

Self-Advocacy Kit

Book 2



First Steps to Self-Advocacy



Advocacy for Inclusion

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1. Introduction

In **Self Advocacy Book 1** we explored the meaning of self-advocacy. We discovered that self-advocacy happens whenever we speak up for ourselves. It happens in all sorts of situations. We self-advocate when we let people know that something is not OK in our life. We self-advocate when we let people know who we are, what matters to us, what we have to offer, and where we want to go in our lives.

We also saw that there is often a connection between self-advocacy and human rights. Human rights are the building blocks that make sure our lives are full, free, and valued by others. Learning about human rights helps us recognize whether we are being treated fairly or whether we are being discriminated against. Everyone should be treated fairly and have their human rights respected.

In **Self Advocacy Book 2** we are going to explore some of the motivation that is behind self-advocacy. How does a person that puts up with things that are not OK become a person who speaks up and self-advocates for a better deal? If self-advocacy is like an engine, then what is the fuel that gives it power and makes it work?



2. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness means our ability to recognise our emotions and feelings, as well as our strengths, weaknesses and preferences.



A self-aware person

- understands what makes them feel happy, sad or angry
- knows what things they are good at and the things they need to work on
- recognises a bad habit and the effect it has on them.

Self-awareness is a skill that can help us in many ways. It can help us get a clearer understanding of the goal we really want to achieve through self-advocacy.



Know your stuff

Watch this video on self-awareness to learn more about what it means.



[Self Advocacy 6 Self Awareness - YouTube](#)



Over to you

How well do you know yourself? Answer the following questions to understand more about what matters to you.

Think: What makes me happy?

Examples:

- Listening to music
- Seeing my friends



Think: What makes me sad or angry?

Example:

- When people don't listen to what I have to say.



Think: What makes me nervous/anxious?

Example:

- Making phone calls to people I don't know.



Think: What are my strengths?

Examples:

- I'm good at listening
- I'm patient
- I'm good at finding answers



Think: What things do I need to work on?

Examples:

- I can be aggressive when I'm angry
- I forget to listen when I'm busy
- I take over sometimes



Self-awareness includes noticing how we are feeling in our bodies.

We use the skill of self-awareness when we notice things like

- if our muscles are stressed or relaxed
- how fast our heart is beating
- if we are feeling jumpy or peaceful.



Our bodies often send us powerful signals telling us that we are feeling OK or not OK. Our bodies tell us whether we feel OK or not when we are in different places or when we meet different people. Our bodies let us know that we are not OK when something happens.

Often the journey of self-advocacy begins when we ask "*What is my body telling me right now?*"

Sometimes feelings of stress are an unavoidable part of life. For example we might want to speak up at a meeting, but we are not used to doing that kind of thing. Our heart might beat faster and we might generally feel nervous.

Over to you

Think: Can I think of a time when I wanted to do something, but my nerves stopped me from doing it?



Think: Can I think of a time when I wanted to do something, felt nervous, but decided to do it anyway?



Digging a bit deeper with self-awareness

Sometimes the first step in understanding a problem is noticing a feeling – the signal our body sends about how we are feeling in a situation.

Let's think of an example.

We go into a meeting and we suddenly feel very tense. We remember that we didn't feel that way at other times during the day. We might notice our muscles are tense or our jaw is tight. Maybe we are frowning or slightly hunched over. Maybe our heart is beating faster than it was.



Self-awareness often begins through noticing a feeling and then gently exploring it with helpful questions.

Is the way I'm feeling right now telling me that I feel OK in this situation or not OK?

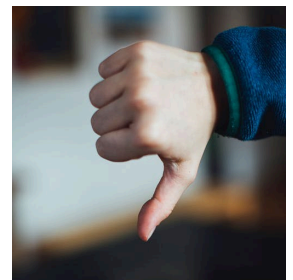
We can often work out what is not OK – what has caused the feeling – through some further questions:

- When did I start feeling this way?
- Did it start when I saw who I was meeting?
- Did it start when someone said something?
- Did it start when I came in the room?

We often use the word *trigger* when we talk about things people say, or situations we are in, that cause strong emotional reactions in us.

The feelings that connect with something that is not OK include:

- feeling tense or anxious
- feeling annoyed (even though the reason why might not be clear)
- feeling threatened.



The feelings that connect with a general sense of being OK include:

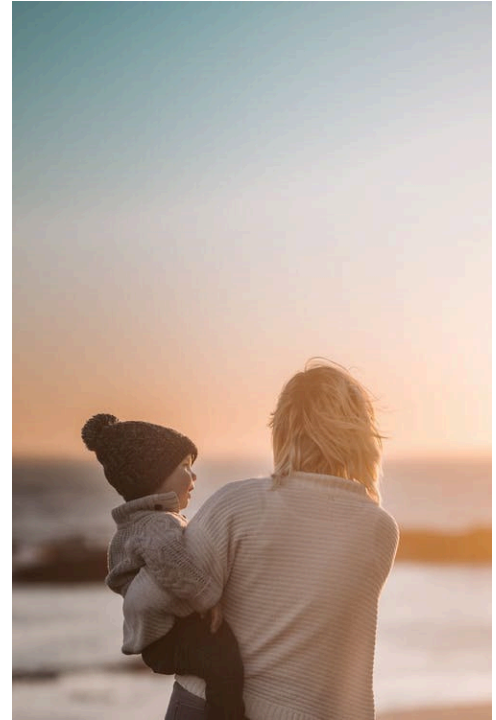
- feeling at ease and safe
- feeling open
- feeling seen, heard, and appreciated.



