
SELF-ADVOCACY

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My mom often tells me this story from when she was in college. One of her friends got a bad grade on an assignment, and they were very upset. Later, this friend's mom emailed the professor asking them to let her child redo the assignment. A college student had their mother advocate for them to a professor. On one hand, you could say that this was a good thing: that this mother just wanted the best for her child. On the other hand, we have to remember that this person's mother might not always be there to help. Being a forty-year-old calling up your mom to talk to your boss about giving you a raise might not look so good.

Self-advocacy is when you figure out a way to solve your own problems - whether that means talking to a teacher about a school assignment or talking to your parents about going to therapy. Self-advocacy is so important to developing problem-solving skills and being able to communicate well with others, but lots of teens struggle with self-advocacy. When you begin to feel like you want to advocate for yourself, it can be challenging conveying that to others, especially to the people who have been advocating for you up until that point. In this article, we will show how to best advocate for yourself and your needs, no matter your age or circumstance.

Asking for Help From Teachers

There are times when I need to reach out and ask for help if I am struggling to get the answer to a problem. I would first go to my friends because I didn't feel comfortable asking my teacher. As I entered high school, asking my friends wasn't effective, so I took a deep breath and decided to step forward to my math teacher. I questioned myself a hundred times - what if we already covered this in class? Will my teacher get mad at me? What if my teacher gives me a weird stare and thinks I am dumb? But my teacher's smile cleared up the restless thoughts rushing through my head and I asked even the smallest questions that popped up. Teachers are always willing to help students not just because it's their job, but because they sincerely want their students to be successful.

Talking to Parents

It is difficult to share every thought with a parent or guardian because sometimes, they just don't understand being a teenager. We hide things from our guardians, but at the same time, we don't feel good about not sharing with our parents and assuming that they will never understand. As a child, I always had fun winning board games, taking turns choosing a movie while cuddling in blankets, and making a mess in the kitchen with my family. Now, these moments are rare because I am busy with my own work and we don't make time for movie or board game nights anymore. So it's possible that because the time we spend together shrank, our parents don't have the opportunity to really understand what's going on. So what if we try to start spending 20 minutes every day to start a brief conversation? Maybe these conversations will help our guardians better know who we are as a person.



Getting Professional Help

Sometimes, asking parents or teachers for help isn't an option, or isn't the help that you are looking for. Sometimes, we need support from someone that isn't directly involved in our personal lives, or someone with a professional background that can provide well-informed help. There is a negative stigma surrounding asking for help in our society, especially regarding mental health. As a consequence, people, especially teens, are uncomfortable with seeking professional help. However, mental health is not something we should dismiss or be ashamed of. Similar to how we need to maintain a healthy physical body, we also need to take care of our mental health. Experiencing change and challenges in mental health can happen to anyone at any age. *There is nothing to be ashamed about getting help.* In fact, getting help soon is important in figuring out ways to overcome our difficulties and take care of our mental health.



Resources / Organizations

Teen Link

<https://www.teenlink.org/>

 (866) 833-6546

Teen Link is a Washington group centered around teens offering support for teens, but there are adults available as well. You can text, call, or chat online with a Youth Crisis Specialist, anonymously and under confidentiality. The Teen Link website also provides resources for mental health, substance abuse, stress, and other teen-related topics, including a resource guide called Where to Turn for Teens (WTTFT).

The Garage

<https://www.issaquahteencafe.org/>

 (425) 395-7341

 @thegarageissaquah

The Garage is a nonprofit teen café in Issaquah, a safe space created exclusively for teens. All services provided by The Garage are free of charge. Currently, the café space is available for five teens at a time to sign up to do remote learning at The Garage, following COVID-19 guidelines. Teens can also book free virtual counseling sessions on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Friends of Youth

<https://friendsofyouth.org/mentalHealth.aspx>



Issaquah (425) 392-6367



Duvall (425) 844-9669



North Bend (425) 888-4151

Friends of Youth provides counseling to youth and families, individually and family. It is important to note, however, that there are fees associated with Friends of Youth counseling services, meaning a guardian is required to handle insurance and fees.

Youth Eastside Services

<https://www.youtheastideservices.org/services/counseling/>

Youth Eastside Services is a licensed clinical team providing counseling services for youth and families. Similar to Friends of Youth, a parent must be aware of this counseling in order to handle fees and insurance.

Motivation Central

“Because the people are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do” - Steve Jobs

“You must strive to find your own voice because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all” -Robin Williams

Your voice matters. Your community has your back and will always be there for you in times of trouble. You know yourself the most so it is crucial to let your voice be heard. Your voice matters to the community and yourself, so be brave and take the first step to voice your own opinion.
