

Self-Advocacy: What Is It And How Does It Work?

The Three Principles of Self-Advocacy

1) Letting Others Know What You Want

Self-advocacy is all about letting people know what you want or need. You can communicate what you want in different ways. Whatever way you choose to communicate, always try to say exactly what it is you want or need.

2) Speaking Up For Yourself

Self-advocacy starts with you. Advocating for yourself requires you to be your own spokesperson. You must be the one who begins the process of getting what you want.

3) Being Polite

It is always important to be polite when asking for anything. You might need to aggressively go after the things you want, but you should always be respectful and nonviolent in your tone and actions.

Using System Supports

When you are advocating for yourself, it may be necessary to use System Supports. **System Supports** (or Natural Supports) are individuals in a position of authority that are willing and able to help you. Examples of System Supports can be a counselor, a teacher/professor, manager, disability support coordinators or your attorney. It is good to know who these people are before you find yourself in need of their assistance.

Is this Self-Advocacy?

Fast Food Example: You go into a fast food restaurant with a few of your friends and ask for a chicken sandwich, french fries, and a drink. Once you pay the cashier, get to your seat, and begin to eat your food, you realize your chicken sandwich has not been completely cooked. Keeping in mind the principles of self-advocacy, see if the following three ways to handle this problem are examples of using self-advocacy.

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1) Letting Others Know What You Want

2) Speaking Up For Yourself

3) Being Polite

- 1) Once you see the chicken sandwich you paid for has not been completely cooked, you just sit in your seat and eat your french fries. Is that self-advocacy? Explain why.

- 2) Once you see the chicken sandwich you paid for has not been completely cooked, you ask your friend to tell the cashier that you would like another sandwich. Is that self-advocacy? Explain why.

- 3) Once you see the chicken sandwich you paid for has not been completely cooked, you run up to the cashier, throw the sandwich on the floor, and begin screaming at the top of your lungs that you want a new sandwich. Is that self-advocacy? Explain why.

Using Self-Advocacy: Professor

Sue is a freshman in college. She is two weeks into her first math class when her professor announces that the class is going to have a quiz at the end of the week. Sue has not let her professor know that she has a learning disability which requires her to take test in a distraction free environment with extra time and a calculator. How should Sue get the academic accommodations she will need to take the quiz?

Keep in mind:

- Every school which accepts federal funds is required by federal law to have a person that handles the needs of students with disabilities. This person is usually found in the disabilities support office on campus.
- In order to receive support for your disability, you need to have documentation that shows what your disability is and how it affects you as a student. This documentation can be your old IEP reports or testing that you arrange on your own.

Using Self-Advocacy: On the Job

Joe has a new job in a clothing store. The job requires him to say hello to customers as they enter the store, help them if they need to find the right sizes, and help them get into the dressing room. If there is no one in the store, Joe is supposed to stand behind a table near the front door and fold clothes. After doing the job for a few weeks, Joe realizes that his physical disability makes it hard for him to stand up continuously in one place and fold clothes. What should Joe do to help him at work?

Keep in mind:

- Every company has a person and/or policies in place to look out for the rights and needs of employees with disabilities. This person may have a title that centers on disability services, employee rights, or promoting diversity.
- It is against the law to deny someone a “reasonable accommodation” for a disability.

Using Self-Advocacy: Roommate

Ray is a student with a disability who lives in the dorms with a new roommate who likes to play music all the time. Ray finds it hard to concentrate on his studies with music playing. As midterm exams get closer, Ray knows he will need to be able to study in his room. What can Ray do to allow him to study in his room?

Keep in mind:

- Every dorm has a Resident Assistance (RA) who is a student that helps to run the building.

Using Self-Advocacy: Email

Aniyah is a high school student working on a research paper for history class. After the five page paper is finished, Aniyah's teacher wants everyone in the class to email their final draft to her by 6pm on Sunday night. Aniyah spends Sunday afternoon typing up the last pages of her paper and at 5:30pm she is ready to email the paper from her home computer. After trying to send the email over and over again, Aniyah realizes that her internet connection is down. With 30 minutes left before the assignment is marked late, what should Aniyah do with her paper?