

A Self-Advocacy Framework: Elements For Success

Introduction

Self-advocacy is a crucial skill, it is the process of working with others to get your needs met. It involves assertiveness, and balancing respect for one's own rights with the rights of others. This guide draws on a blog series that explores the elements needed for effective self-advocacy, aiming to provide social workers and other professionals with insights to support their clients and communities. Self-advocacy and resilience create a mutually beneficial cycle. The original blogs can be found at LearnModelTeach.com and were written by Laura A Gaines MSW, LISW-S.

The Elements of Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is not a rigid set of steps but a combination of elements that can be adapted to different situations. These elements can be categorized into three levels: basic, core, and advanced.

I. Basic Elements: These elements form the foundation for self-advocacy.

Everyday Resources: Access to food, water, shelter, and physical safety. Addressing these basic resources on at least a short-term basis is a necessary foundation.

Ability to Ground: Connecting with one's body, values, and safe spaces to center and ground oneself. Practices such as slow breathing and identifying values can provide regulation.

Belief in the Right to Ask: Confidence in one's right to respect and having your needs met. Recognizing that it is acceptable to ask for one's needs to be met in a fair and accessible way.

II. Core Elements: These elements are central to the process of self-advocacy.

Specific Goal or Objective: Having a clear and defined aim on which to focus efforts. Identifying a specific goal that is worth the time and energy.

Knowledge: Understanding how systems operate, including both formal and informal rules. Gathering accurate information through research and communication.

Support: Receiving encouragement, knowledge, and assistance from others. Building a network of people, including cheerleaders, experts, and allies, is vital for making progress.

III. Advanced Elements: These elements may be needed for longer-term objectives or bigger goals.

Focused Resources: Dedicating time, money, and other resources to support the goal. Allocating specific resources to the situation.

Communication Skills: The ability to convey messages to create change through a variety of methods. This may include using mediums such as art, music and dance.

Collaboration: Working with others who share the same concerns to amplify advocacy efforts. Cooperation, compromise and respect are required.

Practical Implications for Social Workers and other Professionals: Some examples

Assessment: Evaluate clients' access to basic resources, ability to self-regulate, and belief in their right to ask.

Goal Setting: Assist clients in defining specific, achievable objectives.

Education: Provide information about relevant systems, rights, and resources.

Support Building: Connect clients with supportive individuals, groups, and networks.

Skills Training: Offer training in communication, problem-solving, and assertiveness.

Empowerment: Reinforce clients' self-worth and belief in their ability to create change.

Systemic Change: Recognize that individual self-advocacy can lead to broader social change.

Conclusion

By understanding and applying these elements, professionals can empower individuals and communities to advocate effectively for their needs, fostering resilience and driving systemic change. The elements needed in each case will vary, this framework allows participants to take a step back and consider what is needed in their situation.

This Framework was developed by Laura A Gaines, MSW, LISW-S and was first published at LearnModelTeach.com as a blog series in January and February 2025. It is shared as a work in progress. Laura is open to feedback as to its usefulness for strengthening individual and community self-advocacy. Feedback or ideas can be sent to

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