

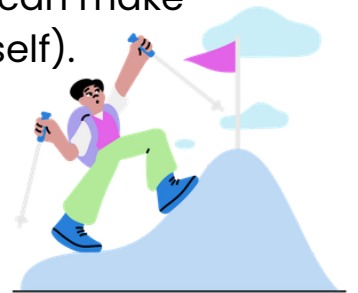
# Self advocacy in your mental health care

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Have you ever tried to seek mental health support, attend an appointment or ask a doctor questions and felt as though you weren't being listened to?

Chances are, you probably answered yes, and while that is unfortunate, you're not alone.

It can be hard to stand up for yourself, your values, preferences or goals, when seeking mental health support. The nature of our mental health system means that there is an inherent power dynamic between you and any professional whose support you're seeking out, which can make it hard to self-advocate (in other words, stand up for yourself).



## What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy involves understanding your needs and what you want to happen, then communicating these to others. It can help to ensure you get the appropriate and respectful support that you deserve.

## How do you self-advocate?

There's no right or wrong way, or a strict handbook that you must follow (although that would be nice), it's about finding what works for you.

That being said, here are a few things that I have found helpful to strengthen my self-advocacy skills:

**Figure out what I'm feeling or thinking.** It can be hard to identify your needs or preferences when seeking mental health support, but often tuning in to your emotions, or any changes in your behaviour, like mood, sleep, activity etc., can sometimes help.

[Check out our content on outcome monitoring here](#)

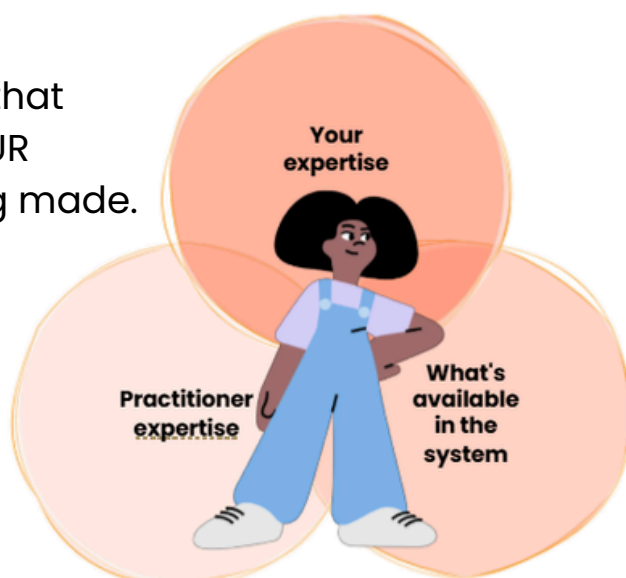


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Once I've figured out how I'm feeling, I like to **understand what options I have** and **what my rights are**. This might include having conversations with family or friends, researching, or asking questions. Generally, when I have a bit of information under my belt, I feel more confident to make shared decisions.

Back myself to make shared decisions. **Shared decision making** can be really empowering, and often the other participants, like doctors, psychologists etc. are very willing to be informed by your opinion. While this isn't always the case, I've been very lucky and have found that once I verbalise my preferences (I find this the hardest part), most people seem pretty receptive.

- Care should be about you; that means that YOUR **goals**, YOUR **preferences**, and YOUR **values** should guide the decisions being made.
- The best decisions are made when your expertise, your practitioner's expertise and information about what's available in the system are all combined.



- It's okay if you don't understand something, it's actually your right to ask questions, and your practitioner's responsibility to translate all their fancy knowledge into information that makes sense to you.

Some questions that you could ask your practitioner include:

- What are the benefits of this treatment?
- What are the risks or side effects, and how likely are they?
- Are there other options?
- What happens if I do nothing right now?
- What would this look like in my day-to-day life?

For more information about shared decision making, [check out the shared decision-making page](#) on the Minding Your Mind website [here](#)



**Self-advocacy does not have to be confrontational!** For some reason, when I heard "self-advocacy", I used to think of "annoying patients" having confrontational conversations or blankly opposing all suggestions that they were given. It's ok everyone, none of that is true! Self-advocating does not make you annoying, rude or disrespectful, nor does it have to involve any confrontational discussions.

- Self-advocating can look different from person to person. For some people it might involve them asking their practitioner questions, but that isn't for everyone.
- Some other ways to share your goals/values/preferences include emailing them, sharing a journal entry, telling them that a friend tried \_\_ type of therapy and you were wondering if that might be helpful, or speaking with the admin team if you want to change practitioners etc.

In summary, the things that help me to self-advocate include: figuring out what I'm feeling or thinking, understanding my options and rights, making shared decisions, and advocating in a respectful form that works for me!

Best of luck on your self-advocacy journey!