

Guide on self-advocacy for deaf people

Self-advocacy is a powerful skill that empowers individuals to express their needs, assert their rights, and advocate for themselves effectively. For deaf individuals, self-advocacy is especially important as it allows them to navigate a predominantly hearing (non-deaf) world and ensure their access to communication, information exchange, and equal opportunities. This document contains some guidelines on self-advocacy for deaf people.

1 Understand your rights

Familiarise yourself with the rights and protections provided to deaf individuals under Australian's anti-discrimination laws, such as Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1992). Knowing your rights will empower you to advocate for them confidently. Liaise with Deaf Australia and the states' Deaf advocacy organisations for support and information.

EXAMPLE

A hospital must provide you the best communication preference you requested (Auslan interpreter) for an appointment or when a doctor needs to discuss with you about your health care. Not doing so breaches the DDA and you have the right to fight on this with the health system.

2 Educate yourself

Stay informed about different services, communication options, assistive technologies, and resources available to the deaf community. This knowledge will help you make informed decisions and effectively communicate yours and your deaf community's needs to others.

EXAMPLE

You might be living in a regional area and need an Auslan interpreter for several important meetings, however you can go with VRI for one of those meetings and get an interpreter in person for other meetings. Knowing exactly what is available now and over the time will help getting the right services in as you or others need. Consult with others in the deaf community for the recommendations.

3 Build self-confidence

Develop self-confidence and believe in your abilities. Recognize that your needs and perspectives are valid, and you deserve to be seen and accepted. Surround yourself with a supportive network of friends, family, and advocates who can provide encouragement and guidance. Connect with other deaf people in the deaf community to share experiences, learn from others, and collaborate on common and essential issues.

EXAMPLE

There will be times when you feel quite alone and isolated with your negative experiences at school, employment, or health, however you need to know that there are other deaf people in the community who would have experienced similar and might have some strategies that you could try. Connect to other deaf people and ask for ideas and strategies to help you being more confident to improve your experiences.

4 Identify your needs

Reflect on your specific needs and find areas where you need support or accommodations. This could include requesting Auslan interpreters, communication support workers, captioning services, assistive listening devices, or accessible materials. Clearly articulate your needs to others while providing alternative solutions when possible.

EXAMPLE

You are meeting with a health specialist, and you're worried you would not remember everything that will be discussed. You can request for a support worker to write down notes on what was discussed for you to take home after the appointment. Ask other deaf people how they manage and what type of support and accommodations they found useful for specific situations.

5 Practice assertiveness

Develop assertiveness skills to confidently express your needs, concerns, and preferences. Clearly and respectfully communicate your expectations and be proactive in seeking solutions. Remember, you have the right to be treated with respect and dignity.

6 Seek support and resources

Reach out to your state Deaf advocacy organisations, general advocacy groups, or disability support services for guidance and resources. They can provide valuable information, training, and support to help you navigate various situations effectively.

7 Engage in self-education

Continuously educate yourself on relevant topics, such as accessibility, human rights, and inclusive practices. This knowledge will strengthen your advocacy skills and help you stay informed about advancements in technology, communication, and policy changes. Join online communities, attend local events, or participate in workshops and conferences to expand your network and gain diverse perspectives.

8 Be persistent

Self-advocacy may require persistence, especially when facing challenges or barriers. Don't be discouraged by setbacks or initial resistance. Stay focused, resilient, and determined to overcome obstacles and achieve positive outcomes.

Remember, self-advocacy is a journey, and it takes time and practice to develop these skills. By embracing self-advocacy, deaf individuals can advocate for their needs, promote inclusivity, and contribute to creating a more accessible society.

Resources

- Deaf Victoria's resources – <https://www.deafvictoria.org.au/>
- Australian Human Rights Commission – <https://humanrights.gov.au/>
- Aged and Disability Advocates (ADA Australia) – <https://adaaustralia.com.au/>
- People with Disability Australia – <https://pwd.org.au/>
- World Federation of the Deaf – <https://wfdeaf.org/>
- National Legal Aid – <https://www.nationallegalaid.org/>

Use the Self-Advocacy checklist in this section to help you plan out your own self-advocacy.