



Supporting young people to build self-advocacy skills

What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself, express your needs, and assert your rights. It involves understanding your own needs and preferences, knowing what kind of support might be helpful, and communicating these to others to achieve your goals.

Self-advocacy is a crucial skill for personal well-being and can be applied in various situations, from relationships and friendships, requesting accommodations at school or work, to participating in community groups and advocating for policy changes.

Self-advocacy skills are important for all young people, but extremely important for people with disabilities or learning differences. The world is often not set up well to meet the needs of people with disability, so it is vital that we can support people to understand their rights, know what services are (or should be) available to them, and how to speak up for what they need. Helping children and young people to build self-advocacy skills as early as possible can help set them up well for the future.

Supporting young people's self advocacy skills will help them:

- Stand up for themselves and what matters to them
- Know and stand up for their rights
- Ask for help or for what they need
- Communicate what they think and feel
- Be better placed to say 'no' in situations where they may be or feel unsafe
- Make choices and decisions about their own life
- Get support if they need it

Believe and Become, through the REACH UP initiative, is proudly delivering projects for the Peer Support and Capacity Building (PSCB) grant for the NDIS, including this free resource.



What are the benefits of teaching self-advocacy skills?



Self- awareness

- Children learn to recognise and understand their own strengths, challenges, sensory needs, and emotions. This awareness is a foundational step in learning how to manage situations and communicate effectively. For example: A child can say, "I need a quiet space when it's too loud," instead of becoming overwhelmed.

Self-confidence

- Children who can speak up for themselves feel more in control and capable. This boosts self-esteem and prepares them to handle situations without always relying on adults.
- Teaching self-advocacy skills helps children feel in control of their life and their choices.
- Teaching children that they have a voice and can ask for what they want and need, promotes self-determination.

Developing independence

- Children who can express their perspectives are more likely to be understood by peers and adults. This fosters more inclusive environments and helps others recognise the child's individuality and autonomy.

Improved communication

- Teaching self-advocacy encourages children to use appropriate and effective ways to express their needs, whether through speech, communication devices, sign language, or other supports. It reinforces the idea: "My voice matters," no matter how that voice is expressed.

Increased participation engagement in school

- When children can explain their needs (e.g., needing visual instructions, breaks, or assistive technology), they're more likely to receive the accommodations necessary to thrive in school and in community settings.

Reduces anxiety, frustrations and behavioural challenges

- When children know how to ask for help or explain what they're feeling, they're less likely to feel frustrated or act out. Self-advocacy can be a powerful tool for emotional regulation.

Tips for helping young people build self-advocacy skills

- **Celebrate their identity:** Help your child explore what makes them unique and identify their strengths and challenges. Encourage them to reflect on what can help them when things get tricky.
- **Model it:** Show your child how you speak up respectfully for your own needs in different environments.
- **Practice at home:** Let your child make choices and express opinions in daily routines.
- **Use role-play:** Practice real-life scenarios like asking for help or explaining a sensory need to a teacher or sports coach.
- **Support communication:** Whether verbal, visual, or tech-based, support the tools your child needs to express themselves safely to others.
- **Encourage participation:** Include your child in discussions about their care, schooling, or therapies in age-appropriate ways from as early as possible. Help your child understand what supports they are eligible for and how to ask for them.

