



Curriculum for Empowering Self-Advocates

Volume 3 Chapter 3

Starting to Take Charge

Purpose:

This session focuses on rights, choices, and responsibilities. Information is presented on the impact of increased demand and limited resources on service availability. Skills for assertive communication are practiced.

Goals of the Session:

Participants will:

1. Understand the choice-making opportunities in their lives, and the interrelationship of rights and responsibilities.
2. Gain insight into how the demand for services has outpaced the available resources.
3. Understand principles of assertive communication, and practice techniques for asserting their rights and preferences in a variety of situations.



*Support and Techniques
for Empowering People*

Chapter 3

Starting to Take Charge

Description of the Activities

	Activity	Approximate Time
3-1	Choices in Our Lives This activity focuses on the types of individual choices affecting participants' lives, and what it means to be empowered to make those choices.	30 minutes
3-2	Supply and Demand This activity gives participants a sense of the demand for services and the resources available to meet that demand. The impacts on services available to each individual are explored.	60 minutes
3-3	Exercising Our Rights Responsibly In this activity, civil and human rights are examined, along with the responsibilities associated with exercising each right. Participants practice skills to ensure their rights are respected.	60 minutes
3-4	Telling Others What We Want This activity addresses communication styles and methods that are aggressive, passive, or assertive. Participants work together to design various scenarios and role-play or practice assertive communication techniques in those scenarios.	60 minutes



Choices in Our Lives

Activity 3-1

Purpose:

This activity focuses on the types of individual choices affecting participants' lives, and what it means to be empowered to make those choices.

Time Required:

Approximately 30 minutes.

Learning Experiences:

Small and large group discussions

Materials:

Handouts:

The Opportunity to Choose

Flip chart, markers, and tape

Welcome And Reconnect:

If the class has not met for several days, welcome them back. Follow up on any significant or common issues that arose during the last session, and see how participants are feeling about the situation. 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. Remind them of the spiral model. 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 participants what it means to have a "choice." Ask them to give examples of choices they make or decisions they've made about their lives. You may want to begin the discussion by asking questions such as, "Where do you live?" or "What work do you do?" then follow up by asking, "How did that come about?" or "Who decided that would be good?"



Go over “The Opportunity to Choose,” soliciting the participants’ experiences and stories about making choices in the various categories. Tell the participants that there are three key elements of informed choice:

- There must be two or more alternatives
- The individual must have adequate information about the alternatives
- The selection cannot be coerced.

In other words, for real choice to be present, the person must have at least two distinct and meaningful options (eating the meatloaf prepared by the staff or not eating dinner, for example, would not meet the criteria); the person must have reasonable information about the options and potential consequences; and the person must be free to choose from among the options without pressure or threats from others.

Help participants to understand the connection between making choices and being empowered. Express that to be a self-advocate means to make choices and speak up to make sure others respect those choices.

Also discuss with the participants that there are some situations in which they face demands rather than choices. For example, at work the boss may ask them to do a task, but the boss may not really be giving the person a choice; the boss wants it done. In most cases, the worker probably should comply. Tell the participants that we all face situations in which we have to follow the rules (in this case, obeying the boss) or suffer the consequences (possibly losing the job in this example). However, if the demand makes the person feel uncomfortable, he should ask someone he trusts for help. In this example, if the worker feels uncomfortable about doing what the boss says, the worker can ask someone to help figure out if it is okay for the boss to tell them to do that task.

Review the meaning of choice. Remind the participants that there are many areas in their lives where they should have choices (refer back the “The Opportunity to Choose”), and that those choices should be respected by people who help them. Divide the participants into groups of two or three. Ask each group to talk about situations in which other people have made or continue to make choices for them. Have them identify at least one choice that a person in the group would prefer to make for him or herself.

Bring the groups back together and ask them to share the main points of their discussion. Tell the participants that they will be practicing assertive communication (in a future class session) to help them express their preferences. As the groups share their scenarios, write enough information on a flipchart so that you can refer to the situations in upcoming activities.



Summarize And Transition:

Highlight any common themes in the participants' experiences with making choices and with having choices made for them. Remind the participants that they will have a chance to talk about ways to assert more control in their lives in future activities.

Indicate that one of the choices that should be available to people receiving developmental disabilities services is how to spend the dollars that the government has set aside to pay for those services. Such choice is not available to everyone at this time. One of the reasons for this is that many states have not devised ways of allocating enough money so that everyone who wants and needs supports can receive what they would like. The next activity will cover services that are available to the participants, and reasons that some of the supports they may want are not offered.

Indicate that a guest speaker will be making the next presentation. Solicit from the class how they would like to express their appreciation to the speaker (a thank-you card, a small gift, etc.) after the presentation. Ask if one or more participants will volunteer to thank the speaker on behalf of the class.

Activity 3-1

The Opportunity to Choose

All people should be able to make choices that affect their own lives. Of course, there are some constraints, such as rules or laws, which are intended to protect everyone.

