



Women with
Disabilities ACT

STRONG WOMEN
STRONG VOICES

Workshop 9

Advocacy support in Canberra



Self-Advocacy and Supported Decision Making Series

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Disability Discrimination Act 1992

What do we mean by rights?

- Disability discrimination is when you are treated unfairly because you have a disability. You have the right to equal access and to have your needs met.

Disability Discrimination ACT

- The Disability Discrimination Act is a law that says that people and the government must treat you fairly.
- It is called the DDA for short.
- It makes it illegal for you to be treated badly because of your disability.
- It tries to make sure you have a fair go and that society treats you fairly.

Who is the DDA for?

The DDA is for people with any type of disability.

It protects you if you:

- have a disability now
- have had a disability in the past
- may have a disability in the future because of family history.

The DDA also protects people who are treated badly because they have a family member or friend with a disability.

Areas of life where the DDA protects you

- Employment or jobs
- Education
- Buying things and using services
- Playing sports and joining clubs and associations
- Buying or renting a house or other buildings.

Employment or jobs

It is against the law to discriminate against you because of your disability at work or when you are looking for a job.

If you can do most of the job then you must have the same chance, rights and opportunities as others you work with.

Your workplace must make changes so you can do your job well.

They can:

- change the way they run the interview
- make the office space easier for you to work in
- change the tasks you have to do and give you extra breaks and time
- provide you with training and support
- provide assistive technology related to work.

Education

It is illegal for a school, TAFE or university to discriminate against you because of your disability.

If you are applying for education, you have the same rights as everyone else to study there.

Places of education cannot:

- stop you from studying there because of your disability
- ask you to pay more
- leave you out of activities, classes, lectures or on-site training.

They must make changes so that you can study well. Some examples are:

- making rooms and lecture halls accessible for you to get into and to study and learn in
- giving you the equipment you need to learn
- giving you extra time for exams and assignments
- giving you information you can read and/or understand
- having systems in place so that you can still get all the information you need if you miss or cannot go to a class.

Buying things and using services

It is against the law for you to be discriminated against because of your disability when buying things or using services.

Stores and services cannot:

- stop you from buying something because of your disability
- ask or make you pay extra for things, for example using wheelchair taxi
- serve you last for no good reason
- refuse you entry because of your disability.

Playing sports and joining clubs

It is against the law for you to be left out from playing sports or being a member of a club, group or association because you have a disability.

This includes:

- sports and social clubs
- drama, dance and music groups
- political parties and business groups
- support groups.

They cannot:

- stop you from applying to become a member
- ask you to pay extra
- leave you out of activities.

The DDA says that clubs or groups must meet in a place that is accessible.

Access to public places

The DDA makes it against the law for public places and public transport to not be accessible. Every public space should be open and for you to enter and use when they are open to the public.

For example:

- access and entrance and inside the building
- things you use inside the building should be accessible and in reach
- all parts of a public space that can be used should be available to you to use
- information about the place should be easy to read, understand and access.

You have the right to complain if a public space is not accessible.

Using government services

The DDA makes it illegal for the Commonwealth Government to discriminate against you because of your disability.

You must have access to:

- government offices
- places where government programs are run, like Centrelink
- voting places and information
- courts and legal help.

Making a complaint

If you are discriminated against or bullied because of your disability you can complain to The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

To make a complaint you can write and email or letter and send it to:

complaints@humanrights.gov.au

For information on making complaints go to the AHRC's website:

www.humanrights.gov.au

To speak with someone over the phone, call **02 9284 9600**

Adapted from: Council for Intellectual Disability – DDA Easy English.

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

What do we mean by rights?

- Countries will not treat people unfairly because of their disability.
- Countries need to make sure that people with disabilities get and have the same rights as others.
- Every country must have an independent organisation to make sure that to make sure people with disabilities get their rights.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities is also known as the UNCRPD.
- In Australia, this is the Australian Human Rights Commission.

What are your rights under the UNCRPD?

Economic rights

- Equal access to family benefits, loans and credit.

Social Rights

- Equal access to employment and education.
- Equal access to housing and transportation.
- Equal access to healthcare and family planning.
- Equal treatment for rural women* and marginalized people.

Cultural rights

- Tells the government to stop cultural practices that discriminate against women* and minorities.
- Equal participation in recreational activities such as sports.

