



# Curriculum for Empowering Self-Advocates

## Volume 3 Chapter 2

### Being Empowered

#### **Purpose:**

This session identifies the participants' experiences of being empowered and participating in the life of the community. This session also presents information and skill-building opportunities regarding self-confidence and self-esteem.

#### **Goals of the Session:**

Participants will:

1. Share experiences and identify common issues for them regarding empowerment and integration in the community.
2. Understand some factors that contribute to confidence, and practice techniques for building self-esteem.





## Chapter 2 Being Empowered

### Description of the Activities

Activity	Approximate Time
<b>2-1 Our Experiences</b> In this activity, participants discuss their experiences with being empowered and being a part of the community. Common issues or concerns are identified to be used in subsequent activities.	<b>60 minutes</b>
<b>2-2 Feeling Good About Ourselves</b> This activity presents information and methods for reinforcing positive feelings about one's competence and self-worth.	<b>60 minutes</b>
<b>2-3 Celebrating Who We Are</b> In this activity, participants have an opportunity to focus on aspects of their lives that are positive and can contribute to their self-esteem.	<b>75 minutes</b>



## Our Experiences

### Activity 2-1

#### **Purpose:**

In this activity, participants discuss their experiences with being empowered and being a part of the community. Common issues or concerns are identified to be used in subsequent activities.

#### **Time Required:**

Approximately 60 minutes.

#### **Learning Experiences:**

Small and large group discussions.

#### **Materials:**

Flip chart and markers  
Tape (to secure flip chart pages to the wall)

#### **Facilitate The Activity:**

Begin by reinforcing the concept of learning from one another as discussed in Activity 1-4, Everyone Teaches, Everyone Learns. Also refresh the concept of self-advocacy as covered in Activity 1-3. Engage participants in these reviews by soliciting experiences they may have had recently that relate to speaking up for themselves.

Review the concept of empowerment, and point out the relationship between empowerment and self-advocacy. (Note: Although the professional research includes a wide range of definitions of “empowerment,” a good working definition is the process by which individuals gain mastery or control over their own lives.) Also introduce the concept of community integration (which can be defined as people having opportunities for full and active participation in their communities to the extent they desire). Solicit some examples of how the participants use or participate their community (things they do away from their home, places they visit, etc.).

Divide the large group into two smaller groups using a random method or a method suggested by the participants. Assign Group 1 to discuss empowerment and self-advocacy, and ask Group 2 to discuss community integration. It may be helpful to have a co-facilitator to work with one group. The groups should move to different areas of the room



or use additional space to allow for concentration. Groups may wish to assign one person to be their Reporter. If dividing into two groups is cumbersome, conduct the activity with the group as a whole.



In Group 1, ask the participants to share what they've experienced in terms of empowerment and being a self-advocate. The Facilitator may want to ask questions such as:

- “What does it mean to be empowered?”
- “When have you had to speak up for yourself?”
- “What kind of response did you get when you said what was important to you?”
- “Have you ever felt that your thoughts or opinions were not respected?”
- “What kinds of decisions or choices do you make for yourself?”
- “What decisions does someone else make for you?”

The Facilitator or the Reporter should record the responses on the flipchart. Begin to identify common issues and help the participants to think about the meaning of empowerment and self-advocacy in their own lives. Solicit from the participants how they've felt in specific situations (such as when their preferences were not respected, or when someone else made a decision for them).

In Group 2, focus on what the participants have experienced in terms of having opportunities in the community. The Facilitator may want to ask questions such as:

- “Do you feel comfortable in the community?”
- “What kinds of things do you do in the community?”
- “Do people treat you the way you want to be treated?”
- “Does someone in the community depend on you or count on you to do something?”
- “Do you depend on someone to do something for you?”
- “Can you go places that are not just for people with disabilities?”
- “What places have you not been that you would like to visit?”
- “Who decides what you do when you are away from home?”

