



Self-Advocacy

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm

Ask students: Do you think it's easier to ask for help for yourself or for others? Why?

Discuss

As student volunteers share their responses, explain that it's not uncommon to find it easier to ask for help for others instead of advocating for our own needs. Continue to facilitate the class discussion as long as the discourse remains productive and on topic, such as by asking for examples of when students have advocated for themselves or someone else.

Dive in!

When you ask for help for yourself or for someone or something, it is called advocacy. When you speak or act in support of yourself it is called **self-advocacy**. We usually hear about advocacy when we are talking about someone who is being treated unfairly, or someone who may be in a position that puts them at risk for being treated unfairly. There are laws that protect people from being denied access to basic rights and laws that protect people from being denied certain rights based on their race, age, nationality, language, religion, sex, or ability. Advocacy is important because everyone should be able to access what they need. For example, if someone with a wheelchair did not have access to a building, this would be unfair treatment, and that person would need to self-advocate or have someone else step in and advocate for them. As you grow older, you'll be expected to take more of an active role in your own life. That means being able to advocate for the things you need. One thing to keep in mind is that self-advocacy should be done in an assertive manner, not an aggressive manner. The difference between being assertive and being aggressive is this - being assertive is being able to express yourself while being respectful of others at the same time. Self-advocating doesn't have to be anything complicated. It can be as simple as asking someone to explain something that you don't understand, or asking a clarifying question about something that is confusing to you. Self-advocating is also asking to move your seat away from the window if you are getting distracted or asking if it's OK to stand while you listen to the lesson because that's what your body needs. In order to self-advocate effectively, there are three steps:

1. **Know exactly what you are asking for.** Be precise and be prepared to explain why you are asking.



High School

2. **Identify who can help you.** Is it your teacher? A family member? Your boss? Someone else? It doesn't make sense to ask someone for help if they aren't in a position to help you.
3. **Decide what you should say.** Remember that you're asking for help, so be polite and prepared. It might help to write it down first or role play with a friend before you ask.

Activity

For this task, students can work independently, in pairs, or in small groups. Distribute copies of the Worksheet to students. Complete the first scenario together as a group. Then, have them complete scenarios 2 and 3. When students are finished with both scenarios, call on volunteers to share their responses.

Reflect

Have students respond to the prompts at the bottom of the worksheet. Think of an example of a time when you didn't self-advocate. What stopped you? Now that you have the skills to advocate for yourself, what other things might stand in your way and how could you deal with them? Are there other strategies we've discussed that might help?

Professional Development

Take 5 minutes and reflect on your ability to self-advocate. Are you satisfied or is this an area that you'd like to improve?

For Further Study:

- Edutopia: *Teaching Students to Self-Advocate During Distance Learning*:
www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-students-self-advocate-during-distance-learning
- NY Times: *How to Stand Up for Yourself*:
<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/year-of-living-better/how-to-stand-up-for-yourself>
- Understood: *6 Tips for Helping Your High Schooler Self-Advocate*:
www.understood.org/articles/en/6-tips-for-helping-your-high-schooler-learn-to-self-advocate
- Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment (University of Oklahoma): *Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy*:
www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy