



Self - Advocacy Training Participant Workbook

Presented by the
ACT Mental Health
Consumer Network



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ACT Health

This workbook was developed in consultation with consumers, and information from the following resources:

Kevin Stone(1999) To Stand Beside—The Advocacy for Inclusion Training Manual—Featuring the VALID Advocacy Program .

Hancock, N., Everett, G., Honey, A., & Scanlan, J. N. (2016). Recovery Assessment Scale – Domains and Stages: Workbook. Version 1. Sydney: The University of Sydney. Available from www.ras-ds.net.au.

VALID Inc (1996) The Becoming a Self-Advocate Training Program

Michael, F (2008) Assert Yourself!, Perth WA, Centre for Clinical Interventions

The following material has been reproduced with kind permission of the ACT Government:

ACT Charter of Rights for People Who Experience Mental Health Issues

Version: 2023 March

Course Contents

Throughout this course you will notice speech bubbles similar to this one.

They contain comments from Network members and other consumers about Self-Advocacy and related issues.



Welcome to the Network's Self-Advocacy Course!

The objective of this course is that you recognise that you have something to say and you can communicate it with *assertion* and *confidence*.

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Group Agreements

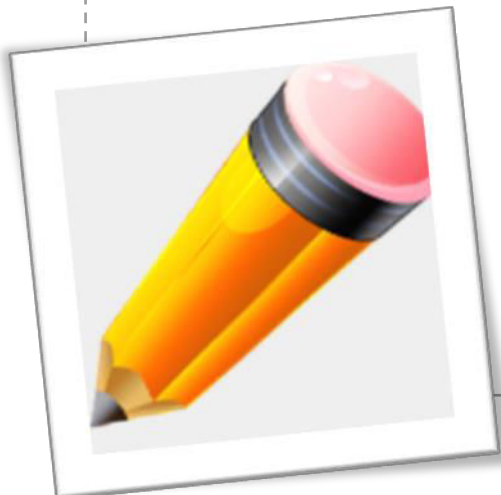
Group agreements or values are useful to establish boundaries on how the group will operate during training.

Due to the nature of sharing personal information of our life experiences during the sessions it is important the group is in agreeance on how this will be done in a safe, productive way.

All values made by the group need to be agreed to by the group and these can be referred to throughout training as required. Group values may also be altered throughout the training as agreed to by the group.

How is developing our group values a way of exercising self-advocacy?

Our Group Values



My Vision of Advocacy

What advocacy means to me, and my vision for expressing it in my life.

This is what self-advocacy means to me:

This is what is important to me and helps me identify when I want to take a stand —these are my VALUES:

These are my STRENGTHS that will help me when I express self-advocacy:

These are skills that I want to further DEVELOP to help me effectively advocate:

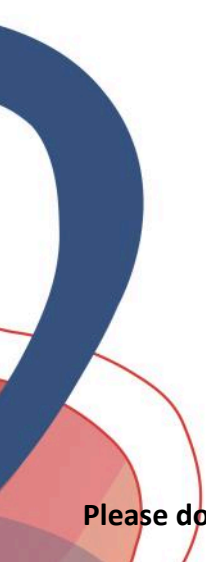
This is an AREA where I would like to self-advocate:

This is a GOAL that I want to work towards to get me started with my self-advocacy:



Module 1: Introduction to Self-Advocacy





Introduction to Self-Advocacy Summary

Outcomes:

- To explore the concept of Self-Advocacy
- What is it?
- Why is it important?

Exploring Self-Advocacy:

What People Think About Self-Advocacy	10
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My Toolkit:

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Resources/Handouts:

ACT Health MH Charter of Rights Pamphlet
Mental Health Statement of Rights and Responsibilities

References and Further Reading:

Appendix A—The Self-Advocacy Process Tool

<https://www.wellnessrecoveryactionplan.com/how-to-self-advocate/>

Being an Effective Self-Advocate, M. A. Copeland, MS, MA,
<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/being-an-effective-self-advocate/>

What people think about Self-Advocacy

Advocating for yourself, it's like going to the doctor, you don't want your co-worker to tell the doctor your story because they're going to put their bent on it.

Being able to advocate for yourself means that you get to have a say in your own life and what happens in your recovery journey.

Influencing your future about where you go, when you go, and how you go.

My voice, my choice, my life, my rights, my empowerment.

What I think:

Self-advocacy means speaking up for ourselves and making our own decisions and choices.

Advocacy is about giving a voice to people who have no voice.

Powers of Strong Self-Advocacy

This course was developed with consumers, for consumers. The course modules are structured around six 'Powers' that were identified as necessary for strong Self-Advocacy.

These are:

- ✓ **Self-Confidence**
- ✓ **Self-Esteem**
- ✓ **Self-Determination**
- ✓ **Self-Reliance**
- ✓ **Self-Expression**
- ✓ **Self-Development**



What do these concepts or 'powers' mean to you?



Being a self-advocate helps you identify concerns and problems and be confident enough to speak up. Self-advocacy involves awareness of rights, assertiveness skills, ability to speak up in appropriate ways, confidence and decision-making skills, (and) a sense of responsibility.

Image courtesy of Stuart Miles and [stockimages](#) / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

What is Self-Advocacy and Consumer Representation Training?

Objective: That YOU recognise that you have something to say and you can communicate it with *assertion* and *confidence*.

Self-Advocacy

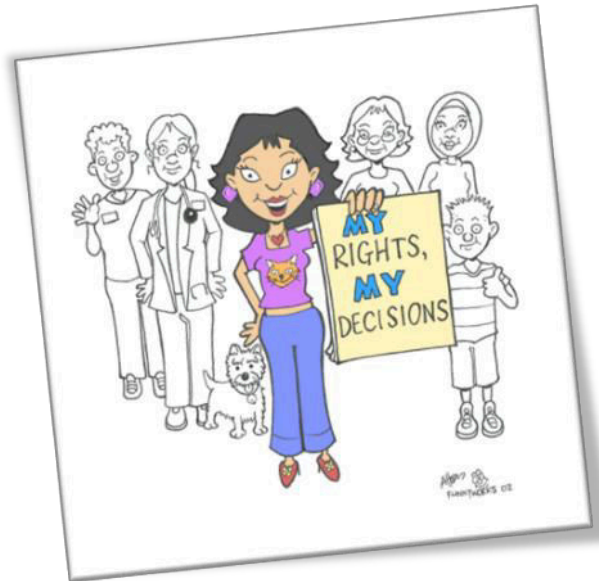
Purpose

To assist you to develop skills to speak for yourself by :

- Exploring your strengths
- The developing the capacity to communicate, negotiate and assert your own interests, desires, needs and rights effectively.

Content of course:

- What is Self-Advocacy?
- Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence
- Self-Reliance/Self-Determination
- Self-Expression
- Self-Development



Consumer Representation

Purpose

To assist you to become an informed consumer representative who is able to comprehensively promote and advocate the collective consumers' voice.

Content of course:

- Introduction to the Consumer Movement and Consumer Representation
- Social Justice and Legislation
- Exploring Committees
- Self-care as a Consumer Representative



Types of Advocacy



Individual Advocacy

Individual Advocacy is having someone to stand beside you if you think something is unfair or that someone is treating you badly and you would like to do something about it.

Self-Advocacy

Self-Advocacy is the action of representing oneself or one's views or interests.

Systemic Advocacy

Systemic Advocacy works to change the situations of a whole group of people who share a similar issue or who want to change the service provided by a system. Systemic Advocacy encourages changes to the law, government services, community services and community attitudes.

Consumer Representation is not just about advocating for me and my needs, it's about advocating for things that affect lots of different people. And it's important because we can change things that are hurting us, we can change things that aren't happening for us that we need to have happen. And we can have our voice heard as policy happens, as legislation is developed and to make sure that the systems that are around us actually support us.



Consumer Representation

A Consumer Representative of the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network is supported to represent the broader consumer voice through participation on committees of government and other non-government organisations.

Image courtesy of Ambro at FreeDigitalPhotos.net

What is Self-Advocacy?

Think about the following questions throughout this module, note down what has meaning for you:

What is self-advocacy?

.....

.....

.....

Why is self-advocacy important?

.....

.....

.....

Where are some places where **YOU** could self-advocate?

.....

.....

.....

.....

When would you self-advocate?

.....

.....

.....

.....

When might you choose **not** to self-advocate?

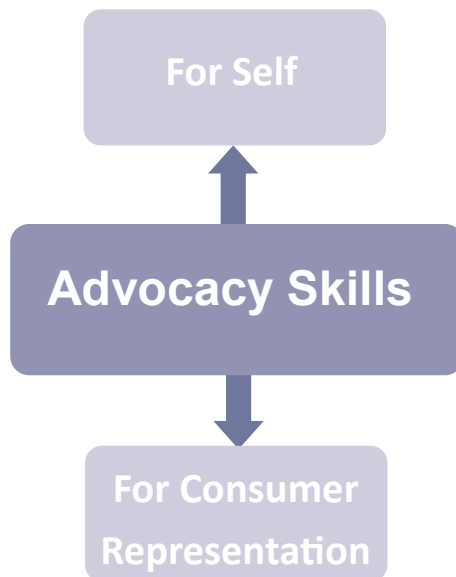
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Self-Advocacy Skills



Advocacy Self-Reflection



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Think of a time when you spoke up for yourself and people LISTENED to you.

Think about:

- What the issue was
- What you said
- Who you spoke to
- How you behaved
- What the other person(s) said
- How the other person behaved
- Who helped you to speak up for yourself
- What happened in the end
- How you felt

Think of a time when you have tried to speak up about something and people have NOT LISTENED to you or you wanted to speak up about something but didn't.

Think about:

- What the issue was
- What you said (if you tried)
- Who you spoke to
- What you said
- How you behaved
- What the other person(s) said
- How the other person (s) behaved
- Who helped you to speak up for yourself
- What happened in the end
- How you felt

What made the difference? How much was in your control to change? What areas would you like to personally improve through the Self Advocacy course?

Self-Reflection Notes:

Adapted from: <http://www.edac.org.au/letmespeak/html/selfadvocacy.html>

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NOTES:

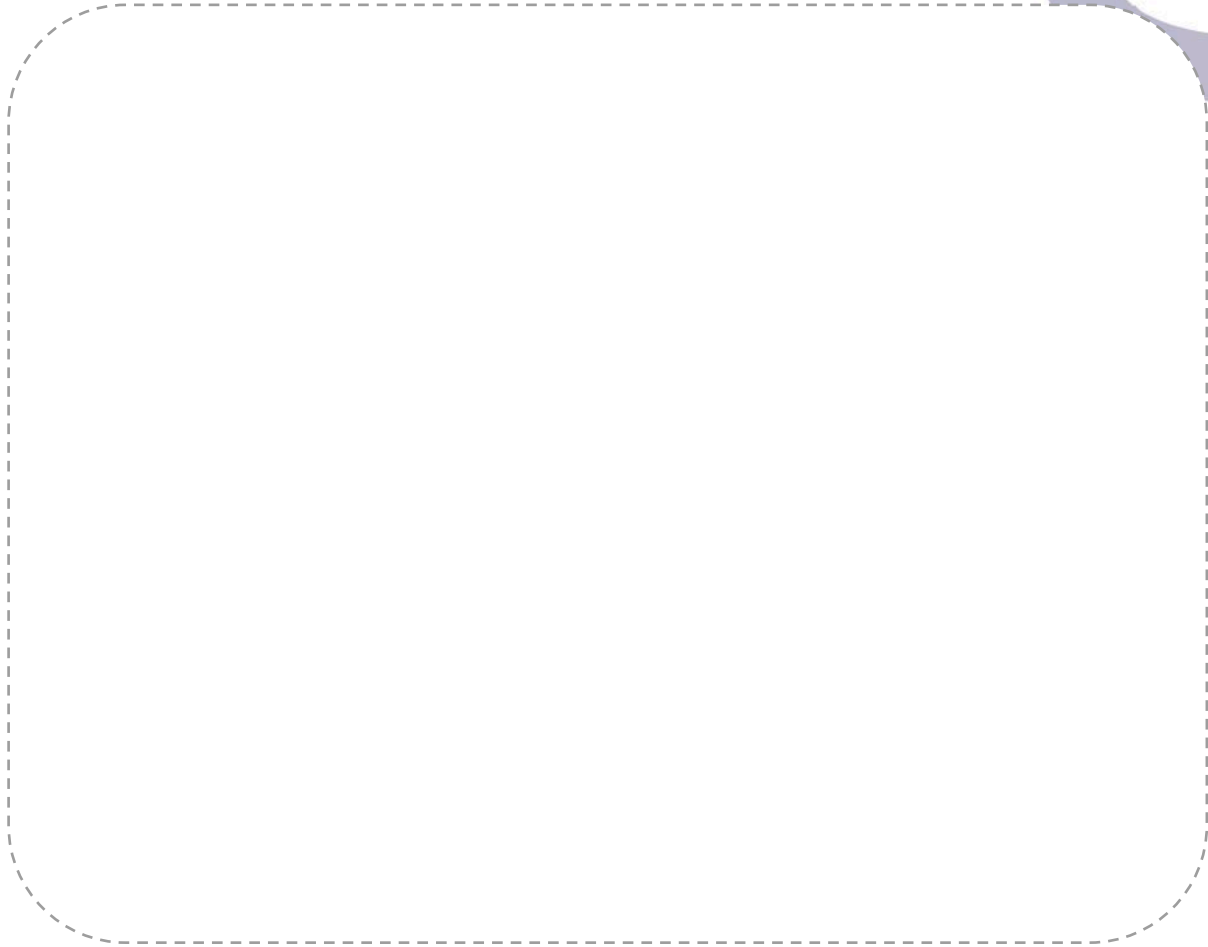


Image Created by Kath Laffey (Network Member)

The Self-Advocacy Process



Photos by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

Before starting to self-advocate think about the following:

1. What is wrong or what is the problem?

You need to get a clear idea of what the problem is. It is hard to solve a problem if it is too big or you are unsure about what you are trying to change.

2. Who can help?

Sometimes you might want to speak-up for yourself but don't know who is the best person to speak to. You might also need some more information before you can speak-up to prepare yourself.

It is important for you to know which people are best to help with your problem and, if you run into any problems, who to complain to. If you don't know the right people to contact, you might waste energy being passed from one person to another without getting anything done.

- Who is the person (or people) I need to speak to about my **feelings**?
- Who has information about this **problem**?
- Who could give me information about my **rights**?

3. What do I want to change?

You need to consider what you would like to happen about the situation. What is happening now that I don't like?

It is also good to write down the best solution you can think of for the problem.

4. What do I need to know

After you have decided what the problem is, how you would like things to change, and who to go to for help and information, you need to decide what information you need.

5. What do I do first?

- Telephone
- Letter/email
- Face to face meeting

Consider:

- Estimate your capacity to effectively advocate in the situation
- How confident am I about proceeding?
- Do I need to go back to my list of who can help?
- Do I need some coaching?



. For more details see: Appendix A—The Self-Advocacy Process Tool

Introduction to Self-Advocacy

Give it a go!

Think about Self-Advocacy issues and strategies discussed in this module.

What did you enjoy the most? Find most useful? Practical?

In what area of your life would you want to be more effective in self-advocating?

Something I want to take away from this module:

**For more information
check out handouts:**

*ACT Health MH Charter or
Rights*

*MH Statement of Rights
and Responsibilities*



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Module 2: Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence





Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence Summary

Objectives:

- To explore the concepts of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Why do we need them to self-advocate effectively?
- How do we build strengths?

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What People Think About Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence	25
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Resources/Handouts:

Healthy Self Esteem
Positive Qualities Record
VIA Classification of Character Strengths

References and Further Reading:

Appendix B: 4 Steps to feel better about yourself

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/self-esteem>

<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-build-self-confidence>

<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-challenge-negative-thoughts>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-esteem/#.W3fN1c4zaUk>

<https://www.valuescentre.com/mapping-values/values/why-values-are-important>

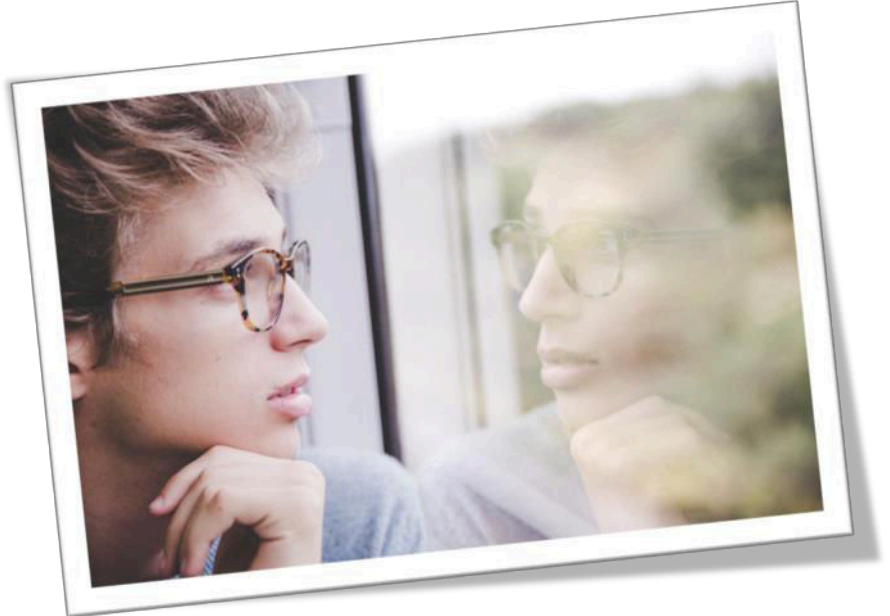
<https://www.drhappy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/The-Happiness-Institutes-Guide-to-Utilising-Your-Strengths.pdf>

Defining Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

Self

Definition of one's identity, character, abilities, and attitudes, especially in relation to persons or things outside oneself or itself.

