

# Creating Access



## Speaking up for yourself



## Speaking up for yourself

As a young person, there are situations where you may feel that your rights are not being upheld or respected, and you would like to speak up about an issue that is affecting you directly. This could be a problem you are experiencing at your school or university, at your job, or at a service you access.

This factsheet will give you some examples of things you may choose to advocate about, skills that can help you feel confident when speaking up for yourself, ways you can self-advocate about an issue you are having, and what to do if you are not seeing change.

## Things you might advocate for

There are many different things that may affect you directly that you might choose to advocate for. Some examples may be:

- Feeling disrespected by a worker or volunteer's words or attitude
- People, services or organisations that won't or can't make adjustments to best support you
- Buildings that are not physically accessible, such as having ramp access or an accessible bathroom available
- No nearby accessible parking at the service you are attending
- Information about services, including policies and procedures, that is hard to understand and not available in alternative formats
- There is no assistance available to complete necessary forms and paperwork
- The website is hard to navigate and doesn't have captioning, transcripts or information on the organisations accessibility
- There are limited or no opportunities to provide feedback, make a complaint or become part of organisations advisory or governance groups.

## Skills for speaking up for social change

Here are some things that can help you feel confident when speaking up about issues that are affecting you:

**Prepare:** Think about the specific issue that you are experiencing and the change you want to see happen. Also consider how you would feel most comfortable raising this concern. It could be done over the phone, by email or in person.

**Practice:** Write down the points you want to bring up. Before you make a call or attend a meeting, practice what you might want to say prior with someone you trust to help you feel comfortable speaking up.

**Be clear:** Be sure to explain how you feel and why it is important. It's good to use "I" statements when talking about something that's impacted you, for example: 'I felt disrespected when you said this to me'.

**Learn about your strengths:** Knowing what you are good at can help. For example, if you are nervous about public speaking, you may be more comfortable sending an email outlining your concerns. Think about your strengths and where you may need support, and ask for help from family, friends, an advocate or someone you trust, where needed.

**Be patient:** Advocacy can take time. Remember to look after yourself throughout the process, follow up with people regularly to discuss progress, and try different approaches if needed.

**Tip** - There are also many organisations in NSW who run training to help develop skills in self-advocacy, for example: [Self Advocacy Sydney](#)

## Ways to do it

**Create a plan:** Think about what the issue is and what you want to see changed, how you want to raise your concern, who you would like to talk to, what support you have or need and what the solution is you want to see. The next step is to put the plan into practice.

**Tell someone:** if you are experiencing an issue with a particular person, you may choose to bring it up with them directly to see if it can be resolved immediately. If you would feel more confident speaking to someone else, chat with another person you trust for advice on next steps.

**Reach out to the organisation:** write a letter, email, call or use your preferred communication method to contact the service and express your concerns.

**Talk to the manager:** Ask to speak or meet with the manager of the service to escalate the problem or issue you are experiencing.

**Ask to see relevant policies or procedures:** Ask the organisation if you can see their policies and procedures relating to complaints handling and feedback so you are aware of the process they follow.

**Give feedback:** Most places have formalised ways to provide feedback about your experiences. It might be on the website, a form at the service or in the organisations policies.

**Make a formal complaint:** Making a complaint can be scary but it's a step to making change at the service. If you don't feel your issue is being resolved, it may be worth making a formal complaint to the organisation about the matter.

**Follow up:** Regularly follow up with the person or organisation to ensure your complaint is being acted upon. Write down who you speak with, dates and important facts from each conversation.

## If you are not seeing change

If you're speaking out and still not seeing change, here are a few things you can do:

- Ask to talk to a senior manager or someone in Human Resources (HR) to find out where things are up to with the issues you have raised
- Speak to the organisation and submit a formal complaint. Depending on the issue, it may need to be escalated to senior management or the board of directors
- Speak to a local service who provides individual advocacy services that can support you, such as People With Disability Australia or Disability Advocacy NSW etc
- Reach out to the relevant external departments that may be able to assist you. For example:
  - For complaints regarding the NSW Department of Education, [click here](#)
  - For complaints regarding NDIS registered service providers, [click here](#)
  - For complaints about other NSW State Government services, [click here](#)

## Keep in mind

Every organisation has their own process on how they address complaints or feedback they receive. Ask the person from the service that you are speaking with to explain their complaints and feedback procedures to you so you are aware of what to expect, including how long it might take to resolve the issue or problem. Be sure to also tell them your preferred way of communication, whether that be via email, letter, over the phone or in person.

## Alex's Story

Alex attends his local school and uses a wheelchair. Alex's worker at his school asked if he wanted to go to an upcoming Careers expo and Alex said yes. They were excited to learn about career opportunities.

A week before the expo, the school contacted Alex and said they didn't have an accessible car to support him to attend the careers expo, and he would be unable to participate in the event. The school tried to tell Alex he wouldn't enjoy the event. Alex thought about this for a little while, however he decided that he wanted to go and learn about different career pathways with the other students in his year. Alex told his worker he really wanted to attend and asked a person he trusted to be with him while he called the school to voice his concern. Alex explained his accessibility support needs, and told them it was important they organised an accessible bus so he was able to attend and participate with his peers.

Alex and his school friends really enjoyed the career expo and now Alex wants to go to University to study social work.

Alex wants everyone to know that it's important to speak up for your rights. When Alex spoke up to his school, supports were put in place and he was able to participate in the event with his friends. He wants you to know that it's important to stand up for what's important to you, because you have a right to participate in all school activities and events.

## For more information

For more information about advocacy and speaking up, please see our other factsheets:

- What is advocacy
- Speaking up for social change

These factsheets and other resources are available on the Creating Access website at:

<http://www.creatingaccess.org.au>

People with Disability Australia (PWDA)  
PO Box 666  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012  
Ph: (02) 9370 3100  
Fax: (02) 9318 1372  
Email: [pwd@pwd.org.au](mailto:pwd@pwd.org.au)  
Website: [www.pwd.org.au](http://www.pwd.org.au)

Youth Action  
Suite 401, Level 4, 52-58 William St  
WOOLLOOMOOLOO NSW, 2011, Australia  
Ph: (02) 8354 3700  
Fax: (02) 8569 2071  
Email: [info@youthaction.org.au](mailto:info@youthaction.org.au)  
Website: [www.youthaction.org.au](http://www.youthaction.org.au)

The information in this document was prepared as part of the Creating Access project, as part of a collaboration between People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and Youth Action.

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced without written permission from People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and Youth Action.

© 2019 People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and Youth Action