Here are some areas in which you should have choice:

a. Your home:

- Where you live
- Who you live with
- How long you live there
- When and how you clean your home
- How you decorate your home



b. Your routine:

- How you begin and end work and non-work days
- What you do on your days off
- How you pursue your hobbies and interests
- How you keep yourself safe

c. Your health:

- How much sleep or rest you get, and when
- Who your doctors are, and what they do to help you
- What medications you take and when
- What you eat

d. Your friends and other relationships:

- Who you spend time with
- What you do when you're with your friends
- How you keep in contact with friends, family, other people

e. Your community:

- How you get from place to place
- Where you spend time and money
- Ways you volunteer or contribute

f. Your career:

- What your career goals are
- Where you work
- What hours you work
- What kind of work you do and where





g. Your finances:

- How you spend your money and where
- Your will – what will happen to your belongings when you die
- When and how you pay your bills
- Your plans for saving money

h. Having fun:

- How you spend your free time
- What hobbies you have
- When and where you go on vacation

i. Expressing yourself:

- What you wear
- How you style your hair
- Letting people know how you feel and what you want
- Expressing your opinions

j. Your spirituality:

- What you believe in
- Where you worship, if you choose to do so
- How you express your beliefs

k. Your goals:

- What you want to do, to be, to have
- What you want to learn
- What you want your life to be like
- What you want your goals to be and how you pursue them

l. Problems and challenges:



- Who you talk to about problems
- What you do to solve a problem
- Who you talk to when there is a crisis
- Who you trust for good advice
- Who you want to help you through difficult times
- Who helps you think things through

m. Supports and help:

- Who you want to share their skills with you
- What role your helpers play
- How much help you get
- When and how you will work with the people who help
- What your expectations are for the quality of work





Supply and Demand Activity 3-2

Purpose:

This activity gives participants a sense of the demand for services and the resources available to meet that demand. The impacts on services available to each individual are explored.

Time Required:

Approximately 60 minutes.

Learning Experience:

Large group presentation.

Materials:

Handouts from speaker

Flip chart and markers

Tape (to secure flip chart pages to the wall)

Overhead projector, markers, and any other materials as needed by speaker

Preparation:

Invite a speaker from adult case management services or the state Developmental Disabilities office who is familiar with the evolution of services, current demand levels, waiting lists, budgets, how constraints affect the services available to individual recipients, and any related issues that have arisen during class discussions. If the participants have indicated an interest, also invite a speaker from the Social Security Administration to present information about programs relevant to the participants. Contact the speaker(s) a week in advance to offer to make copies if needed and to determine any audio/visual requirements.

Welcome And Reconnect:

If the class has not met for several days, welcome them back. Follow up on any significant or common issues that arose during the last session, and see how participants are feeling about the situation. 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. Remind them of the spiral model.



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.

Tell The Group:

“Many people who are receiving some supports – or who want to receive some help – have questions about how services work and what is available. We’ve invited a guest speaker who will try to answer your questions.”

Introduce the speaker(s). Encourage the participants to ask questions and to voice their opinions as appropriate. If the speaker(s) cannot answer a specific question, ask who could address that area, and make a note for the participants to pursue that issue in the future.

Summarize And Transition:

If needed, cue the volunteer to complete the expression of thanks the participants previously planned.

Ask the participants to indicate what were the highlights of the presentation for each of them, or what new thing they learned. Solicit their thoughts on aspects of the adult service system with which they still have concerns. Make notes (or ask a participant to make notes) for future discussion about advocacy efforts.

Transition to the next activity by commenting to the participants that one area of importance to self-advocates is that of exercising their rights and knowing the responsibilities that go along with those rights.



Exercising Our Rights Responsibly Activity 3-3

Purpose:

In this activity, civil and human rights are examined, along with the responsibilities associated with exercising each right. Participants practice skills to ensure their rights are respected.

Time Required:

Approximately 60 minutes.

Learning Experiences:

Large group discussion.

Materials:

Handouts:

- What Are My Rights?
- Thinking About Rights and Responsibilities

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

Preparation:

Review the material on rights and prepare a brief mini-presentation. An excellent resource is the *Consent Handbook for Self-Advocates and Support Staff*, by Cathy Ficker Terrill, AAMR (1999).

Welcome And Reconnect:

If the class has not met for several days, welcome them back. Follow up on any significant or common issues that arose during the last session, and see how participants are feeling about the situation. 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. Remind them of the spiral model. 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 And Begin The Discussion:

“When someone says you have rights, what does that mean?”

Lead a discussion about the meaning of the term “rights.” Be sure that the participants understand that rights are personal powers that we have because we are human beings and citizens of the United States. Ask the participants for examples of rights they have. Some examples that can help stimulate the discussion are speaking freely, reading what we choose, voting, and worshipping where and how we choose. Tell the participants that “exercising your rights” means doing what your rights allow you to do.

