

Supported Decision-Making: How to Be a Self-Advocate

Families play an important role in supporting their youth to be their own best advocate. You can help your loved one develop advocacy skills throughout childhood and into adulthood. Here are some ways to get started:

- 1. Ask Them to Share What They Like and Don't Like:** Encourage your loved one to express what they like and don't like. When your loved one practices telling people what they want, they are learning to express their opinion and you are learning to support them expressing themselves.
- 2. Ask Them to Make Decisions About Their Own Life:** Help your loved one make choices about their life, even in small ways. This can include deciding on what they are going to do each day, what to wear, or what to eat or drink. But it can also include bigger things such as work, where they want to live, and what they want to do in the future.
- 3. Share With Them About Their Rights:** It's important for your loved one to know their rights. Help them learn about their rights and how to use them to make sure they are treated fairly and with respect.
- 4. Learn to Problem Solve:** Teach your loved one how to solve problems on their own. Problem-solving skills will help them manage challenges and find solutions effectively.
- 5. Get Help When Needed:** Encourage your loved one to ask for help when they need it. It's okay to get support from others, and it can make a big difference in how they handle different situations.
- 6. Practice Communicating in a Way That Works Best:** Your loved one should use whatever method works best for them to communicate what they need and want. Families may need to try different approaches to learn what works best for them. Here are some examples:
 - **Verbal – Talk in Person or Over the Phone:** Direct conversations can be very effective.
 - **Written – Send a Text, Email, or Letter:** Written messages are an alternative to verbal talk.
 - **Use Technology:** Tools like speech-to-text programs or assistive technology devices can help with communication.
 - **Use Pictures, Photos, or Videos:** Visual aids can help express thoughts and ideas.



Additional Tips for Developing Self-Advocacy Skills:

- **Practice Self-Advocacy Skills:** Role-play different situations with your loved one to practice speaking up and making decisions. This can build their confidence and improve their skills.
- **Set Goals Together:** Work with your loved one to set personal goals. Goals can help them focus on what they want to achieve. Once they have goals to focus on, you can help them create a plan for how to achieve their goals. Having goals and a plan to achieve them feels good.
- **Encourage Independence:** Support your loved one to do things on their own, like making choices about what they want to do each day and how to spend their money. Independence is an important part of self-advocacy.
- **Provide Positive Feedback:** Recognize and praise your loved one's efforts in advocating for themselves. Positive reinforcement can boost confidence. It also will be motivating, meaning they will want to keep making their own decisions and choices.

By supporting your loved one in these ways, you are helping them become a strong self-advocate and make important decisions about their own life.

For more information, contact PPMD by visiting our [website](#) or calling (410)768-9100.



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