

# HOW TO BE A SELF-ADVOCATE



**Grades 4-7**

**How to be a Self-Advocate**

**Health & Physical Education, Social Studies and English Language Arts**

## **Purpose of the Lesson:**

Learning how to advocate for ourselves is an extremely valuable life-lesson. When we understand how to speak up for ourselves, set boundaries and advocate for our needs, we can improve our circumstances and our mental health. Through this lesson, your students will learn what it means to be a self-advocate. They will then think of instances where they can practice self-advocacy and do so when the opportunity presents itself. They will then write a report about how it felt to advocate for themselves. The lesson concludes with a discussion around how vital self-advocacy is in our lives.

## **Curriculum Competencies:**

### **Health Education**

- Identify and describe avoidance or assertiveness strategies to use in unsafe and/or uncomfortable situations (Grade 4)
- Identify and describe strategies for avoiding and/or responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, or exploitive situations (Grade 5/6/7)
- Describe and apply strategies for developing and maintaining positive relationships (Grade 4/5/6/7)
- Describe and apply strategies that promote a safe and caring environment (Grade 4/5)
- Explore strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 6/7)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being (Grade 4)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 5/6/7)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use (Grade 4)
- Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity (Grade 4)
- Explore and describe how personal identities adapt and change in different settings and situations (Grade 5/6/7)

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## Social Studies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions (Grade 4/5/6/7)
- Construct narratives that capture the attitudes, values, and worldviews commonly held by people at different times or places (Grade 4)
- Develop a plan of action to address a selected problem or issue (Grade 5/6)
- Take stakeholders' perspectives on issues, developments, or events by making inferences about their beliefs, values, and motivations (Grade 5/6)
- Differentiate between intended and unintended consequences of events, decisions, and developments, and speculate about alternative outcomes (Grade 5)
- Make ethical judgments about events, decisions, or actions that consider the conditions of a particular time and place (Grade 4)
- Make ethical judgments about events, decisions, or actions that consider the conditions of a particular time and place, and assess appropriate ways to respond (Grade 5/6/7)

## English Language Arts

- Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding (Grade 4/5/6/7)
- Communicate in sentences and paragraphs, applying conventions of Canadian spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Grade 4/5/6)
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking (Grade 7)
- Develop and apply expanding word knowledge (Grade 4/5)

## First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

## Video

### Self-Advocacy - EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.

## Guiding Questions:

- What is self-advocacy, according to this video?
- Why is self-advocacy important?
- How can self-advocacy support our mental health and wellbeing?

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## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

**Preparation:** Queue up video/set up projector

1. **Have the students watch the video “Self-Advocacy”** This video can be found [HERE](#).
2. **Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.**
3. **Define the term self-advocacy for your students.** Provide your students with a longer, more in depth definition of self-advocacy. Read this definition to them: “Self-advocacy is the ability to speak-up for yourself and the things that are important to you. Self-advocacy means you are able to ask for what you need and want and tell people about your thoughts and feelings. Self-advocacy means you know your rights and responsibilities, you speak-up for your rights, and you are able to make choices and decisions that affect your life. The goal of self-advocacy is for YOU to decide what you want then develop and carry out a plan to help you get it. It does not mean you can’t get help if you need or want it, it just means that you are making the choices and you have to be responsible for the choices you make.”  
([SOURCE](#))
4. **Have your students do a think-pair-share about this definition.** Break your students up into pairs and have them reflect on what this definition means. Give them a bit of time for reflection on their own before they share with their partner. Then facilitate a whole group discussion about the definition. You can write key words on the board that come up during the conversation to act as an anchor chart for the remainder of the lesson.
5. **Discuss with your students that self-advocacy is a necessary part of our mental health journeys.** Explain to them that when we are struggling with our mental health and we ask for help from others, that’s a form of self-advocacy. Self-advocacy also looks like setting boundaries with people who are hurting our feelings or making us feel unsafe or uncomfortable. It can look like asking for more time with an assignment if we’re having a hard day in school or choosing not to participate in a soccer game because our bodies and minds need rest.
6. **Have your students work individually to come up with examples of times they’ve advocated for their needs.** These can be in big or small ways. Give them quite a bit of time to do this reflection, as it will help them in the active part of the lesson. If they’re feeling stuck you can provide them with a few more specific examples that may spark connection-making for them. Ensure that they feel confident in the definition of self-advocacy before they begin this part of the lesson.

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7. **Explain the curriculum connections to your students.** Inform them that they are going to practice doing self-advocacy and use the tips from the video they watched earlier in the lesson to do so. Have them think of another instance where they may need to practice advocating for themselves. This could be either a real situation they have coming up or something entirely hypothetical. Get them to use the steps from the video to figure out exactly how they would do that in a hypothetical or real situation.

## The steps from the video are:

- Identify and clarify - what is the issue? What do I need or want? Be clear and specific.
- Reach out - to someone you trust, someone you think might help. You can reach out to different people. Consider making a plan.
- Have courage - believe in yourself, you are worth it! Take one step at a time. Practice what you're going to say. Be prepared.
- Speak up - speak to the person who can help you solve the issue. Choose the right time and place. Be specific and maintain respect.
- Reflect - check-in with yourself. What did you learn? What can you do differently next time? Are there any next steps?

Next, they're going to put this to the test in a real self-advocacy situation. This could take some time and each student will work on this in their own time, as situations arise organically in their lives. Once they've done their self-advocacy, have them write a short report to reflect on their experience. This can take any structure you want, but have them do some writing work so they have something to look back on for the next time they need to advocate for themselves. Hopefully this will help to build their confidence and remind them they can self-advocate in the future.

8. **Lesson Closure.** Have your students individually share with you what these experiences were like. When they submit their report to you, take time to meet with each student one-on-one to discuss what their self-advocacy journey has been like. Inform them that you are always a safe space for them to practice self-advocacy with. Whether that's asking for more time for a test or assignment, having someone to talk about boundaries with, or simply having someone to debrief about their self-advocating with. You can go into a deeper conversation with each student about how self-advocacy can impact their lives based on what you already know about them and things they may struggle with in this regard.