The essential qualities distinguishing one person from another.



Esteem

To regard with respect; prize.

To regard highly or favourably; regard with respect or admiration.

Confidence

A feeling of trust in a person or thing.

Belief in one's own abilities.

For more information
check out handout:

Healthy Self-Esteem

The difference between Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence:

Self Esteem – Internal focus (how we see ourselves)

Self Confidence – How we engage with the outside world

What people think about Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

Knowing one is doing one's best – other people may have other values.

I value myself and have confidence in my ability. I am confident in myself and have the power to assert my rights and choose my behaviour.

I feel good about myself and believe I can make a difference. I choose to take responsibility for asserting my rights and in the rights of others.

From the choices I make, I believe I can support others. I choose the choices I make. I choose the 'fights' I take on.

What I think:

Knowing my values helps me be confident on what to take a stand on and speak out about.

Self-advocacy is that first step to empowerment. Once one feels empowered to look after yourself and care for yourself then you feel you have the skills and confidence to help care for other people.

Exploring Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

Signs of low self-esteem include:

- Saying negative things and being critical about yourself
- Focusing on your negatives and ignoring your achievements
- Thinking other people are better than you
- Not accepting compliments

Self-Confidence: Self-confidence is an attitude about your skills and abilities. Confidence comes from a Latin word which means "to trust"; therefore, having self-confidence is having trust in one's self.

Sometimes it can be hard to develop confidence, either because personal experiences have caused you to lose confidence or because you suffer from low self-esteem.

How to improve your self-esteem:

- Think about things you are good at
- Celebrate the small things in your life – give yourself a pat on the back when you achieve even a small thing
- Challenge your negative thinking – look for alternative explanations and put things into perspective
- Think about things you can change – don't worry about things you can't change
- Avoid trying to do things perfectly –it's not possible
- Stop beating yourself up if you make mistakes – everyone makes mistakes
- Do things you enjoy – it's easier to be positive when you are doing things you like
- Be with people who don't bring you down
- Volunteer to help people
- Exercise – it can improve your mood.

A Confident Person:

- Does what they believe is right, even if it's unpopular
- Is willing to take risks
- Admits their mistakes and learns from them
- Is able to accept a compliment
- Is optimistic

Tips for building self-confidence

1. Look at what you've already achieved
2. Think of things you're good at
3. Set some goals
4. Think about your self-talk and how that might be affecting your self-confidence.
5. Get a hobby

Challenging Negative Self-Talk

A good way to test the accuracy or reasonableness of your thoughts might be to ask yourself some challenging questions. There are four main types of challenging questions:

1. Questions that act as a reality check

- What is the evidence for and against my thinking?
- Am I jumping to negative conclusions?
- How can I find out if what I'm thinking is actually true?

2. Questions that seek alternative explanations

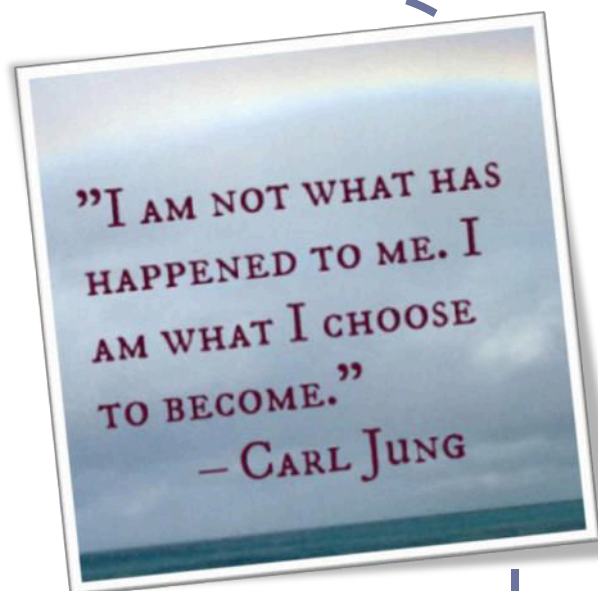
- Are there any other ways that I could look at this situation?
- What else could this mean?
- If I were being positive, how would I perceive this situation?

3. Questions that put things in perspective

- What's the best thing that could happen?
- Is there anything good about this situation?
- Will this matter in five years' time?

4. Questions that are goal-directed

- Is this way of thinking helping me to achieve my goals?
- What can I do that will help me solve the problem?
- Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me do it better next time?



<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-challenge-negative-thoughts>

Examining Self-Confidence

What does it LOOK like?

What does it FEEL like?

What ISN'T Self-Confidence?

How can I make it real?

My Values

Choose your top 5 values. (You may want to choose a value that isn't listed below – just add it to the list!)

Abundance	Grace	Kind
Achievement	Grateful	Loving
Acceptance	Fair	Loyal
Adventure	Family-Oriented	Passionate
Authentic	Faithful	Patient
Attractiveness	Flexible	Peaceful
Caring	Freedom	Physically Fit
Consideration	Friendship	Powerful
Compassion	Fun	Prosperous
Committed	Funny	Religious
Confident	Hard-Working	Respectful
Creative	Healthy	Responsible
Debt-Free	Helpful	Serenity
Dedicated	Honesty	Smart
Educated	Hopeful	Spiritual
Empathetic	Humanitarian	Spontaneous
Empowered	Integrity	Strong
Energetic	Intuitive	Trustworthy
Generous	Joyful	Truthful
		Wisdom

For more information
check out handout:

*VIA Classification of
Character Strengths*

Am I living consistently
with my values?

Am I truly living my
most important
values?

Do my behaviors
reflect my values?

How do my values
influence my
decisions?

Why is identifying values
important? These are the
bedrock—what you return
to when you feel insecure.
By identifying values we
can set our boundaries
and increase our resili-
ence!

When we live according to
our values, consistent-
ly and repeatedly over
time, we experience a
sense of **satisfaction**.

By identifying what we val-
ue and reflecting on how
we actually live,
we get a picture of where
we may be **out of bal-
ance**.

A Picture of Me in a Strong Frame

Spend a few minutes thinking about **positive aspect of yourself** you need to keep in this 'picture'. **Write these in the picture space.**

Consider:

- What things do I value in life and what do I like to do?
- What are my strengths and skills?
- How would someone who knows me well describe my abilities and successes?
- What aspects of my illness fit into this picture?
- What knowledge and skills do I need to frame and strengthen this picture of me?
- What parts of you do you sometimes lose sight of that are essential to your 'whole self'?

What knowledge, resources and strategies do I need to frame and strengthen this picture of me?

Think about what **internal resources** you would draw on to maintain this picture of yourself. **Write these in the picture space.** Consider things such as :

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Humour | • Motivation |
| • Self-determination | • Spirituality |
| • Resilience | • Sense of self |
| • Stubbornness | • Personal responsibility |
| • Courage | |

Think about what external resources you would draw on to maintain this picture of yourself. Write these in the picture frame.

Consider things such as:

- Natural Supports
- Hobbies and interests
- Housing
- Financial supports
- Meaningful occupation
- Mental health care and support
- Transport

Feel free use colours and decoration to personalise the picture and frame to reflect who you are!

Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Give it a go!

Think about Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem as discussed in this module.

How can you use these skills to self-advocate?

How can you practice them to help you be better at self-advocate?

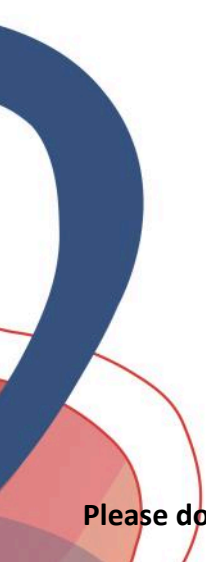
What is one thing you want to do this week to boost your self-esteem and confidence?

Which value will you commit to this week?