The Reporter or Facilitator should list the participants' comments on the flip chart, and begin to point out similarities or common themes. Ask participants to share their feelings in specific situations (such as when they do not feel welcome in the community).

Bring the groups back together. Ask each Reporter to present in summary form what their group discussed. Record additional comments as appropriate.

During these discussions, participants may have suggestions for one another about how to handle certain situations. Encourage the exchange of ideas, and allow for participants to discuss and practice new approaches, if they would like. But don't focus on answers or solutions here, just allow the participants to give voice to their experiences and knowledge.



### **Summarize And Transition:**

Summarize the common themes, or ask for volunteers to do a brief summary. Let the participants know that there will be time during future sessions to further address the issues and whether they would like to plan some action as a group.

Make note if one or more participants have indicated a desire to try a new approach or skill in a specific situation. Be sure to follow up at the beginning of the next session to allow for reflection and further discussion.

Transition to the next activity by indicating to the participants that many people find their experiences in the community and their ability to speak up for themselves are affected by how they feel about themselves. People who like themselves, in general, respect who they are and what they want out of life. People who feel good about themselves are probably more comfortable advocating for themselves than are people who do not have high self-esteem. Having self-esteem – feeling good about themselves – helps them to speak up for what they need and want in the community and at home.

### **Tell The Group:**

“Let’s take a few minutes, then, to look at ways we can feel good about ourselves.”



## Feeling Good About Ourselves Activity 2-2

### **Purpose:**

This activity presents information and methods for reinforcing positive feelings about one's competence and self-worth.

### **Time Required:**

Approximately 60 minutes.

### **Learning Experience:**

Large group discussion.

### **Materials:**

#### Handouts:

- My Self-Esteem
- Tips for Feeling Good About Yourself
- Who Me? Self-Esteem for People with Disabilities

One Thing questions (actually incomplete sentences), cut into strips then rolled or folded (there should be about twice as many strips as there are participants; duplicates are okay)

A container for the question strips (may include snack-sized pieces of candy if desired)

Flip chart, markers, and tape

### **Preparation:**

Read over the handouts, and prepare to focus attention on the highlights of "Who Me? Self-Esteem for People with Disabilities."



### **Welcome And Reconnect:**

If the class has not met for several days, welcome them back. You may want to incorporate a warm-up (ice-breaker) or team-building activity. Follow up on any significant or common issues that arose during the last session, and see how participants are feeling about the situation(s). If participants tried a new skill or used new information away from the class, help them to reflect on the outcomes, ask if they want more information or more practice with the skill, and continue to encourage them. Adjust the lesson as appropriate. Remember, adult learners get the most out of information when it is directly tied to their needs at the time. Remind the participants of the spiral model of learning. Indicate that using a new skill or new information usually takes lots of trials and practice before it becomes automatic and comfortable. Make a connection between the specific issue and today's topic.

### **Introduce The Activity:**

Begin by asking the participants to share their experiences about self-esteem. You may want to give a working definition of self-esteem, such as how much you value and respect yourself. You may want to ask:

- “What are some things that make you feel good about yourself?”
- “When have you not felt good about yourself?”
- “What are some things people do that make you feel good or not good about yourself?”

List responses on the flipchart. Note any common themes.

### **Tell The Participants:**

“Let's take a look at the handout 'My Self-Esteem.' Take a few minutes to read the sentences and place a checkmark by the sentences that seem true for you. There are no right or wrong answers, you should just mark the ones that sound right to you. We won't grade these, and you don't have to share your responses unless you want to.”

Allow the participants several minutes to go through the handout. You may want to have additional assistance or support for participants who do not read or who feel uncomfortable with pencil and paper exercises. When participants have finished, have them tally up their marks. Tell them that the number of marks they have (the number of sentences that seem true for them) tells them a little bit about how they feel about themselves.

