

Self Advocacy Advisors

Good Practice Guide





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What Makes A Good Self Advocacy Advisor?

This booklet outlines a few ideas about how to be a good advisor.

Thanks to all the self advocates and advisors for their invaluable input in creating this guide.

The role of an advisor is complex and requires workers to be vigilant and constantly reflect on their interactions with individual self advocates and self advocacy groups.

Essential skills of an advisor include:

- A commitment to the rights of people with a disability.
- Good communication skills.
- An understanding of the importance of rights and self advocacy for people with a disability.
- A strong willingness to learn and develop knowledge and skills.¹

1. Adapted from Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) Stakeholder Participation Position Paper 6 – Supporting Self Advocacy www.scie.org.uk



Good support: What is it?

Good support is an important part of involving people and supporting them to speak up.

Good support:

- Does not take over but can take the **initiative** sometimes.
- Makes sure that people see self advocates in a positive way. Not making the worker look good.
- Builds a relationship. Spends a long time listening to groups and individuals to find out what support is needed.
- Listens to how self advocates want to be supported and talk about roles with us.
- Works with other supporters to find out how people communicate and knows how to listen and observe effectively.
- Tries to support self advocates at our own pace even when there is pressure to rush something.
- Is independent and supports self advocates to take on challenges.
- Is flexible and can change.
- Does not judge people and is not easily shocked.
- Has a sense of humour. Can laugh with people not at them.



- Can be trusted and relied on to be there.
- Really listens.
- Looks for positive opportunities for self advocates to influence what is happening and change things.
- Is thoughtful and thinks things through.
- Supports self advocates as active citizens.
- Guides self advocates through confusing information to help with choices.
- Asks other organisations or people to make their information accessible and challenges those that don't.
- Helps self advocates to talk through plans and decide what to do.
- Accepts that everyone has a right to be involved.
- Works hard to ensure people who need lots of support are not left out.
- Can take criticism and learn from 'mistakes'.
- Is open to support and supervision.
- Is prepared to promote and develop self advocacy.
- Encourages everyone (self advocates included) to think beyond learning disability issues.²

2. Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) Stakeholder Participation Position Paper 6 – Supporting Self Advocacy www.scie.org.uk



Power and Control

The role of an advisor 'is easy to corrupt due to the amount of power and trust given to the support person'.³

A good advisor recognises there is an inherent power imbalance between self advocates and advisors; the default is often that of the advisor being in control.

Self advocates want a person who does not take over; your role as an advisor is to assist rather than direct the group.

A good advisor is 'someone who listens and doesn't take over. These people understand that we (self advocates) are the experts on the support we need.'
~ *Self advocate*

Furthermore, advisors 'should always ask before they say something or do something. Always ask, do you mind if I? One of my good support workers would always ask... I have an idea do you mind if I say something?' ~ *Self advocate*

'One of our best support workers would put the ball back in our court. She would always ask what we think we should do. She wouldn't give us the answer but she would make us tease it out'. ~ *Self advocate*

A good advisor:

- hands power to self advocates
- makes sure that the control of the group is with the group
- supports and does not direct
- reflects on their role and actions.

3. Fyffe, McCubbery, Frawley, Laurie & Bigby (2004) Self Advocacy Resource Unit, Model Development Report.



Power and Control Tips

- Ask yourself 'how do I make sure control is always with the self advocate and the self advocacy group?'
- View and treat self advocates as equals.
- Put in place ways to make sure decisions are always genuinely the group's decisions.
- Remain neutral in decision making processes.
- Question your role in all interactions with individual self advocates and groups.
- Reflect and review.



Conflict of Interest

If the beliefs of an advisor conflict with those of a self advocate or group, many self advocates consider it is more likely the advisor's beliefs will win out.

'If we (self advocates) don't agree with what their (advisors) agenda is, it is really, really hard to change their minds.' Self advocate

A conflict of interest exists where 'the group's needs go directly against the needs of the advisor.'⁴

Conflicts of interest can be internal, such as one's own values and beliefs or external, for example with funding bodies.

Recognising and managing conflicts of interest is vital to a successful and transparent working relationship.

4. Worrell (1988), People First Advice for Advisor, People First Project Ontario.



Conflict of Interest Tips

- Know your own values.
- Identify your own internal conflicts.
- Understand your motivation before offering support or an opinion.
- Know your opinion can change what an individual or the group thinks.
- Reflect and review.



Accountability and Professionalism

Fostering an environment of accountability and professionalism are vital.

Managing your work, being accountable and professional are important attributes of a good advisor.

An advisor 'can't have a bad hair day, whatever your problem is you need to leave it at home. Your presence can make all the difference in the time you are with someone. You always need to have a degree of professionalism'. ~ *Advisor*

'One of the key roles of an advisor is to constantly recognise when you make mistakes, to reflect and always review what you do.' ~ *Advisor*



Accountability and Professionalism Tips

- Encourage regular appraisal and feedback from the group.
- Take criticism gracefully.
- Admit when you are wrong.
- Learn from mistakes.
- Be reliable.
- Be organised.
- Be prepared.
- Reflect and review.



Connections and Relationships: Trust and Respect

Building good relationships and connections based on trust and respect is crucial to a successful working relationship.

Socialising with and getting to know individuals within the group helps advisors develop a good rapport with members of the group.

Building relationships helps advisors to get to know the skills and interests of individuals in the group. It also helps build trust between advisors and self advocates.

‘When the person with intellectual disabilities gives that person (the advisor) a promise to keep and they can keep it to themselves that’s when the person will gradually trust them and build a friendship.....you can help them better if they trust you.’ ~ *Self advocate*



Connections and Relationships Tips

- Get to know individuals within the group.
- Take the time to understand each person's skills and interests.
- Be trustful.
- Model respectful behaviour.
- Reflect and review.



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