Something I want to take away from this module:



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Module 3: Self- Determination and Self-Reliance





Self-Determination and Self-Reliance Summary

Objectives:

- To explore the concepts of self-determination and self-reliance
- Why is self-determination important?
- How to make empowered decisions

Exploring Self-Determination and Self-Reliance:

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My Toolkit:

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Reflection on Self-Reliance	41
Is your GP the right one for you?	43
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Resources:

'MH Rights I have' brochure
'My Rights, My Decision' Summary
Why is Health Literacy Important?
Mental Health Treatment Options—Questions Checklist

References and Further Reading

<http://selfdeterminationtheory.org/>

SPEAKING OUT—The Role of Self-Determination in Mental Health Recovery, Cynthia Ann Piltch, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston, Massachusetts, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 2016, Vol. 39, No. 1, 77– 80

Know Your Rights, M. A. Copeland, MS, MA,

<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/health-policy-advocacy-know-your-rights/>

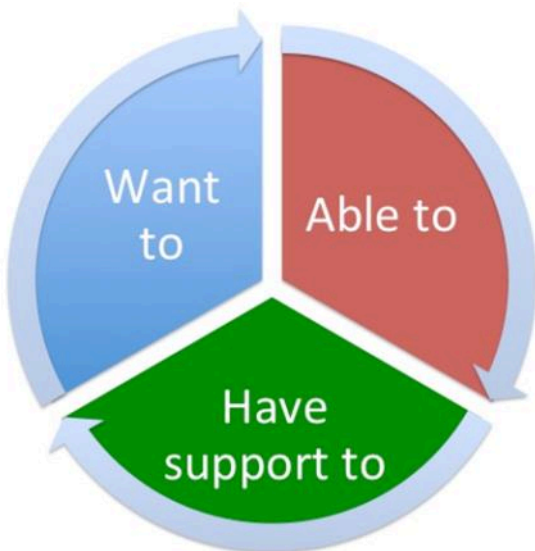
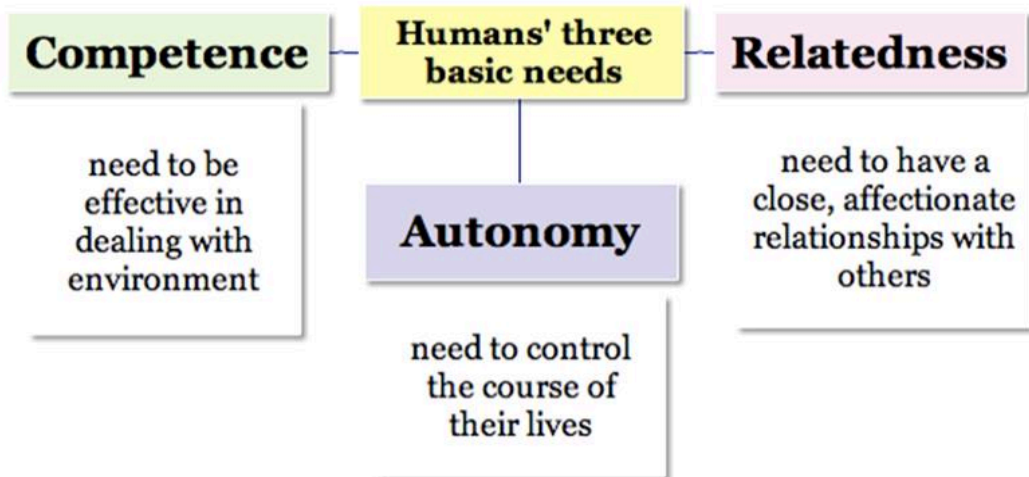
<http://www.ahrq.gov/apps/qb/>

<https://cbrhl.org.au/>

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/health-literacy>

What is Self-Determination?

Self-Determination Theory



Self-determination is linked to self-confidence. The more control you have over the decisions in your life, the more confident you feel in your ability to achieve your goals... The growth of my self-determination has been fostered by a combination of supportive relationships, access to accurate information about a broad range of intervention options, a willingness to experiment with different strategies for getting and maintaining wellness, and involvement in meaningful roles and activities.... Mental health challenges are an assault on one's self-esteem and self-confidence. I believe that these can be restored through the growth of one's self-determination. Attention to these factors ... can play an invaluable role in supporting our recovery and cultivating our self-determination. *

* SPEAKING OUT—The Role of Self-Determination in Mental Health Recovery, Cynthia Ann Piltch

Self-Determination Definitions

Self-Determination:

The ability or power to make decisions for yourself... (The Cambridge Dictionary, © Cambridge University Press)

Motivation

Intrinsic: initiating activity for its own sake because it is interesting and satisfying.

Extrinsic: initiating activity to obtain external reward.

Autonomy: to be in charge of your own life and act in harmony with yourself.

It does not mean to be totally independent of others and work in isolation.

Competence: to seek to control the outcome and experience progress and growth.

Relatedness: the desire to interact and be connected to others.



For mental health consumers, I think it's important, because there are a lot of areas where we do feel disempowered and we feel we are not being listened to.

It happens with doctors, and it happens with family sometimes, so being able to advocate for yourself just means that you get to have a say in your own life and what happens with your recovery journey.

Image courtesy of Stuart Miles / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

What people think about Self-Determination and Self-Reliance

It's important to not let other people assume what's best for you, so... being able to speak up for yourself is making sure you get to say what's best for you rather than somebody else.

Deciding one's self and following through with that decision to live in a certain way. Ability to maintain confidence in oneself to decide for oneself.

I make decisions for myself and make plans for my own life. I do things for myself whenever I can.

Empowered to choose, to make decisions based on my interest, and am allowed to choose my future destiny. I choose to do things when I choose to do them.

What I think:

Self-care is important in a healthy work-life balance. My life is in my control.

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go.

Dr. Seuss

Self-Reflection



Where in your life would you like more **control** (*Autonomy*)?

What would you like to learn or **become better at** (*Competence*)?

How would you like to **connect** with other people more (*Relatedness*)?

Image courtesy of Jac Alexandru/ Unsplash

Self-Reliance

What does **Self-Reliance** mean to me?

The concept that we must be entirely emotionally self-reliant to be “strong” or “healthy” is what can lead people to feel weaker and weaker, and to become isolated. ... Emotional regulation for me is thus really about knowing when to rely on myself alone (i.e.: taking an action by myself such as a walk in nature), and when to ask for help from others. A balance of these choices has helped me to build and maintain a healthy lifestyle for myself and my family.

What do I need to do to make **empowered decisions**?

What supports are there that can help me be more **Self-determined** and **Self-Reliant**?

Health Literacy

Health literacy is about how people understand information about health and health care, and how they apply that information to their lives, use it to make decisions and act on it. It is important for consumers because it affects their capacity to make decisions and take action to manage their health and health care.

Consumers with low health literacy can find it hard to understand a diagnosis, medication instructions, health forms, or instructions on how to prepare for a medical procedure or surgery. It has been estimated that people with low individual health literacy are between one-and-a-half and three times more likely to experience an adverse outcome.

Everyone can play a part in addressing health literacy. To address it in a coordinated way requires health literacy principles to be embedded into systems and integrated into education. Health information needs to be clear, focused and useable, and there needs to be effective communication between individuals.



What can consumers do?

- Discuss any difficulties they might have in understanding health and information with healthcare providers
- Discuss difficulties in communicating with healthcare providers, ask family to help, or request support services such as qualified interpreters or consumer advocates
- Ask for further information about any aspect of their care
- Be open and honest with staff and provide details of medical history and medication that they are taking
- Improve their individual knowledge and skills by participating in education
- Raise awareness in their community about the importance of health literacy
- Be involved in the development and review of consumer information and resources
- Be involved in the planning, design and delivery of policies, strategies and projects to reduce barriers to health literacy.

Health literacy influences how people undertake a range of tasks, including:

- Reading, understanding and acting on health messages, medication instructions and other health information
- Completing healthcare forms such as consent forms, insurance forms, and Medicare claim forms
- Finding a healthcare provider or service and making an appointment
- Making informed decisions about health and health care
- Navigating healthcare systems and services

For more information see: <https://cbrhl.org.au/> <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/patient-and-consumer-centred-care/health-literacy>

Mental Health Literacy

Mental Health Literacy is a term used to describe how both individuals and communities understand and respond to mental illness.

Good mental health literacy is about having the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to promote mental health and wellbeing, and reduce the impact of mental illness.

It helps people better understand their own mental health and helps them to know how to work to improve their wellbeing. It increases people's resilience and control over their mental health and encourages people to seek help, by knowing when and where to seek help and how to manage their mental health condition.



Mental Health Literacy consists of:

- Decreasing stigma related to mental health disorders
- Help-seeking efficacy (knowing when and where to seek help, and the skills needed to self-manage a mental health condition)
- Understanding mental health disorders and their treatments,
- The ability to recognise mental health problems
- Attitudes that assist with recognition and appropriate help-seeking
- Knowledge about how to seek appropriate mental health information
- Knowledge and beliefs about risk factors and causes
- knowledge about self-help interventions
- Understanding how to obtain and maintain positive mental health,
- Knowledge and beliefs about professional help available

For more information see:

<https://cbrhl.org.au/what-is-health-literacy/mental-health-literacy/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4813415/>

Activity: Is Your GP the Right one For you?

If any of the answers to these questions is “no”, then you may want to think about finding a new GP and getting the treatment you deserve.

Does your GP do all of the following things?	Yes	No
Take your health concerns seriously, rather than assuming that it's all in your head?		
Treat your physical health as though it's just as important as your mental health?		
Show a respectful and non-judgemental attitude?		
Take the time to really listen to your concerns and understand your situation?		
Treat you like an individual, and not a number?		
Tell you your options, make recommendations and discuss the benefits and drawbacks, rather than giving you orders?		
Make you feel comfortable, confident and welcome?		
Encourage you to ask questions?		
Give you enough information in language you can understand?		