- 15 – 16 marks: You have high self-esteem
- 12 – 14 marks: You have good self-esteem, and can take steps to feel even better about yourself
- 8 – 11 marks: Doing some things to improve your self-esteem will help you feel good about yourself



Fewer than 8 marks: There are lots of things you can do to feel better about yourself

Indicate to participants that there are steps that everyone can take, regardless of how many or how few sentences they marked on “My Self-Esteem,” to help them feel better about themselves.

Review “Tips for Feeling Good About Yourself” with participants, and ask if they have any experiences with using those methods, or any additional methods they could suggest. Record additional ideas on the flipchart. Go over the highlights of “Who Me? Self-Esteem for People with Disabilities.”

Give participants an opportunity to practice focusing on their strengths. Pass the container of One Thing question strips around the room and have participants pick a strip (and a candy if desired). Participants then take turns reading and responding to the One Thing question they picked. (Be prepared to assist participants as necessary, by rewording the question, reminding of past experiences or successes that fit the question, etc.) Participants should be allowed to pick a different strip if they don’t like their first choice.

An alternative, you may ask the participants to reflect on their strengths and accomplishments. Then, each participant proclaims a strength or talent he or she has. The proclamation should be a firm statement, made without qualification, modesty, or hesitation. Give some guidelines prior to starting the process:

- Statements should be worded as “I am (good, excellent, etc.) at...” or “I accomplished...”
- Emphasis should be on skill, not likes (for example, “I like to...” is not acceptable)
- Qualifications (such as “I’m sort of good at...,” “People say I’m good at ...,” “I guess I’m okay at...”) are not acceptable.

If a statement is not acceptable, gently but firmly ask the participant to make a stronger statement.

The Facilitator can enhance either of these activities by asking the participants to give a standing ovation (with lots of clapping and cheering) after each person’s turn, as a way of celebrating and acknowledging their strengths.



### **Discuss With The Participants:**

Generate some reflective discussion, asking questions such as:

“How did you feel saying positive things about yourself?”

“How can you become more comfortable proclaiming your strengths and talents?”

“How can you help others to feel good about their strengths?”

“What are some situations in which you can think about your strengths and accomplishments rather than negative things?”

### **Summarize And Transition:**

Ask participants to mention what they learned or gained from this activity. Or, present a brief summary of the highlights of this section.

Ask participants if they would like to begin future class meetings by briefly sharing self-reports of good things that happened, things that they felt good about, things they accomplished or did, etc. since the last class session. This is a good way to practice recognizing their strengths and achievements. If participants agree as a group to do this, be sure to include this brief activity at the outset of all future class sessions.



## Activity 2-2

### My Self-Esteem



Place a mark beside each sentence that is true for you. Remember, all answers are okay – there are no right or wrong answers.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am about as fortunate as other people I know.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am happy with myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy being with other people.

\_\_\_\_\_ I deserve to be respected.

\_\_\_\_\_ Other people treat me well.

\_\_\_\_\_ I know when I've done a good job, even if no one tells me.

\_\_\_\_\_ It's important to be myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have friends who care about me.

\_\_\_\_\_ If someone is critical of me, I still like myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I admit when I've made a mistake.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don't try to hide how I feel.

\_\_\_\_\_ I speak up for myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am happy.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don't worry about what other people think of me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I like myself even if other people don't agree with me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don't feel guilty when I say what I want or need.

Add up the number of sentences you marked. \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 2-2

**Tips for Feeling Good About Yourself**

- Remember your successes.
- Be with people who like you and appreciate you.
- Try something new – it's okay if it doesn't work out.
- Reward yourself for trying.
- Think about what you like about yourself.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Learn something new.
- Talk to your friends about what you did or accomplished.





