

***PEER SUPPORT
AND
EMPOWERMENT***

Booklet Three



ABLE MINDS

• UNLOCKING MINDS. •
CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES.



Table of Contents

01. Skills for Self-advocacy

04. Communication

10. Assertiveness

17. Managing Emotions

Introduction



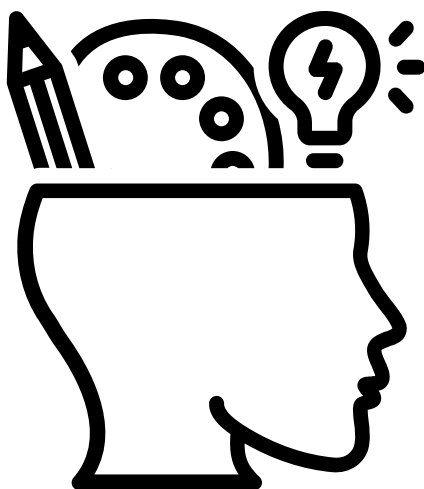
In this session, we will explore how individuals self-advocate. We will examine the key skills involved in self-advocacy, such as communication, connecting with others and problem-solving.

We will also look at confidence and assertiveness, and how these qualities help us find the strength to speak up about what is not OK and how we want situations to improve.

We will then explore skills that help us manage our emotions, so we can advocate effectively and achieve the outcomes we desire. This will include techniques for staying calm and focused during self-advocacy efforts.

Skills for Self-advocacy

It's important to be patient with ourselves as building strength and confidence takes time.



Sometimes, we might not handle situations as well as we could. For example:

- We might get so angry that we blow up instead of calmly discussing our problem.
- We might feel so overwhelmed that we can't find the right words to say.



There are always lessons to be learned from our efforts, even when things don't go exactly as planned. Often, when we are self-advocating, we experience a lot of emotions because we care deeply about resolving an important problem or issue.

As we are learning we may notice our emotions tell a story about who we are, what we've been through in our lives, and what matters to us.



As we learnt in session Two , our emotions tell a story about who we are, what we've been through, and what matters to us.

Self-advocacy is about doing our best, step by step, to communicate who we are, what matters to us, the problems we face, and the changes we want to improve our lives.

Every effort we make, even those that don't go as planned, helps us gain knowledge and experience.

What skills do I need?



We'll focus on some broad skills that can help us become better self-advocates. These skills include:

- Communication skills, including social and relationship skills
- Assertiveness
- Anger Management
- Relaxation and stress management
- Decision-making and goal-setting skills

By working on these skills, we can improve our ability to advocate for ourselves effectively and confidently.



Reflecting on your skills:

What are things you are good at?

What skills do you need to become a better advocate for yourself?



What about Support from others?

You can ask people around you to help develop these skills by:

- providing opportunities for you to learn and practice
- sharing information about these skills with you
- supporting your self-advocacy and providing feedback.



Communication:

What is communication?

Communication is the act of giving, receiving, and processing information. It's how we get our message across to other people.

Communication involves:

- Figuring out how to express what we need or feel, what is not OK, or what matters to us
- Identifying the best person to communicate this to
- Deciding how we would like the situation to be made OK or improved

How do we communicate?



We communicate in various ways; such as:



Speaking and listening



Reading and writing



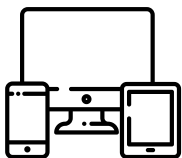
Using body language and gestures



Through facial expressions



Using technology



Utilizing communication aids

These diverse methods help us convey our messages and connect with others effectively.



Why do we communicate?

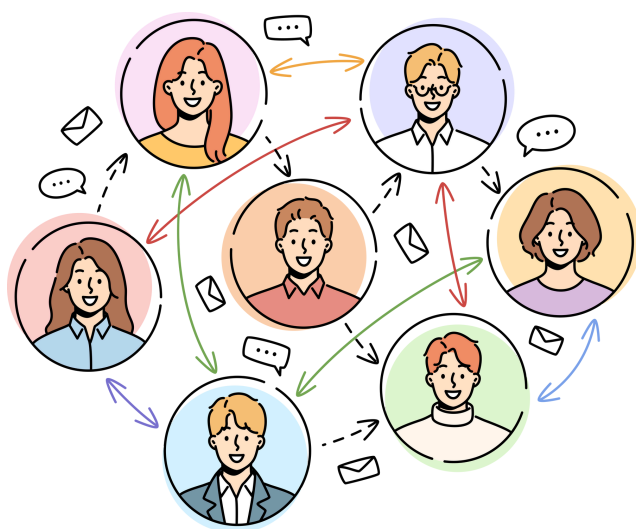
We communicate to express our:

- Needs and wants
- Likes and dislikes
- Emotions
- Creativity (Such as singing, telling stories, ect)

Communication allows us to share our thoughts and feelings with others in various ways.

