



Self-Advocacy Advisor Guide

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WHAT IS SELF-ADVOCACY?

According to Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) . . .

Self-Advocacy, “. . . is about independent groups of people with disabilities working together for justice by helping each other take charge of their lives and fight discrimination. It teaches us how to make decisions and choices that affect our lives, so we can be more independent. It teaches us about our rights, but along with learning about our rights, we learn responsibilities. The way we learn about advocating for ourselves is by supporting each other and helping each other to gain confidence to speak out for what we believe in.” (Dybwad, 1996, p. 2)

Who Should Be An Advisor to a Self-Advocacy Group?

An Advisor is a person either with or without a disability! They are not a voting member of the Self-Advocacy Group, but are available to support the group in many ways. They help others to find their voices and teach communication skills.

*“I may not be able to look into the future, but based on my past, the future looks bright for me, thanks to People First of Ohio, for giving me the opportunity to expand my wings.”
- Bill Adams, Past President*

Looking Ahead

As we explore the responsibilities (do’s and don’ts) of being an Advisor for a Self-Advocacy Group, keep in mind that Advisors have a significant influence on the group. Your role should be to assist when needed - not to run the group. Each group is unique and will have their own wants and needs! Flexibility is key to success.

RULES TO REMEMBER - - -

The #1 rule to remember is that an Advisor is there to facilitate, not dictate!

The Advisor works for the Self-Advocacy group and is there to support.

- Respect the members' choices: You may need to assist the group in finding the information they need to make an informed decision. Ultimately, your job is to support their choice.
- Empower the members: Allow members to try things for themselves first. They will ask you for help, if and when they need it.
- Use People-First language: Our language communicates our attitudes and opinions. Refrain from using terms such as "client", "disabled", etc. Always speak of the person, not the disability.
- Understand Perceptions: Each person in the group comes from a different background. Your views may not be that of the members of the group.
- Check for Understanding: Some people are reluctant to admit that they do not understand something that is being discussed. Help the group to understand the issue.
- Teach Self-Advocacy Skills: Help the members understand their rights and responsibilities. Teach how to advocate assertively.

SPEAK UP, BE HEARD,
IF YOU DON'T SAY A WORD, EVERYTHING WILL STAY THE SAME WAY

FLATREY

THE ADVISOR AS A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL -

Leading by Example:

- Arriving to the meetings and activities on-time
- Dressed and groomed appropriately
- Being a good listener
- Respecting the opinions and values of others

Teaching by Example:

- Provides information on Community Resources
- Provides education opportunities (conferences, workshops, trainings, etc.)
- Policy-making opportunities (what issues are currently being worked on?)
- Teaching how to run a meeting and leadership training
- Teaching voting procedures

Guiding the Group by Example:

- Ask “key” questions to check for understanding
- Use words and sentences that are easy to understand
- Ask open-ended questions (not yes/no)
- Always be objective: let the group make the decisions, give advice only when asked or when additional information is needed to make an informed decision.
- Assist the group in attaining their goals.

Remember:

An effective Advisor is one who does not “do it all” for the group!



CHALLENGES:

Be supportive of the challenges that Self-Advocates may face to attend group meetings!

Consider these difficulties:

- Transportation - how will members get to the meetings?
- Remembering Meeting Times - what reminders work best?
- Note Taking - does the Secretary need assistance with minutes?
- Organizing Meeting Materials - assisting the President with an agenda, making copies of materials
- Setting Meeting Times - what works best for the group?

There may be other challenges, as well. Where should your group meet? Is it possible to schedule a public meeting room? What about work schedules and activities?



High Expectations!

Help the group set expectations of membership. Self-Advocacy Groups are formed to make a difference in their lives and in their communities. Goals and expectations are that your Self-Advocacy Group creates the change that makes the future brighter by our actions today! As an Advisor - your enthusiasm and belief in the Self-Advocates that you advise sets the tone for SUCCESS!