## Activity 2-2

# Who Me? Self-Esteem For People With Disabilities

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What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is a term used to describe how we view ourselves. It is how we view our worth as a person. It may be more positive or more negative and it is not set in stone. Thus, if someone has low self-esteem, he or she can do things to boost his or her self concept. When someone has a healthy or more positive self-esteem, he or she is able to accept him or herself "as is." This means acknowledging that we all have both strengths and weaknesses - and that's OK! Healthy or positive self-esteem does not mean that someone has an inflated or self-righteous view of him or herself. One added challenge for a person with a disability may be viewing him or herself as a person first. A disability is only one facet of a person. Thus, for people with disabilities, it's important to allow yourself to view your disability as one component of your life, not the only component. Another issue for people with disabilities may be dealing with discrimination and stereotypes from society. Our society places emphasis on looks, speed, and being the same as everyone else. Thus, people with disabilities might place additional pressure on themselves to try to meet society's impossible standards.



Where does self-esteem come from?

Self-esteem is influenced by many variables while a person is developing his or her self-concept. Parents may provide a crucial role in shaping a child's concept of him or herself. Parents can convey attitudes that the child is independent and successful or inadequate, incapable, and inferior. Thus, lack of confidence does not necessarily equal lack of ability. It may just be a false set of beliefs that a person holds about him or herself. Friends and society can also powerfully influence a person's concept of him or herself. College may be a time when people re-evaluate their self-concept and re-shape their own identities to reflect what they believe is more accurate. For people with disabilities, parents, friends, and society may have shaped your self-image in ways you wish to change.

Consider the following statements:

- If you have depression and are taking medication for it do you ever conclude: "I can't go out with my friends because I can't drink while taking this medication?" [All or nothing thinking]
- If you're deaf, do you ever think: "If I can't do a certain job that interests me because I'm deaf, I won't be able to do any interesting job?" [Overgeneralization]
- If you walk with unsteady gait, do you ever think: "I'm a klutz because I have cerebral palsy?" [Mental Filter]
- If you have a reading disability, do you ever think: "I just finished a book, but it doesn't count because I didn't read it as fast as other people?" [Disqualifying the positive]



- If you have ADHD, do you ever think: "I got in trouble acting up in class; I know I'm going to fail?" [Jumping to conclusions]
- If you're blind, do you ever think: "I should be able to do anything that my sighted peers can?" [Should statements]
- If you have a speech impediment, do you ever think: "If this person can't understand me that will be awful?" [Catastrophizing]
- If you have dyslexia, do you ever think: "I feel stupid having to explain to people that dyslexia is a "real" disability so I must be stupid?" [Emotional reasoning]
- If you have ADD and you miss an appointment because you didn't write it down, do you think: "I'm so stupid because I have ADD?" [Mislabeling]
- If you're a wheelchair user and you fall out of your chair because of a crack on the sidewalk, do you ever think: "I should have been more careful and avoided that crack?" [Personalization]

The statements above are examples of things that people with disabilities may say to themselves when their having a bad day. The statements illustrate some examples of thinking errors sometimes called cognitive distortions. These are patterns of thinking that people with lower self-esteem may engage in more than people with higher self-esteem. By identifying and changing some of these errors, a person can begin to change how he or she views him or herself. You have become an expert at playing on a field that is not level as a result of dealing with your disability and peoples' attitudes toward your disability. Read on for more information on self-esteem and disabilities.

Tips to improve self-esteem for people with disabilities:



1.) Maximize the positive and minimize the negative. Focus your abilities more than your limitations. Everyone has both abilities and limitations. This is not to say that you don't acknowledge that you have a disability, but rather, by focusing on and developing your abilities you can feel good about all the things you can do.



2.) Avoid unrealistic comparisons. Don't get caught up in comparing apples to oranges. Everyone has both strengths and limitations. A person with a locomotor disability may not be able to compete in Olympic ice hockey, but he or she can compete in Paralympic Sledge hockey.

3.) Set realistic goals for yourself. Since everyone has limitations, it is not fair to expect yourself to be able to do something unrealistic. This may mean allowing yourself to take the extra time needed to read material and rewarding yourself for persevering. It may not be realistic to expect yourself to read something in the same amount of time as someone without a reading disability.