We also communicate to:

- Socialise or talk with families and friends
- Get and share information
- Learn
- Keep ourselves safe
- protect our rights



Communication may not always come easily to us. it involves skills that we can develop and strengthen through practice.

Practicing with someone we trust can be especially helpful in improving our communication abilities.

Know your stuff - Links to videos



Self-advocacy communication and reconnecting - •– [Write Like a Pro | Write Your Best Work With Grammarly](#)

Self-advocacy 5 communication and problem solving - •[Self Advocacy 5 Communication and Problem Solving](#)

Over to you!



In what ways do you prefer communicating with others?

What types of communication do you feel less comfortable with? E.g. I don't like formal meetings.



How can we communicate more effectively?

Improving our communication skills takes time and practice, Just like any other skill, the more we practice, the better we become, and the easier it gets.

For self-advocacy, here are some simple ways to make communication easier:

- Be clear and concise in expressing our needs and feelings.
- Listen actively to others and show that we understand them.
- Use "I" statements to take ownership of our feelings and thoughts
- .
- Practice patience and give ourselves time to improve.
- Ask for feedback from someone we trust to help us refine our communication skills.



Here are some tips to make communication easier:



Let others know our preferred ways of communicating.

- Be prepared, think about or plan out what we want to share, and perhaps even write it down.
- Take our time and ensure others give us time too.
- Focus on the most important points.
- Ensure we have our say.
- Allow others to have their say and listen to them.
- Have an advocate or support person with us.
- Consider using communication aids, including technology, to help get our message across.

Activity on Communication: Blind Drawing

The aim of this game is to work with your partner to draw a picture.

Rules:

- One teammate is blind folded, and the other teammate is the communicator.
- The teammate who is blind folded must listen carefully to their other teammate who will be instructing them in drawing a picture.

The example picture options are:

- Dog/Cat
- House



Assertiveness

Assertiveness means having confidence in ourselves and our abilities.

It includes being confident in our ability to communicate our thoughts and feelings about things.



Why be assertive?

There are many reasons why assertiveness is a valuable skill to learn. Being assertive helps us:

- Feel good about ourselves and develop good self-esteem
- Build better relationships with others
- Achieve our goals and get things done
- Prevent others from taking advantage of us
- Gain the respect of others
- Protect our rights
- Take control of our life
- Express what we think, feel, need, and want

Developing assertiveness can have a positive impact on many areas of our lives.

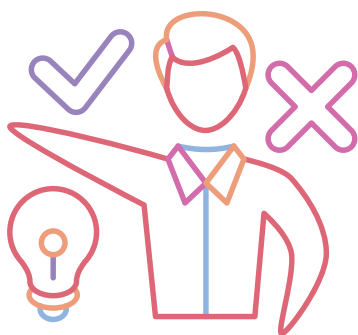


Why stop us from being assertive?

How assertive we are is mostly learned from our upbringing and life experiences.

For example, if we grow up in an environment where we are punished for speaking our minds, we might be less likely to be assertive as adults.

Similarly, if we are taught to always put others' needs before our own, we may think that being assertive is impolite.



Here are some factors that prevent us from being assertive:

Self-defeating beliefs: These are negative thoughts about what might happen if we are assertive. For example:

- "It is rude and selfish to say what I want."
- "I will upset the other person if I say what I want."
- "If I say what I think, it might be wrong, and then I will look silly."

Recognizing these beliefs is the first step toward overcoming them and building our assertiveness skills.



Self-defeating beliefs are often shaped by our culture and generation. For example, in some cultures and older generations, it is considered very disrespectful to openly question the authority of elders.

Many of us are also familiar with outdated social norms, such as:

- It's weak for men to show their emotions ("boys don't cry").
- Women look aggressive if they voice their needs or opinions ("that's not very ladylike").
-
- Young people should not interrupt ("don't speak unless you are spoken to").

Recognizing these influences helps us understand and challenge these beliefs, allowing us to be more assertive in our lives.



Anxiety and stress:

Anxiety and stress can greatly impact our ability to think and act the way we want.

We might know what we want to say but become so nervous or overwhelmed that the words just don't come out.

To become more assertive, we need to learn how to manage these emotions effectively.