Self-Determination and Self-Reliance

Give it a go!

Think about Self-Determination and Self-Reliance and the strategies discussed in this module.

How do these skills assist you to be better at self-advocating?

What did you enjoy the most? Find most useful? Practical?

Is there anything new you want to give a go?

In what area of life do you want to be more self-determined and self-reliant?

What is one way you want to practice these skills over the next week to self advocate?

Something I want to take away from this module:



**For more information
check out handouts:**

'My Rights, My Decisions'
*MH Treatment Options
Checklist*

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Module 4: Self-Expression



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Self-Expression Summary

Objectives:

- To explore the importance of self-expression
- To understand effective communication style
- Learning how to communicate in a way that leads to strong self-advocacy

Exploring Self-Expression:

Self-Expression	48
What people think about Self-Expression	49
Approaches to Communication	50
Assertiveness	51
Exploring Criticism	56

My Toolkit:

Steps to Improving your Assertiveness	52
Assertiveness Techniques	53
How to say 'No'	54-55
Assertively Responding to Criticism	57
Assertiveness—Self-Reflection	58
Self-Expression—Give it a go!	59

Resources:

Assert Yourself, Module 2—How to Recognise Assertive Behaviour
Assert Yourself, Module 3—How to Think More Assertively
Assert Yourself, Module 4—How to Behave More Assertively

References and Further Reading

<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Home/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Assertiveness>
Appendices—C, D, E, F, G

Self-Expression

What is Self-Expression?

Self-expression is how a person interacts with others and the world around them. It's a way you can express your feelings, thoughts, opinions, ideas, personality, and more—that which makes you an individual.

Self-expression is to say something that you truly believe is important in a form of communication, which can include art, writing, speech, music and dance. Creative self-expression reduces stress and increases a sense of well-being and other positive emotions.

At times it feels easier to repress self-expression than risk judgment, humiliation, and even rejection, so many of us conveniently hide behind masks. However, the need to express oneself is believed to be important for mental health. Suppressing oneself can have negative emotional and psychological effects on individuals.

Learning to express yourself, whether through something like art or simply a deep conversation, will greatly help to break down barriers.

Self-expression can help you to reflect on your life, actions, decisions, relationships, beliefs, and thoughts. When you are able to communicate your problems, your feelings, or your goals, you will find that others are able to better understand what you need from them.

It's always okay to express yourself – that means you should get comfortable with speaking your mind, creating boundaries, and standing up for who you are. By expressing ourselves thoughtfully, we can better communicate, collaborate and build a community with others.

Without self-expression, life lacks spontaneity and joy.

- Laurence Boldt

Self-expression is the dominant necessity of human nature.

- Dale Carnegie

Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.

- Sigmund Freud

How to Improve Self-Expression Skills

As with most skills, the best way to improve your self-expression skills is to practice them! Self-expression skills and strategies include—but are not limited to—the following:

Speaking	Writing
Body language	Artistic endeavors (creating music, dancing, etc.)
Speak your truth in the moment - commit to being more honest and authentic, but make sure	Acquire self-knowledge – Use introspection and reflection to learn more about your values and
Build, create, or restore something to encourage yourself on your own journey toward a healthier, happier you.	Engage in creative techniques. E.g. a journal, an idea book, creating mind maps to help you problem-solve, and creating vision boards to motivate you to
Write a new ending to a previous event, particularly an event that involved conflict, bad	Make time to pursue your dreams and feed your passions.

What people think about Self-Expression

Ownership of and choosing whether or not to state something that comes from the mind and or the heart.

You're the best person to describe the need and answer any questions for the need, so learning to do it yourself is a great advantage.

Choice, personal, opinion, emotions, power, rights of my own

My opinions are respected

What I think:

My expressed wishes are important and should be respected .

I like to express myself in different ways, being honest about my needs and open to listening to others and making connections.

I express my feelings and assert my opinions.

Approaches to Communication

	Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Rights			
Needs			
Costs			
Payoffs			

People develop different styles of communication based on their life experiences. Your style may be so ingrained that you're not even aware of what it is.

Each communication style has some positive aspects and negative aspects.

For example, people around you may have been getting some benefit from your being unassertive, and they may not want you to change'.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a learned behaviour and thinking style.

It is being able to express your feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and opinions in an open manner that doesn't violate the rights of others, and respects both your needs and the needs of others. Assertiveness is different to aggressive behaviour which violates the rights of others and passive behaviour where we violate our own rights.

Understanding how to be assertive provides you with the choice of when to be assertive. It does not mean you have to be assertive in every situation. You may come to the realisation in certain situations that being assertive is not the most helpful way to behave. Learning to be assertive is about providing yourself with a choice!

If we communicate in a **passive manner** we are not saying what we really feel or think. This can make us feel tense, stressed, anxious or resentful. It can result in a feeling of not being in control of our own lives, and can lead to low self-esteem.

If we constantly communicate in an **aggressive manner** we will eventually lose friends and people will lose respect for us. Again this can lead to low self esteem.

Even if we are assertive in most situations there can still be certain situations in which we find it difficult to be assertive.

It is important to remember the nonverbal communication as well as the verbal. You may think you are being assertive because you are using a particular assertiveness technique; however it is possible to use all of these in an aggressive or a passive way if you are not careful with your nonverbal communication.

Behaving assertively can help you:

- Gain self-confidence and self-esteem
- Understand and recognize your feelings
- Earn respect from others
- Improve communication
- Create win-win situations
- Improve your decision-making skills
- Create honest relationships
- Gain more job satisfaction

Learning to be more assertive can also help you effectively express your feelings when communicating with others about issues.

Self-advocacy isn't as easy as it sounds... I remind people how hard it is to complain to a waiter about a dish in a restaurant. Lots of people might find that difficult, so Self-advocacy isn't straightforward, it's not easy. ..Self-advocacy is that first step to empowerment. Once one feels empowered to look after yourself and care for yourself then you feel you have the skills and confidence to help care for other people.

Steps to Improving your Assertiveness

1. **Identify the situations** you want to work on—e.g. at home, at work, with friends or out in public. How do you normally deal with these situations? Do you normally deal with it in a passive or aggressive way? List these situations in order from easiest to hardest.
2. **Identify any unhelpful thinking** associated with these situations.
3. **Come up with a more assertive way of thinking** about the situation.
4. **Identify any unhelpful behaviour** (both verbal and non-verbal) you have been using when you have tried to do the task before.
5. **Come up with a more helpful behaviour.**
6. **Rehearse what you are going to say and do.** It can be helpful sometimes to write down what you want to say.
7. **Do the task** you have identified.
8. Once you have done the task **praise yourself for what went well** and then work out what you might want to improve on next time.
9. **Keep practising** until you feel comfortable being assertive in this situation.



For more information check out:

Appendix C: Beliefs about Assertiveness

Appendix D: x

Assert Yourself!
Training Modules: 2, 3, 4



Assertiveness Techniques

All of these techniques require practice. Pick one technique at a time and use it whenever appropriate.

It is important to remember your non-verbal communication when using these techniques.

Basic Assertion

A specific, simple and brief statement that:

- Is used when raising an issue with someone for the first time
- Expresses clearly our needs, wants, beliefs, opinions or feelings
- Can be used to give praise or compliments, information or facts

Empathic Assertion

Taking another person's feelings, needs or wants into perspective.

Consequence Assertion

Last resort and usually used in a situation where you want to change someone's behaviour without being aggressive.

Discrepancy Assertion

Pointing out a discrepancy between what has previously been agreed and what is actually happening.

Broken Record

Prepare what you are going to say and repeat as often as necessary, in a calm relaxed manner.



For more
information check
out:

*Assert Yourself!
Training Module 4—
How to Behave More
Assertively*

How to Say 'No'

Saying "No" can be difficult for a lot of people. Even people who are quite assertive in other situations may find themselves saying "Yes" to things that they really don't want to do.

Saying "Yes" when we really mean "No" can lead to stress, resentment and anger. Both towards the person you have said "Yes" to, (even though they have done nothing wrong) as well becoming increasingly frustrated and disappointed with yourself. In the long term not being assertive in this way can decrease your self-esteem and lead to depression and anxiety.



For more information check out:

Appendix E: Beliefs about Saying 'No'

At the other end of the spectrum some people are able to say "No" but do so in an aggressive manner without consideration or respect for the other person. This may result in people disliking you or being angry and resentful.

Neither of these situations is good assertive communication.

How to say No:

- Be straightforward and honest but not rude
- Keep it brief
- Admit to the person if you are finding it difficult
- Be polite – say something like 'thank you for asking...'
- Speak slowly with warmth otherwise no may sound abrupt
- Don't apologise or give elaborate reasons for saying no. It is your right to say no if you don't want to do things
- Remember that it is better in the long run to be truthful than breed resentment and bitterness within yourself
- When saying no take responsibility for it. Don't blame. You don't NEED to make excuses. You may want to change 'I can't' to 'I don't want to'.

