

Is the Child Being Heard?

A reflection for supporting self-advocacy without making children responsible for securing their own support.



Using their voice
is one part.

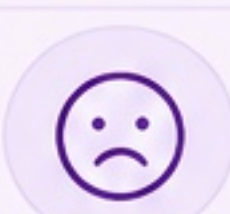
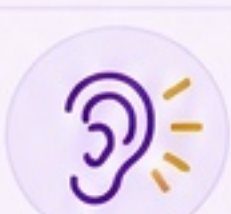
Knowing someone
will listen
matters too.

Self-advocacy can help children with a disability develop greater choice, confidence and control over their lives.

But there is a difference between giving a child opportunities to use their voice and making them responsible for ensuring adults listen.

This reflection can help us notice that difference.

THE ADVOCACY CHECK

THE CHILD SAYS...		ASK...	
	"I need help."	→	 Do they receive support — or have to prove why they need it?
	"This isn't working."	→	 Do we become curious about why — or expect them to tolerate it?
	"I want to try."	→	 Do we explore what would make it possible — or focus immediately on why it may be difficult?
	"Don't tell anyone."	→	 Do we consider their privacy — and explain clearly if information genuinely needs to be shared?
	The child becomes upset.	→	 Do we keep listening to the message underneath the emotion?



VOICE NEEDS A RESPONSE

A child should not have to keep saying the same thing before it matters.

Having a voice matters. Knowing that someone will listen matters too.



What Is the Child Actually Having to Advocate For?

Repeated advocacy can tell us something about the environment too.



Sometimes repetition isn't practice.

It is a sign that something still isn't working.

NOTICE THE PATTERN

Is the child regularly having to:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Remind adults about an agreed adjustment? | ☐ Defend a choice because adults think it will be difficult? |
| ☐ Explain the same disability need to different people? | ☐ Ask adults not to discuss private information? |
| ☐ Correct assumptions about what they can manage? | ☐ Explain who they do and don't want helping them? |
| ☐ Ask for help that should already be available? | ☐ Become visibly distressed before a concern is taken seriously? |
| ☐ Explain when support isn't working? | |

ASK WHY



Is this an opportunity for the child to practise self-advocacy — or evidence that something around them needs to change?



THE CHILD CAN LEARN TO:



ADULTS CAN DO DIFFERENTLY:



THE ENVIRONMENT CAN CHANGE BY:



Not every repeated act of self-advocacy is a skill-building opportunity.
Sometimes it is a system gap.



Make Room for the Child's Voice

Supporting self-advocacy also means creating conditions where children can safely be heard.



The goal isn't simply to help children speak.

It is to build environments that respond.

BEFORE EXPECTING A CHILD TO ADVOCATE, ASK...



01 Have we made room for their voice?

- ☐ Have we explained the decision in a way they understand?
- ☐ Have we actually asked what they think?
- ☐ Do they have enough time to respond?
- ☐ Can they disagree with us safely?
- ☐ Can they change their mind?



02 Are adults still listening and responding?

- ☐ Are we listening when their communication looks different from ours?
- ☐ Do we recognise emotion as part of communication rather than automatically dismissing it?
- ☐ Are their privacy boundaries being respected?
- ☐ If we cannot follow their preference, have we explained why?
- ☐ Are adults still taking responsibility for providing appropriate support?



ONE THING WE COULD CHANGE

Something this child currently has to keep advocating for:

What they are trying to tell us:

Something an adult could take responsibility for instead:

How we can keep the child's voice involved:



The aim is not to remove opportunities for children to advocate.

It is to create environments where using their voice leads to being heard.

Self-advocacy should increase a child's power — not increase their responsibility for making support work.