Not having the skills, we need: Lack of necessary skills



Sometimes we might feel confident in ourselves but lack the verbal or non-verbal skills to assert ourselves effectively. We may struggle to find the right words, or have difficulty controlling certain emotions, like anger, making it easier to avoid asserting ourselves altogether.

Improving these skills can help us become more assertive and better communicate our needs and feelings.

One very important thing to remember here is this: - if we do not understand something, it is NOT our fault. We all have the right to be given information in a way we understand.

It's Okay to:

- It's okay to say, "I don't understand."
- It's okay to ask for help.
- It's okay to request information in a different format.



Remember, advocating for your needs is important and perfectly acceptable!



What assertiveness is not:

Assertiveness means expressing ourselves openly, but not in a way that infringes on the rights of others. It's about balancing self-expression with respect for others, ensuring our communication is clear and respectful.

Being assertive does not mean being aggressive. For example, feeling angry about something does not justify yelling or hitting. When we communicate assertively, we need to consider our words, tone of voice, and body language to express ourselves effectively and respectfully.

Being assertive does not mean expressing our anger in indirect ways, such as using sarcastic language, sulking, or refusing to communicate.

This type of behavior is known as "passive-aggressive" and is simply another form of aggression.

Assertiveness involves expressing our feelings openly and directly, while still respecting the rights and feelings of others.





How Assertive am I? worksheet

More on assertive communication: Examples

Finding the Right Words, Let's look at two examples of communicating:

Example 1:

"You are making me feel bad because you told me I had to come to this room instead of the one I like for our meeting, and now I'm really upset."

•

Let's work on expressing our feelings more effectively. By finding the right words, we can communicate our emotions and needs in a clearer and more constructive manner.

Example 2:

"I don't feel comfortable in this meeting room. I don't feel OK in small spaces. I would find it helpful if we could have this meeting in a larger room where I feel comfortable."

If we look at these two examples, we can see that they are both about the same thing. The speaker does not feel OK about the room where the meeting is happening.



Self-advocacy is about addressing what is not acceptable in a constructive manner that helps solve the problem.

By effectively expressing our concerns, we can work towards finding solutions and improving our situation.

Which example above is most likely to help solve the problem?
And why?

Using “I Statements”

Using an "I statement" allows us to express our feelings without blaming the other person. When we use an "I statement," we follow these steps:

1. "I feel" (What emotion am I feeling?)
2. "when" (What is causing this feeling? What are the triggers?)
3. "because" (How does the person's actions affect me? How does my feeling relate to what is OK or not OK for me?)
4. "Can you please....." (What outcome do I want?)

This method helps us communicate our emotions and needs clearly and constructively.



examples: instead of saying:



‘Will you stop that noise; you are driving me crazy’

Try using:

“I feel annoyed when loud music is always on because I can’t concentrate. Can you please use headphones when I am trying to work?”

This statement clearly expresses your feelings and requests a solution without blaming the other person.

Think about a situation - worksheet





A challenge with self-advocacy

One of the challenges of self-advocacy is that not everyone we encounter will be willing to help us.

In such situations, it is especially important to know your rights and where to seek assistance.

Having this knowledge empowers us to navigate difficult interactions and ensures we receive the support we need



Managing emotions

Self-awareness is crucial when deciding when and how to communicate our message.

When we encounter problems or conflicts, our automatic response is often “fight or flight”.

This mode is when our body physically prepares itself for a threat or danger.

Our body sends signals to our brain that things are “not OK”, getting us ready to react.

What Does fight or flight reaction do to our body?

Our brain releases hormones, such as adrenaline.

Our heart rate increases.

- We breathe faster.
- Our muscles tighten.
- Blood flows from our organs to our major muscles.
- We may sweat or turn red.
- We feel uncomfortable.

How to deal with strong emotions



When we find ourselves feeling overwhelmed, emotional, angry, or panicked, there are ways to control these emotions, so they don't interfere with our goals. Here are some strategies:

- **Breathe:** Focusing on your breathing can help you stay calm. Try this: Count to five as you slowly inhale and then count to five as you slowly exhale.
- **Move:** Physical movement releases hormones that relax the body and improve mood. Simple movements like walking around, stretching your arms, or moving from an indoor to an outdoor environment can help reduce panic attacks and anxiety.
- **Take a Break:** If we know that solving our problem requires calm communication.

it's helpful to ask ourselves some self-awareness questions:

- Do I feel like I can communicate calmly right now?
- What can I do to help myself become calmer?

By using these techniques, we can manage our emotions and communicate more effectively.