Activity—Match the 'NOs'!

Ways of saying No:

Direct 'no'. Just say no without apologising. This technique can be forceful and effective with salespeople.

Reflecting 'no'. Acknowledge the content and feeling of the request.

Reasoned 'no'. Give a brief and genuine reason for why you are saying 'No'.

Raincheck 'no'. This is not a definite 'No'. It is a way of saying "no" to the request at the present moment but leaves room for saying "Yes" in the future. Only use it if you genuinely want to meet the request.

Enquiring 'no'. As with a raincheck no this not a definite 'No. It is a way of opening up the request to see if there is another way it could be met. For example "Is there any other time you'd like to go?"

Broken record 'no'. This can be used in a wide range of situations. You just repeat the simple statement of refusal over and over again.

Remember – saying "No" in an aggressive manner without consideration or respect for the other person is not right. This may result in people disliking you or being angry and resentful.

"I can't have lunch with you today, but I could make it sometime next week."

I can't have lunch with you because I have a report that needs to be finished by tomorrow

No.

I know you're looking forward to a walk this afternoon but I can't (or, don't want to) come."

Dave: No, I'd rather not eat out today.

Kate: Oh please, it won't take long.

Dave: No, I don't want to have lunch out today.

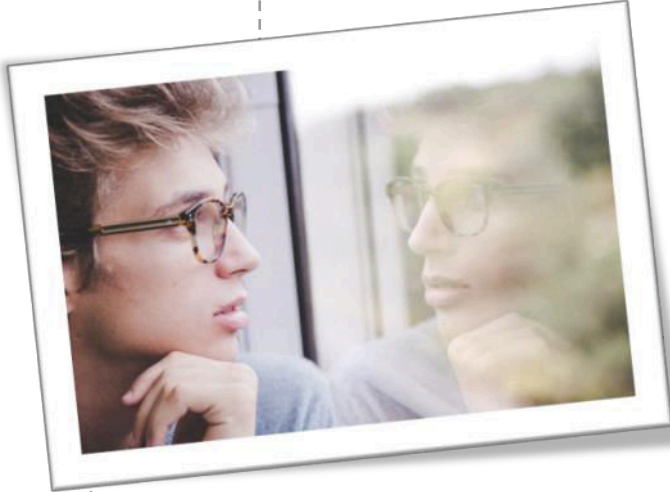
Kate: Oh, go on, I'll pay.

Dave: No, I'd rather not.

"Is there any other time you'd like to go?"

Assertiveness Self –Reflection

What is the **situation** I want to become more assertive in?



What **unhelpful beliefs** are maintaining the unassertive behaviour?

What **unassertive behaviours** am I using?

What are more **assertive beliefs and behaviours** I could use?

Photo by [Laurenz Kleinheider](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Self-Expression

Give it a go!

Think about the issues and strategies discussed in this module.

In what ways would you like to express yourself more?

How can self-expression help you to better self-advocate?

Is there anything that you identified regarding assertiveness on p 57 that you can start getting better at this week?

Something I want to take away from this module:



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Module 5: Self- Development





Self-Development Summary

Outcomes:

- Why is self-development important for self-advocacy
- To explore principles of effective goal-setting
- To reflect on what has been learned and develop a plan for future self-advocacy opportunities

Exploring Self-Development:

What people think about Self-Development	64
SMARTER Goals	66

My Toolkit:

Goals Setting	65
Ideas for Activities/Goals	67
My Goal!	68
Self-Development—Give it a go!	70
My Vision of Advocacy	71

References and Further Reading

Defining your life purpose and clarifying your goals (workbook),
www.thehappinessinstitute.com
<https://www.drhappy.com.au/resources/>

What people think about Self-Development

I have a right to choose and express my future goals and achieve them if I want to.

I enjoy having something meaningful to work towards, and feel a boost of confidence whenever I'm able to achieve a goal.

I challenge and reflect on my personal journey

Decision to change or augment self.

What I think:

To identify and follow my values so I can be my authentic self.

I have goals and dreams and I'm going to achieve them.

"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Goal Setting

What's most important to you (e.g. values identified in Module 2)?

When one does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca.

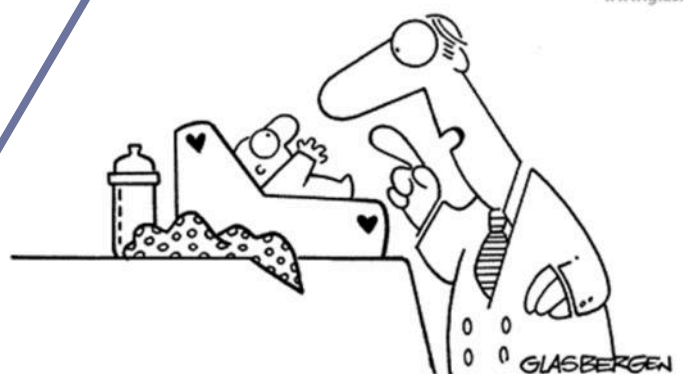
What shapes/motivates your daily activities (how/why you live your life)?

Where do YOU want to go from here (how do you want to express self-determination discussed in Module 3)?

... the significant majority of people go about their daily activities without really thinking about what it is that they're specifically working towards. Without any clear plan, they often procrastinate and they're often less happy in their day to day life.

...**Life purpose** refers to your ultimate life goals, it's your life purpose that shapes your direction and it's your direction that drives your short and medium-term goals. It's your short-term goals that ultimately determine your daily activities or what you do.

www.thehappinessinstitute.com



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www.glasbergen.com

"To get what you want, first create a list of compelling and meaningful goals. Next, draft a dynamic plan of action, then follow through with consistent maximum effort. If that doesn't work, just cry."

SMARTER goals...

S = SPECIFIC

Define exactly what you are wanting to achieve—be detailed and clear.

M = MEASURABLE

Set milestones and make your goals measurable so that you can objectively assess how well you are going.

A = ACHIEVABLE

Make goals that are challenging yet realistic. If you want to achieve something substantive, break the goal down into smaller more achievable steps

R = RELEVANT

Make sure that your goals are aligned with where you heading and to what you are wanting (your life purpose, values).

T = TIMED

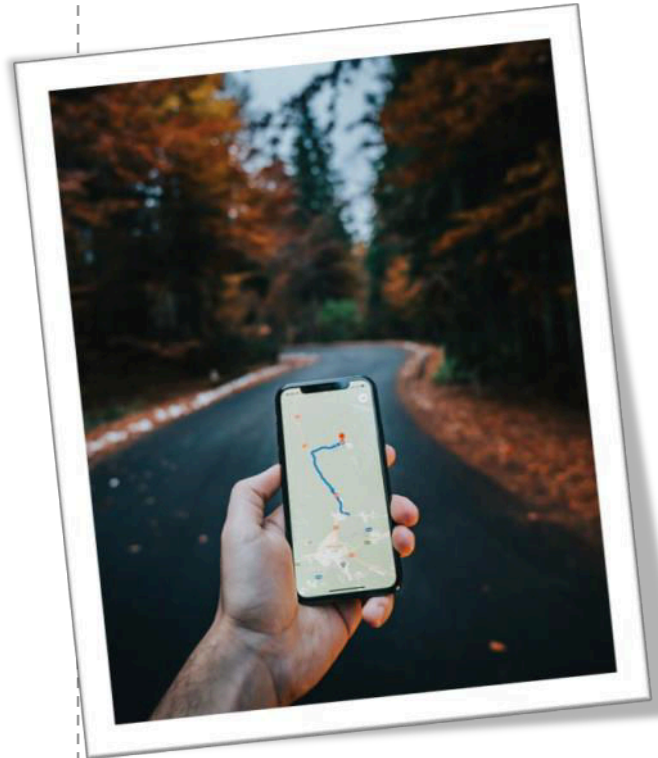
Set specific start and finish dates. Make sure you set yourself days and times when you can work towards achieving your goals

E = EVALUATE

Aim to evaluate your goals and your progress at regular point—are you making the progress you expected? If not, what can you do to get back on track?

R = REVIEW

Review your goals at regular intervals. Are they still appropriate? Should they be tweaked, extended, changed? (Try to regularly—e.g. annually—review your goals and progress toward your life purpose)



Steps to achieving my goals

Think about an activity you want to start. Reflect:

- What is my 'why'?
- What might get in the way/ stop me?
- What can I do to overcome these barriers?
- What's my plan to start it up?
- What do I need to keep doing? Do more of? Less of?

Photo Tamas Tuzes Katai Ern on [Unsplash](#)

Ideas for Activities/Goals

Doing things for fun and pleasure—Doing things we enjoy is very important for our health and well-being

Doing things I value—Spending time on meaningful things is essential, as knowing that your life has purpose in it can completely change the way you see the world. This can have a positive effect on self-esteem (discussed in Module 2). Different types of meaning are important to different people, and some activities can be meaningful in many different ways.