4.) Do not over-generalize. If there is something that you cannot do as a result of your disability, it is not fair to conclude that you are an overall failure. There are many things that you can do. Don't tie all of your self-worth to any one attribute or event. Just because you might be a lousy cook does not mean that you are a lousy person in general.

5.) Avoid getting caught using "should" statements. For example, a student with ADHD says, "I should be able to finish this exam in 50 minutes like everyone else in the class." This is an example of a "should" statement that may not be accurate. Accommodations like extra time on tests are an important tool to create equal opportunities for students to show what they know.



6.) Appreciate yourself - all of yourself. This means appreciating your disability too. There may be times when you believe that it is more annoying than appreciable, but focus on the positive aspects of your disability. One way to do this is making a list of your strengths including how your disability, or your methods of coping with it, can be an asset (benefit) to you.



**Activity 2-2**  
**One Thing strips**

One thing I am proud of is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I like about myself is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I accomplished is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I am good at is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I like about myself is \_\_\_\_\_

One good word that describes me now is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I do well is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I am proud of is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I like about myself is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing that makes me a good friend is \_\_\_\_\_



One thing that people like about me is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing that I can do for other people is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I know well is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing I am good at is \_\_\_\_\_



## Celebrating Who We Are Activity 2-3

### **Purpose:**

In this activity, participants have an opportunity to focus on aspects of their lives that are positive and that contribute to their self-esteem.

### **Time Required:**

Approximately 75 minutes.

### **Learning Experience:**

Individual work and large group discussion.

### **Materials:**

Large sheets of paper or poster board (at least one per participant)  
Markers (enough for all of the participants to have access to a variety of colors)  
Stickers (large assortment)  
Magazines, clipart, or other pictures or collage items (large assortment)  
Glue or rubber cement (several containers)  
Scissors  
Tape  
Instant camera and film, if available

### **Welcome And Reconnect:**

If the class has not met for several days, welcome them back. You may want to incorporate a warm-up (ice-breaker) or team-building activity. Follow up on any significant or common issues that arose during the last session, and see how participants are feeling about the situation(s). If participants tried a new skill or used new information away from the class, help them to reflect on the outcomes, ask if they want more information or more practice with the skill, and continue to encourage them. Adjust the lesson as appropriate. Remind participants that using a new skill or new information usually takes lots of trials and practice before it becomes automatic and comfortable. Make a connection between the specific issue and today's topic.



### **Introduce And Begin The Activity:**

Indicate to the participants that having completed the “One Thing” questions or the alternative activity, it is clear that they each have unique and positive qualities. Many times we are so busy with life that we don’t take the time to really appreciate ourselves and how extraordinary each one of us is. This activity will allow us to acknowledge many of our good qualities, and to share with others some of the things that make us feel good about ourselves.

Have the participants put their names at the top of their papers, in large letters. Then, divide the remainder of the page into thirds. Label the top section “Why I like Myself,” the middle section “Why Other People Like Me,” and the bottom section “Things I Do Well.” The participants then write comments in each section, and/or embellish each section with stickers, magazine cut-outs, clip-art, drawings, etc. to convey their responses. Encourage the participants to have fun! They can make their posters as colorful and descriptive as they like. Offer assistance to participants as appropriate. Encourage participants to describe or otherwise indicate at least three factors in each section. If a camera and film are available, you or one of the participants may offer to take pictures of the individuals to add to their posters.

When the participants are finished, help them to tape or post their sheets to the walls. Then allow time for them to take turns describing to the group what each section of their page means to them. Lead the group in celebrating each person by applauding (or giving a standing ovation) as each participant finishes presenting.

### **Summarize And Transition:**

Ask the participants to name one or two things they learned or enjoyed from this activity. If their posters can be left on the walls for a time, ask their permission to do this, or take the posters down and encourage the participants to hang them at home. Remark that they have now created their own reminder of good things about themselves. Encourage them to add remarks and graphics to their posters as they wish