If we can connect what we are feeling with something that happened or something about where we are or even something that happened a while ago, then we are a step closer to clearly seeing what is not OK.

Not OK is not OK

Human beings can be funny creatures. As we go through life we can become very good at ignoring the messages our body sends us. We push along with our lives as though everything is OK, even though our body is telling us that something is not OK. We force ourselves to smile when we really feel sad. We reassure other people that we are fine when we are not. Some of us put other peoples' feelings ahead of our own and, after a while, that can lead to problems for us.



Our feelings matter.

Our rights matter.

Our being all we can be as part of the community matters.

Taking what we feel seriously is an important starting place for self-advocacy. It is where we can begin to:

- more clearly see what is OK and not OK in our lives and situations we find ourselves in;
- think about our next steps in dealing with what is not OK.

Over to you

Can you think of a time when you felt that a situation you were in was not OK?

Reflect on the following:

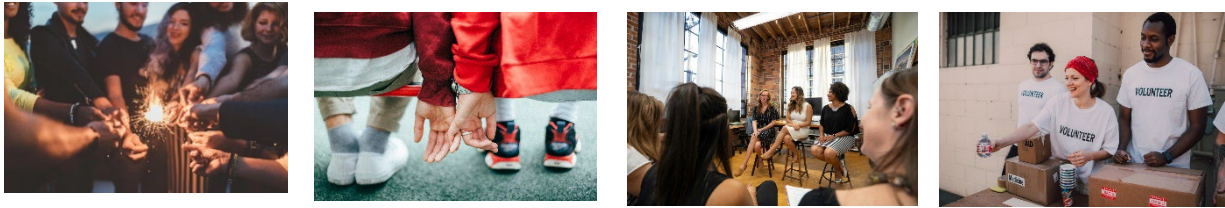
Think: How did I feel? What signs did my body give me?



Think: What steps did I take to deal with the situation? Did they work?

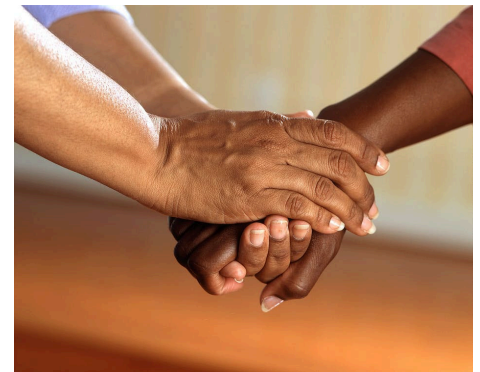


3. Support from others



Sometimes we can work out the connection between what we are feeling and what is not OK on our own. That's great when that happens and our ability to make those connections can increase through working on our self-awareness skills.

But there are times when it helps to get help from someone else. Many people find they need help from others in difficult times. This can be particularly true when there is a lot going on in our life and our feelings are tangled and hard to work out.



People who can help us include:

- supportive family and friends who we trust
- helplines like Lifeline
- counsellors or psychologists.

Talking to someone we trust has an important place in self-advocacy. It is not about handing our problem over to someone else to solve. It is about asking for support so we can move forward with solving the thing that is not OK in our life.

Trust in Relationships

Trust is a very important part of our relationships with others. But how do we know who to trust in our lives?



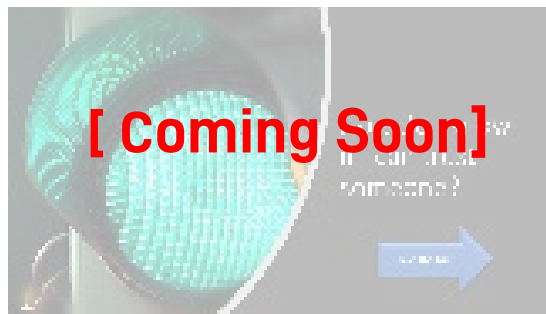
Know your stuff

Watch this video to learn more about **Trust**:



[Self Advocacy 3 Trust in Daily Life - YouTube](#)

If you are not sure about if you can trust someone or not, take this quiz:



Over to you

Think: Who are the people in my life I trust the most? Who do I go to when I have a problem?



Think: Has there been a time when I trusted somebody who was not trustworthy? What were the signs that this person was not somebody I could trust?