Civil rights

- Equality in legal matters.
- The right to freedom of movement.
- The right to choose where they live.

Political Rights

- The right to vote.
- The right to hold office in politics and to participate in politics.
- The right to represent their government at an international level.

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WWDACT acknowledges that we work on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Women with Disabilities ACT Inc. is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission ABN 74 908 530 982.

Getting help with self-advocacy

The goal of advocating for yourself is to make your needs and wants known and have them met. It means ensuring that you have the same rights, the same chances, and the same choices in life as everyone else.

Self-advocacy means explaining your feelings and thoughts, and asking for what you want, as well as the things you need. It also means having the right to do so.

It means being involved and listened to when it comes to a decision that affects or involves you. This means working towards finding solutions for problems. Sometimes by yourself and sometimes with the help of others. Self-advocacy means being able to ask for help when you need it, asking questions and making sure you are informed, and reaching out for help within your support network when you need it.

Getting help, let alone knowing when and how to ask for help, is something a lot of people find challenging. Sometimes it can seem easier to just not ask for help because of previous experiences we may have had. This means that when we do need to start looking for help, it can be really overwhelming knowing where to even start. Having a support system in place, and/or having a list of organisations and services who can help you when advocating, is always handy.

You don't have to advocate alone!

Asking for help

One of the most important questions when advocating for yourself is 'What type of help do I want?'. If we know what help we are after, we can work out how to access it!

Figuring out where to start when asking for help can be daunting. That's why asking those you know and trust can be a good start. This can be friends, family, doctors, therapists, and essentially anyone you trust! They can help give us a clearer idea of the areas we may need support in and may even see something about us that we might not have picked up on ourselves. These relationships can also help give us the validation we need to ask for help. Sometimes hearing a thought we have had for a long time said out loud by someone else can be just the push we need to speak up for ourselves.

After we recognise the areas we need help in, we can then work on building up a list of areas we want more help in, this could be in general as well as during self-advocacy. An example of what to ask those you trust is: from what you have seen of me on tough days, what areas do you think I would benefit from help in?

We do need to take into consideration who we ask, as not everyone we turn to could be helpful or considerate of our feelings. Honesty is incredibly important when it comes to asking for help, but if the person we are asking often leaves us with the feeling of disappointment, it's probably best to think twice before getting them involved again.

Below are some questions we can ask ourselves to think about the ways we go about asking for help and who we turn to. These can help you when it comes to figuring out how to make that step towards finding the help you want. Asking those around us questions like these ones can also help build up and practice our self-confidence when asking for help. It can be about anything - no matter how small we think it might be.

How do I ask for help?

What are the different ways I can go about asking for help from the people around me?

What types of communication methods would I use?

Who would I be most likely to turn to for help first?

Who do I turn to if the person I would normally ask for help is unavailable?

How, when, where, what and why to get help

When it comes to getting help with self-advocacy, we need to think about the why's, when's, where's, what's and how's surrounding what we are advocating for. We also need to think how much we need to consider with each of these and where we want help to advocate, when the right time to advocate is, how much we need to go into each of these in different situations and why we are advocating in the first place.

Key questions to consider when seeking help:

We also need to be mindful of how those helping us communicate with us. Asking ourselves the following questions can keep us safe when asking for help.

How:

- How do I ask for help?
- How do I find help?
- How do I want help advocating?
- How am I going to find and get help to advocate for myself?
- How am I going to communicate my needs and wants to the person helping me?
- How far am I willing to go with this based on how I am feeling overall?
- How will this help me?
- How much help am I looking for?

When:

- Do I need help immediately?
- Do I have a deadline that I need help with?
- When do I feel the most comfortable advocating and with whom?
- When do I know if I need more than one person's help to advocate?

Where:

- Where can I get help with advocating?
- Where is my current headspace at in this current situation? Do I need help in this area too?
- Where is this taking place or going to take place?
- Where could this cause problems?
- Where are the areas I would like more help in?

What:

- What type of help am I after?
- What is the situation I am in where I need help advocating?
- What do I need help with specifically?
- What are my current energy levels, and how am I feeling emotionally?
- What do I want to come out of this situation?
- What do I want the person helping me advocate to understand?
- What do I do if I'm uncomfortable getting help?
- What areas do I want more help in when advocating?
- What areas do I *not* want help in?

