

Training: One hour

Supporting Self-advocacy

Reference Material: The Council on Quality and Leadership

Self-advocacy is all about people being empowered to make choices and decide what is best for them as an individual. Self-advocates enjoy their rights and responsibilities and understand that everyone should have the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them. Being a strong supporter of self-advocacy comes down to ensuring that the individual has opportunities for self-expression and developing assertiveness skills, while at the same time, being aware of rights and responsibilities.

The core value of the self-advocacy is that each individual is treated as an equal and allowed to make choices and direct their life. If a potential supporter has the attitude that it is not possible for a developmentally disabled individual to make their own choices, they are not ready to truly advocate for the individual and efforts at self-advocacy will likely fail.

If the supporters (employee) has the mindset that they are a “caregiver” and not a “supporter “ there will not be positive results for the consumer’s advancement towards self-advocacy. Supporters often times block the growth of the individual because of their own preconceived ideas or expectations regarding the individual’s abilities.

Many of our adult consumers have experienced years of roadblocks keeping them from developing to their full potential by well meaning family members, teachers, and other members of society. At times the non-disabled are impatient with the time it may take a disabled individual to accomplish a task so they complete the task for them. This sends two messages: “If I take long enough, someone else will do it for me”, or “I can’t ever do it right”. Eventually, our “help” stifles the growth of the individual.

A person can better support self-advocacy by encouraging the consumer to:

1. Take responsibility for their own lives, and to speak up for themselves and for what they want
2. Believe in the power of their voice and their influence
3. Take on leadership roles and opportunities for personal growth
4. Make personal choices and informed decisions for themselves
5. Volunteer at community events
6. Educate and inform community members about important disability issues
7. Develop social connections and community involvement
8. Develop alternative forms of communication if the consumer is not verbal. The alternative method gives them their voice to express themselves
9. Be involved in making choices
10. Serve on committees

Suggestions for supporters: you can be a better supporter by:

1. Being comfortable in taking guidance from the consumer- be there to listen and support, not take over
2. Avoid being judgmental and disapproving- being negative in this way will often kill any seeds of relationship building
3. Following through on what you say you will do – this is one of the best ways to demonstrate that you can be trusted and relied upon

4. Being able to accept criticism and use it to become a better supporter
5. Supporting the consumer in achieving their goals
6. Being a good listener and taking supporting action when necessary
7. Understanding the difference between supporting and getting in the way- and making sure to not get in the way of the consumer's chance to grow
8. Having great expectations for the consumer and believing in them as they continue to gain in confidence and grow in personal resilience
9. Recognize and acknowledge that the consumer holds the power over his or her life or circumstances – not you.

Questions:

As a "supporter" how can you help develop the confidence a consumer needs to make choices in his/her life? _____

Sometimes you need to help a consumer make a choice by offering suggestions. Give an example.

Give an example of how you can be a better supporter of self-advocacy with your consumer.

Name 5 ways you can better support self-advocacy.

Employee Name

Date