Doing things that are good for my health/self-care— Our mental health can affect our physical health and our physical health can affect our mental health, so looking after one is looking after the other.

Read the list of different activities below, and circle the ones that you might be interested in giving a go. Remember that you can add extra activities to this list if you want.

Which of these can help you to express yourself (as discussed in Module 4)?

- Play a musical instrument
- Write stories or poetry
- Paint or draw
- Photography
- Pottery
- Dance
- Metalwork or leatherwork
- Model making
- Woodworking
- Knitting, sewing or needlework
- Read books or comics
- Learn about science or nature
- Take a course for fun
- Go to museums or art galleries
- Go for a coffee with friends
- Visit friends
- Learn a language
- Keep a journal
- Use social media to connect
- Feed the ducks, or play with your pet
- Have people around for dinner
- Go to church
- Learn to cook
- Play cards
- Bird-watching
- Collecting
- Do puzzles
- Play chess or other board games
- Bushwalking, beach walking or even city walking
- Go swimming
- Go fishing
- Play sport – soccer, cricket, netball, whatever
- Do yoga
- Bowling (ten-pin or lawn)
- Camping
- Gardening
- Bike riding
- Get involved with a mental health advocacy group
- Join a campaign to raise money for refugees
- Visit somebody who's lonely
- Volunteer in the community
- Cook a meal for someone you know who's sick, or who finds it hard to cook
- Have a regular exercise routine
- Get involved with systemic advocacy
- Give up smoking
- Eat healthier

My Goal!

Think back to values identified in Module 2, and your planning on p 63, and come up with a relevant **long-term goal**. Consider some **SMART action steps** to achieve it!

Long -Term Goal:

ACTION STEPS:

.....

.....

.....

Explore the following:

How is it **SPECIFIC?**

.....

.....

.....

How is it **MEASURABLE?**

.....

.....

.....

How is it **ACHIEVABLE?** (Is it too big? Do you need to break it down?)

.....

.....

.....

How is it **RELEVANT?**

.....

.....

.....

How is it **TIMELINED**? It needs to be very specific
e.g. 30th Sept 2022 not 'the end of the month.'

.....

.....

What specific first step can I start with in the **next 24 hours** to get me closer to my goal?

.....

.....

.....

Out of 10, how much do I want to do this?

If it is 7 or less, you may need to rethink your goal!

Out of 10, how likely am I to achieve this goal?

If it is 7 or less you may need to adjust the goal!

If you find that you are not meeting your goal simply go back and identify the obstacle e.g. was it **REALISTIC**? Once you have identified the obstacle reset your goal. **DO NOT** beat yourself up!!!!



When will I **EVALUATE** if this goal is on track?

.....

When will I **REVIEW** how appropriate this goal is or it should be tweaked/extended or changed?

.....

Self-Development

Give it a Go!

Think about the issues and strategies discussed in this module.

What goals can you set to practice self-advocacy?

What is the first step you want try to do over the upcoming week?

Something I want to take away from this module:



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What Next?

Congratulations on Completing the Self-Advocacy Training!

Presented in two parts, The Self-Advocacy and Consumer Representation Course has been designed with consumers, for consumers.

The first part of the course is **Self-Advocacy Training** and the second is **Consumer Representation**.

Now that you have completed the **Self-Advocacy Training** you can continue to complete the **Consumer Representation Training** and then you can as a volunteer represent the

consumer voice to the wider ACT community.

You will get to help develop policy that will affect people in the future. You will get to have a say about things that are happening now... you will get to discuss new improvements... if you want to have a say in the ground level, then this is the job for you!





Appendix

Appendix A: The Self-Advocacy Process Tool

Appendix B: 4 Steps to Feel Better About Yourself

Appendix C: Beliefs about Assertiveness

Appendix D: Beliefs about Saying 'No'

Appendix E: Exploring Criticism

Appendix F: Beliefs about Criticism

Appendix G: Responding to Criticism



Photo by Christin Hume on Unsplash

Appendix A: The Self-Advocacy Process Tool



Image courtesy of scottchan / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Before beginning a self-advocacy process it is important to be able to identify:

1. What is wrong or what is the problem?
2. Who can help?
3. What do I want to change?
4. What do I need to know
5. What do I do first?

1. What Is Wrong?

Think of a problem that you would like to speak up about and then answer these questions.

What is the problem? What is it that I don't like? What makes me angry or upset?	
How do I feel when the problem happens/ed? Do I get angry? Do I get upset?	
Why do I feel like that when the problem happens? Are my rights being protected? Is it unfair?	
Who is contributing to the problem? Am I? Is it somebody else?	
When does the problem happen most? Does it happen when I am alone? Does it happen when other people are around?	
Where does the problem happen most? Does it happen in one place? Does it happen in a lot places?	

2. Who can help me?

Sometimes you might want to speak-up for yourself but don't know who is the best person to speak to. You might also need some more information before you can speak-up to prepare yourself.

It is good to know all the people you can speak to about your problem and all the people who can give you more information that might help you.

Write a list of people you trust and feel comfortable talking to. You might like to talk to them and ask if they would be able to be your support person while you are speaking up for yourself.

The people I feel comfortable speaking to about my thoughts and feelings are:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Then you need to think about who you are going to speak to and who could give you information that might help you. Think about the problem you decided to speak-up about and list all the people you think could help. Speak with your support person to try and think of everyone you can.

Who is the person (or people) I need to speak to about my <i>feelings</i>?	
Who has information about this <i>problem</i>?	
Who could give me information about my <i>rights</i>?	
Who could give me information about my <i>responsibilities</i>?	

3. What do I want to change?

You need to consider what you would like to happen about the situation.

What needs to change? What is happening now that I don't like? Have any other changes been tried? What is the cause of the problem? How does the problem make me feel?	
Who needs to change? Does another person's behavior need to change? Who? Do many people's behaviors need to change? Does my behavior need to change?	
Why do things need to change? How does the way things are done now make me feel? How would I like to feel? How will I feel if things do not change?	
When do things need to change? Does the problem need to change now? Can the problem be changed slowly? By what date do I want things to change?	
How do things need to change? What is the best way I can think of for things to change? How would I like to feel? What are some other ways I would like things to change?	

Adapted from: <http://www.edac.org.au/letmespeak/html/selfadvocacy.html>

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4. What do I need to know?

After you have decided what the problem is, how you would like things to change, and who to go to for help and information, you need to decide what information you need.

<p>What are my rights in this situation? Are there rights to protect me in this situation? Are my rights being protected?</p>	
<p>What are my responsibilities in this situation? What do I need to do to make sure my rights are protected? What do I need to do to make the situation better for me?</p>	
<p>Do I need any documentation to support what I am saying? Do I need identification papers? Do I need medical papers? Do I need immigration papers? Is there any other documentation that I may need?</p>	
<p>Are there any policies or procedures that relate to this situation? Is there an existing complaints procedure where I will be speaking up for myself? What is it?</p>	
<p>Do other people have the same or similar problems? Who are they? Are they willing to speak-up about the problem together?</p>	

Adapted from: <http://www.edac.org.au/letmespeak/html/selfadvocacy.html>
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Appendix B: 4 Steps to Feel Better About Yourself

(Extracts from an article By Mayo Clinic staff)

Step 1: Identify troubling conditions or situations

Think about the **conditions or situations that seem to deflate your self-esteem**. Common triggers might include:

- A business presentation
- A crisis at work or home
- A challenge with a spouse, loved one, co-worker or other close contact
- A change in life circumstances, such as a job loss or a child leaving home

Step 2: Become aware of thoughts and beliefs

Once you've identified troubling conditions or situations, **pay attention to your thoughts about them**. This includes your self-talk — what you tell yourself — and your interpretation of what the situation means. Your thoughts and beliefs might be positive, negative or neutral. They might be rational, based on reason or facts, or irrational, based on false ideas.

Step 3: Challenge negative or inaccurate thinking

Your initial thoughts might not be the only possible way to view a situation — so test the accuracy of your thoughts. Ask yourself whether your view is consistent with facts and logic or whether other explanations for the situation might be plausible.

Be aware that it's sometimes tough to recognize inaccuracies in thinking, though. Most people have automatic, long-standing ways of thinking about their lives and themselves. These long-held thoughts and beliefs can feel normal and factual, but many are actually just opinions or perceptions.

Also pay attention to thought patterns that tend to erode self-esteem:

1: My Situation:

2: My Thoughts and Beliefs:

All-or-nothing thinking. You see things as either all good or all bad. For example, "If I don't succeed in this task, I'm a total failure."

Mental filtering. You see only negatives and dwell on them, distorting your view of a person or situation. For example, "I made a mistake on that report and now everyone will realize I'm not up to this job."

Converting positives into negatives. You reject your achievements and other positive experiences by insisting that they don't count. For example, "I only did well on that test because it was so easy."

Jumping to negative conclusions. You reach a negative conclusion when little or no evidence supports it. For example, "My friend hasn't replied to my email, so I must have done something to make her angry."

