steps count and it’s best to maintain a short- and long-term view. Always remember that you are important, a full human being, and valuable. Ask others to help you.”

Senft suggests taking the time to “paint the picture of the full you” including your unique interests and talents to the people who can help you. Let them get to know you as a person. If a conversation gets heated, Senft advises to listen carefully first to what others are saying. Then reflect back the exact language the other person is using to clarify the situation before you ask open-ended questions. It works!



TIP:

*Believe in yourself.
You are worth it.
You can do it!*

We're Here to Help

When you become a self-advocate, you learn how to speak up for yourself and get the information you need to make informed decisions. Luckily you are not alone in this journey. We're here to help you connect to the information and resources you need to live a full and happy life. Please contact us today!

Helpful Resources

ADA National Network:

ADATA.org

Center for Medicare Advocacy:

medicareadvocacy.org

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN):

NDRN.org

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): Disability

hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/disability_main

U.S. Department of Justice Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act

ADA.gov

"I truly feel that if you understand yourself and set goals without the regulations and limitations others put on you, then nothing is impossible."

- Christopher Reeve

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Learn more today!

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