Example:

- A person I know borrowed some money from me and never gave it back. I felt uneasy giving them the money, but it was difficult to say 'no'. I knew this person couldn't be trusted because they often made promises they didn't keep.



Think: What can I do to meet more people, and build trusting relationships and friendships?

Examples:

- join a club or group that is focused on one of my interests
- ask others about themselves



4. Turning the way we feel into self-advocacy goals



We self-advocate because we want to achieve a goal such as:

- wanting to be heard and taken seriously
- wanting to let others know what matters to us
- wanting to fix a problem that is causing difficulty in our life.

Our first challenge is often about sorting out exactly what the goal is that we want to achieve.

Sometimes our self-advocacy journey begins with a general feeling that our life is not OK right now. It might be something we feel rather than think: a feeling of crankiness or overwhelm, feeling tired from not sleeping enough, feeling vulnerable or angry in some situations.



Over to you

Think: Are there times when I don't feel like people are listening to me, or taking me seriously? When does this happen?



Think: Are there times when I want other people to know what matters to me, but I don't know how to begin? When does this happen?



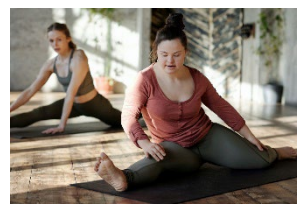
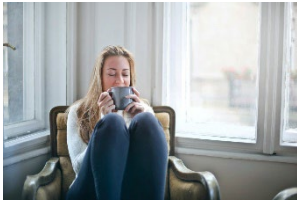
Think: Do I have any problems in my life right now that I want to try and fix?



Think: Do I have a clear idea of some of the goals I want to achieve in **advocating better for myself?** (Don't worry if you can't say what your goals are right now. Some of the next chapters may be able to help you work out what your goals are.)



5. Self Care



Self advocacy is often hard work.

Speaking up about what is not OK in our lives takes courage.

Facing our feelings and listening to what they tell us involves a lot of reflection and emotional energy.

Working out our best way to communicate and focusing on what we say and what the other person says in meetings calls for a lot of concentration and emotional management.

Talking to people who we find challenging can take a lot of energy.

Self-Care is a set of advocacy skills that we use before, during, and after we have meetings or take other steps in identifying and resolving what is not OK in our life.

Self-care in situations that are not OK and directly afterwards

When something happens that is not OK, and we are upset about it, then caring for ourselves, at that time, is very important.

A first step of self-care might be taking ourselves out of the situation that is not OK, if that is possible.



Please note: if you are in a situation where you are the victim of a crime, then find safety and contact the police as soon as you can.

The time directly after finding ourselves in situations that are not OK calls for a great amount of self-care. Different people have different ways of caring for themselves at times like that.

Some of those ways might include:

- talking to someone who can help -
 - the police, if you have been the victim of a crime;
 - a trusted person, your go-to person, about your experience;
 - a professional, like a counsellor or psychologist, if you are having difficulties with mental health or trauma.



- giving yourself time and space to process what has happened -
 - Some people find it helpful to journal or reflect in other ways
 - Some of us have places we can go to where we feel safe, calmer, and are able to think clearly – self-care might involve spending time in a place like that.



Self-care when we are self-advocating to resolve a problem

Self-advocacy at meetings can sometimes be challenging. It can take a lot of focus and energy to communicate in a calm and effective way, particularly when we are feeling strong emotions.



It is OK to ask for a meeting to happen in a way that works for us. When a meeting is being organised, self-help might mean:

- letting the person we are meeting know if there are environments that we find a problem (eg. some people have difficulty with fluorescent lights);
- letting the person we are meeting know if we have access requirements.

It is important to think about ways that we can care for ourselves when we are self-advocating.

Self-care in a situation like a meeting might include:

- organising, before the meeting, to have a support person with you if that would help you
- asking for a break if the meeting is starting to feel overwhelming
- ask people to slow down or repeat what they said if they are hard to understand
- asking for a glass of water if you would find that helpful to have
- asking for an explanation if something is said that you don't understand
- asking to have information in writing so you can read it in an easier situation later.

Self-care after we have taken action

Self-care is important after we have carried out self-advocacy action, whether we have arrived at a successful outcome or we still have a way to go.

This is another time when self-awareness has a part to play in checking on ourselves:

- How are we feeling?
- What are the most helpful ways we can take care of ourselves?

Rest and recovery are important.

Over to you

Think: What relaxes me and makes me feel calm?

Examples:

- Being in nature
- Reading



Think: What more can I do to help me relax and manage stress?



More Resources, Information and Support

Self-Awareness

- Study Work Grow: Self-Awareness Resources for Teachers
[Self-awareness - Study Work Grow](#)
- ReachOut - Mental Health Resources for Young People
[Positive mindsets | ReachOut Australia](#)

Self-Care

- ReachOut – Mental Health Resources for Young People
[Self-care | ReachOut Australia](#)
- Beyond Blue: Self-Care Resources
[Self-care \(beyondblue.org.au\)](#)