Why:

- Why do I need help advocating in this situation?
- Why is there a need for me to advocate now?

Other:

Communicating with others

Communication is key when it comes to getting help with advocacy. It could be something like reaching out to anyone within our support network, as well as organisations or government departments.

Everyone communicates differently—your needs when communicating should be met, so that you can communicate to those you are seeking help from. Not everyone you interact with is going to have the means to accommodate this, but efforts should be made.

You can also have an advocate to help you advocate with another advocate. For example, you could have someone who understands your communication style—let's call them Advocate A—whose only job is to help you communicate with the second advocate—Advocate B—on an issue or in a situation Advocate A cannot help you advocate in, beyond helping you with communication.

We can have many people helping us advocate, just in different ways. A combination of other people's thoughts can help us advocate on our own.

When we think about communication, we also need to think about how we are going to ask for help. Knowing what options are available means we can decide on the communication that is best for us.

This might mean looking at an organisation's website, looking at what contact information they have, and then deciding which of their communication methods are right for you.

If you don't feel comfortable calling people, you can send them an email or even a letter. If you're still feeling uncomfortable, you can ask those around you if they wouldn't mind writing an email or letter on your behalf with what you would like to say.

How do I communicate?

How do I communicate with others when I am seeking help for advocating for myself?

Reflect on a past experience when you have asked for help. Was it received positively and did you get the help you wanted?

Was there anything you would change about how you communicated?

My strengths in communicating with others are:

Things to keep in mind when asking for help while advocating:

- Remember the situation is about you and should involve you throughout the process.
- You should be included in all decisions made. No decision should be made without telling you first, or without you giving the OK.
- You have the right to change advocates or to ask for a different advocate.
- You have the right to say no or stop getting help with advocating at any time.
- You have the right to ask for help and for what you need and want.
- You should be listened to without judgement.
- You should be and feel respected and safe.

Other things to remember:

[illegible]

Becoming comfortable with asking for help

We all need different things and are all comfortable in different situations, this is also the same when it comes to getting help with advocacy. For example, you might prefer a female mental health professional, or if you are a person of colour you might be after someone who is also a person of colour when looking for a doctor, therapist, advocate, and so on. It can be hard at times to find the right type of help we are after. Sometimes asking communities if they know of anyone can be helpful or friends who have needed similar help can also be useful.

There will be times when we need to advocate to have our beliefs, choices, and decisions respected and acted upon. This can be an intimidating experience, especially if we have negative past experiences in these areas. Remembering that we have the right to ask for someone to help us when we are in these situations is incredibly important for our mental and physical health.

Past experiences can determine our self-confidence in certain situations. If you have been in a situation where your self-confidence has taken a hit, you're more likely to have less confidence in yourself in a similar situation in the future. This is where it is important to focus on the times we have succeeded in these areas in the past, instead of the negatives. If we use our past experiences when asking for help, it can guide us when it comes to working out what can make us comfortable to speak up if a similar situation happens.

It's important to remember that not every decision or request for help needs to be justified. If someone does want you to justify why you are making it or are in need of help, you do not have to disclose to them why – unless it is a medical professional or someone directly affected by your decision. If you are feeling pressured or feel the need to give some form of explanation, it does not have to be in depth. It's up to you to decide what you wish to disclose to those around you.

How do I feel more comfortable when asking for help?

What makes me feel comfortable when asking for help?

What could help me feel more comfortable asking for help?

Organisations I have contacted, frequently contact, or would like to know more about:

Who to reach out to for support?

So, where do we actually go to get help with advocating for ourselves? It is different from person to person and is situation based: the level of help and the type of help you want may change with each situations.

The people you can turn to could be your close support network, therapists, doctors, nurses, hospital advocates, and so many more. Many organisations also offer individual advocacy supports in the ACT region, like Advocacy For Inclusion, ACT Disability Aged Carer Advocacy Service, and many more. Others also offer systemic advocacy supports like us — Women With Disabilities ACT, People With Disabilities Australia, and many more.

Our program provides a booklet of resources within the ACT region that can offer support for all kinds of circumstances.

Have I contacted any organisation for support?

In what kind of situations can I ask an organisation for support in the future?

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