

Self-Advocacy

FOR YOUNG ADULTS



Self-advocacy means speaking up for what you need to feel safe, understood, and successful. Everyone should practice self-advocacy in order to become more comfortable and confident in getting their needs met. Don't forget: your voice matters!

When to Use Self-Advocacy

When I need a break	When a direction feels confusing	When a social situation is uncomfortable	When I need more time
When someone crosses a boundary	When expectations are unclear	When I need help but don't want to interrupt	When I feel overwhelmed
When I don't know what to do or say	When I want to do something different	When I don't think anyone is listening to me	When I'm scared, nervous, or worried

Sentence Starters

Fill in the blanks with what makes sense in the moment. You also don't have to stick to these-- they are only ideas or leads to your own self-advocacy statements.

Use This	Why
“I don’t understand _____. Can you explain it another way?”	Shows that you are confused and what could help you (them rephrasing).
“I need a break because ____.”	Shows that you need some space away from what is being asked. Even though you might not need to say why and shouldn’t have to, giving an explanation sometimes helps others to understand it isn’t just to “get out of” something you don’t want to do.
“I need a minute to think before I answer.”	Shows that you need to pause to give yourself time to process before responding.
“I’m not comfortable with _____. Can we try _____ instead?”	Sets a clear boundary and suggests an alternative. Note that you do not need to always give another option--for example, if someone is touching you and you don’t like it, setting the boundary with NO other option is also completely appropriate.
“Can we slow down? I’m feeling overwhelmed.”	Shows what you need (to slow down) and gives a reason.
“I want to help, but I need more support with _____.”	Clarifies your motivation and the barrier to being able to do what you want or need so that the other person can help overcome that barrier.

Practice

Use the following tables to come up with a situation, a need, and an ask. The situation should be what’s happening. The need is what you need to feel okay. The ask is how you will actually communicate that--your self-advocacy statement.

Situation	A friend wants to play with your new collectable vintage figurine. It's never been out of the box, and you have planned to keep it that way.
Need	To get him to not take the figurine out of its box To get him to not mess with it in any way To get him to just leave it on its shelf
Ask	"I'm not comfortable with you touching it. It needs to stay on my shelf."

Situation	
Need	
Ask	

Situation	
Need	
Ask	

Situation	
Need	
Ask	

Emergency Self-Advocacy

IMPORTANT: When others don't respect your self-advocacy--or in situations where your boundaries are not being respected and someone is making you feel unsafe--you can use the following:

- "STOP. I'm not okay with that."
- "I need space."
- "I said NO."