Mistaking feelings for facts. You confuse feelings or beliefs with facts. For example, "I feel like a failure, so I must be a failure."

Self put-downs. You undervalue yourself, put yourself down or use self-deprecating humour. This can result from overreacting to a situation, such as making a mistake. For example, "I don't deserve anything better."

Step 4: Adjust your thoughts and beliefs

Now **replace negative or inaccurate thoughts with accurate, constructive thoughts.** Try these strategies:

Use hopeful statements. Treat yourself with kindness and encouragement. Pessimism can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if you think your presentation isn't going to go well, you might indeed stumble through it. Try telling yourself things such as, "Even though it's tough, I can handle this situation."

Forgive yourself. Everyone makes mistakes — and mistakes aren't permanent reflections on you as a person. They're isolated moments in time. Tell yourself, "I made a mistake, but that doesn't make me a bad person."

Avoid 'should' and 'must' statements. If you find that your thoughts are full of these words, you might be putting unreasonable demands on yourself — or on others. Removing these words from your thoughts can lead to more realistic expectations.

3: Challenging my thinking
(what inaccurate thinking
patterns am I using?)

For more information
check out handout:

Positive Qualities Record

Focus on the positive.

Think about the good parts of your life. Remind yourself of things that have gone well recently. Consider the skills you've used to cope with challenging situations.



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4: My Adjusted Thought or Belief:

Re-label upsetting thoughts. You don't need to react negatively to negative thoughts. Instead, think of negative thoughts as signals to try new, healthy patterns. Ask yourself, "What can I think and do to make this less stressful?"

Encourage yourself. Give yourself credit for making positive changes. For example, "My presentation might not have been perfect, but my colleagues asked questions and remained engaged — which means that I accomplished my goal."

These steps might seem awkward at first, but they'll get easier with practice. As you begin to recognize the thoughts and beliefs that are contributing to your low self-esteem, you can actively counter them — which will help you accept your value as a person. As your self-esteem increases, your confidence and sense of well-being are likely to soar.

Taken from Mayo Clinic Website : <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/self-esteem>

Appendix C: Beliefs About Assertiveness

There are often good and valid reasons why we become unassertive.

Things that can make it challenging to be assertive:

There are a number of **myths** about assertiveness. Some people use these as support for why they shouldn't try and be more assertive. Some myths are:

"Assertiveness is basically the same as being aggressive".

"If I am assertive I will get what I want".

"If I am assertive I have to be assertive in every situation"

We might have **unrealistic beliefs** and **negative self statements** about being assertive, our ability to be assertive, or the things that might happen if we are assertive.

There can be strong **cultural and generational influences** on our behaviour. For example, in some cultures assertiveness is not as valued as in Western society. If you are from one of these cultures it is important to weight up the pros and cons about being assertive in particular situations.

*Below are listed a number of typical **unassertive** thoughts. See if any of them apply to you:*

- I shouldn't say how I'm really feeling or thinking because I don't want to burden others with my problems.
- If I assert myself I will upset the other person and ruin our relationship.
- It will be terribly embarrassing if I say what I think.
- If someone says 'no' to my request it is because they don't like or love me.
- I shouldn't have to say what I need or how I feel: people close to me should already know.
- It is uncaring, rude and selfish to say what you want.
- I have no right to change my mind; neither has anyone else.
- It will all work out in the end, and anyway it's not my fault.
- People should keep their feelings to themselves.
- If I express that I am feeling anxious people will think I am weak and ridicule me or take advantage of me.
- If I accept compliments from someone it will mean I am big headed.

Identifying your unhelpful beliefs is the first step towards changing them.

For some people just realising that they have been thinking this way can be enough to help them change, especially when they realise they have the right to change and think in a different way.

One way of addressing unhelpful thoughts is to challenge them head on. This works on the principle that most of our thoughts and beliefs are learned opinions rather than facts.

To challenge or dispute your thoughts means that you examine the evidence for and against the thoughts. You evaluate them as if you were a detective or a lawyer.

See if you can identify any more unassertive beliefs that you have.

Appendix D: Beliefs about saying 'No'

These unhelpful thoughts are not facts. They are just thoughts or opinions that we have learned.

Unhelpful beliefs about saying 'no':

- It's rude and aggressive.
- It's unkind, uncaring and selfish.
- It will hurt and upset others and make them feel rejected.
- They won't like me anymore.
- Other's needs are more important than mine.
- I should always try and please others and be helpful.
- Saying no over little things is small minded and petty.



Each of the beliefs above can be replaced by a more helpful thought or opinion about saying “no”.

For example:

- Other people have the right to ask and I have the right to refuse.
- When you say “no” you are refusing a request, not rejecting a person.
- When we say “yes” to one thing we are actually saying “no” to something else.
- We always have a choice and we are constantly making choices.

Try and come up with alternatives for your own unhelpful beliefs about saying “no”.

People who have difficulty saying no usually overestimate the difficulty that the other person will have in accepting the refusal. We are not trusting that they can cope with hearing “no”. By expressing our feelings openly and honestly, it actually liberates the other person to express their feelings. By saying “no” to somebody it allows them to say “no” to your requests while still being able to ask for further requests.

Appendix E: Exploring Criticism

Criticism can be constructive or destructive. Learning to accept constructive criticism is an important skill.

How we accept criticism is largely based on our experiences with criticism, and can lead us to respond in a passive or aggressive way. We can change this thinking to more assertive thinking.

Destructive—This is criticism that is either not valid or true or criticism that may be valid but is delivered in an unhelpful way.

Constructive—This criticism is designed to provide genuine feedback in a helpful and non-threatening way in order that the person being criticised may learn and grow in some way. The feedback is typically valid, that is, it is a true criticism.



Image courtesy of Stuart Miles / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Some of the common non-assertive ways of responding to criticism are:

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run and hide, feel hurt and confused • Ignore it and hurt inside • May agree whether valid or not • May laugh it off/act silly to reduce appearance of being hurt. • Shut down and withdraw • See criticism of behaviour as a rejection of ourselves • Internalise anger and stew over it • Leads to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can identify the difference between constructive and destructive • Can see that criticism may be about behaviour skill, not about us as a person • Not get defensive, angry, blaming, hurt or run away • Stay calm and accept criticism without negative emotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hear the criticism as a personal attack • Become defensive and go on the attack • Retaliating with anger and blame • Leads to conflict and increased aggression • Leads to depression and low self-esteem.

Take a minute and think of the last time you were criticised. Jot down the situation and how you reacted:

For more information check out:
Appendix F: Beliefs about Criticism

Appendix F: Beliefs about Criticism

Unhelpful beliefs about criticism:

- If I am criticised it means I am stupid.
- They criticised me, they mustn't like me anymore.
- They are right, I did get it wrong, I can't do anything right. I'm a failure.
- I can't criticise them because then they won't like me.
- How dare they tell me I've done something wrong. They have no right.
- They're an idiot anyway. I'm not going to listen to them.
- If I criticize myself more and make it a joke then no-one will know I am hurt



Can you identify any other unhelpful thoughts that may stop you from responding to criticism assertively?

Here are some more helpful and assertive thoughts to challenge any unhelpful thoughts you may have.

- If there is something wrong with what I've done it doesn't mean anything about me as a person. I need to separate the behaviour from me.
- What can I learn from this criticism? Most criticism is probably based, at least in part, on some truths. Criticism may appear negative. But, through criticism we have the opportunity to learn and improve from their suggestions. Always ask yourself "What can I learn?"
- I have the right to let someone know if their behaviour has hurt, irritated or upset me.
- Giving direct feedback can be loving and helpful.

Image courtesy of Stuart Miles / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Appendix G: Responding to Criticism

Assertively responding to Constructive Criticism:

Accept the criticism

If the criticism is valid then just accept it without expressing guilt or other negative emotions.

Negative Assertion

You can use this when a true criticism is made. The skill involves calmly agreeing with it and not apologising or letting yourself feel hurt. This method often diffuses aggressive situations.

Negative Inquiry

If someone criticises you but you are not sure if the criticism is valid or constructive you ask for more details. If the criticism is constructive, that information can be used constructively and the general channel of communication will be improved. If the criticism is manipulative or destructive then the critic will be put on the spot.

Assertively responding to Destructive criticism:

Disagree with the criticism

Remain calm and disagree with it and watch your non-verbal behaviours including tone of voice.

Negative Enquiry

As mentioned before you can ask for clarification of the criticism to determine whether the criticism is valid or not.

Defusion

Stay calm and agree with some part of the criticism, this removes some of its destructive power. You can *Agree in part, in probability, in principle*.



Image courtesy of stockimages / FreeDigitalPhotos.net;

When feeling criticised:

Stop – Don't react until you are sure what is going on.

Question – Have you really been criticised? Are you mind-reading?

Check - If you need to, by asking the other person. For example, you can say: "What did you mean by that?"

Decide—Once you have worked out if it is really a criticism, decide if it is valid or not and respond using one of the techniques.