Have the participants name rights that they can think of, and list them on a flipchart. Then, review “What Are My Rights?” and present any points from your mini-presentation that have not yet been covered. Try to make sure the participants understand each right before moving on to the next. Remark that for each of us, some rights are more important than others; everyone exercises rights in ways that are unique to them.

Ask the participants to describe their experiences exercising their rights, or instances in which others have not supported them exercising their rights. Remind the participants that rights do not have to be earned.

Note: Some participants may be receiving services in a setting in which one or more of their rights has been restricted. Such restrictions should only occur if attempts to support the person to fulfill their responsibilities have not been successful, and if the person is jeopardizing his or her welfare or the welfare of others. Participants whose rights have been restricted should understand what they need to learn or do in order for the right to be reinstated; how often and when the need for the restriction will be revisited; and what procedure exists for a person to dispute the need for the restriction (due process policy).

Identify any trends or common themes. Indicate to the participants that they will have a chance to practice assertive communication in a future activity, which can help them to exercise their rights. If the group identifies an issue about which they feel very strongly, take this opportunity to facilitate some discussion of what they might want to do to advocate for change in that area. Ask the group what role they would like you to play in addressing the issue.

Tell The Group:

“Along with rights, we have responsibilities. For example, you and I have the right to go to the movies, but we need to be responsible and not talk loudly or disturb other people during the movie. Another example might be that we have the right to choose how to spend our money. But we need to be responsible and pay things like rent and other bills, not just buy fun things that we want.”



Take another look at “What Are My Rights?” and ask the participants for additional examples of responsibilities that go with the rights. List these on a flipchart.

Or, ask the group what some of the consequences might be for not exercising their rights in a responsible way. List these on the flipchart.

To help stimulate discussion, use “Thinking About Rights and Responsibilities.”

Ask what the participants could do if a right was taken away and they didn’t think it was fair, or it wasn’t explained to them in a way that made sense. Write these options (such as speaking up, asking someone for help, talking to a friend, calling a case manager, etc.) on the flipchart.

Be sure to keep the discussion on rights. Participants may tend to digress to talking about other issues or events that trouble them. Acknowledge their feelings and redirect the conversation as needed.

Summarize And Transition:

Invite participants to volunteer to give some of the highlights of this activity, or to tell what rights are most important to them, and what responsibilities go along with those rights. As an alternative, you may summarize the main points.

“We’ve talked about rights and how important they are to all of us. We’ve also talked about some examples of our rights not being respected. Next we’re going to learn about and practice some ways of communicating with people that show respect for our own rights and for theirs.”

Activity 3-3

What Are My Rights?

No one should try to take away your rights just because you have a disability. People with disabilities have the same rights as other people.

You have rights because you are a human being:

- To have life
- To have choice
- To have freedom
- To be happy
- To make up your own mind
- To choose the people you want to be with
- To be listened to
- To eat what you want
- To go to bed when you want
- To choose where you live
- To choose where you want to work
- To say, “no” when you don’t want to do something
- To change things you don’t like
- To be treated with fairness and respect



You have rights because you are a US citizen:

- To access the legal system (courts)
- To associate with people you choose
- To own and sell property
- To have equal opportunity for education
- To have equal opportunity for employment
- To have equal protection and due process
- To be free from cruel and unusual punishment
- To have freedom of speech and expression
- To be free to marry, to have and raise children
- To have freedom of religion
- To have privacy
- To have the information you need to make decisions

You have rights if you are receiving supports:

- To live or work in a clean facility
- To not be restrained unless all other ways of managing your behavior have been tried
- To choose whether to have your picture taken or information about you shared in any way
- To send and receive unopened mail
- To make private phone calls
- To let family and friends visit you
- To have nourishing, well-balanced meals
- To wear your own clothing and to have well-fitting clothes that are appropriate for the weather
- To be treated with dignity and respect
- To have freedom of movement, with or without a key
- To keep and spend your money
- To read any records or documents that are written about you
- To decide who else can read information about you
- To give yourself your own medication





Activity 3-3

Thinking About Rights and Responsibilities

Here are some examples of rights and how to use them in respectful and responsible ways.

Rights	Responsibilities
To be treated nicely.	To treat others fairly.
Not to be hit, yelled at or hurt.	Not to hit, hurt or yell at others.
To have help.	To help others.
To say “NO.”	To say “NO” without hurting others.
Not to be tied, locked or medicated for control	If I hurt myself or others, to accept control from someone else.
To control my IP meetings – invite the people I want and talk about what I want.	Not to cause harm or interference to others when I do this.
To see my file and to keep it private.	To be courteous in asking, refusing entry.
To ask someone to speak for me.	To listen.
To have a clean safe home, according to my standards.	To consider the rights of other involved – roommates, landlords, etc.
To eat what I want.	To contribute however I can in preparing meals.
To see a doctor when I want	To cooperate with recommendations made by the doctor.
To manage my own money.	To have the same consequences as others if I write checks without having money in the bank.
To wear clothes I like and to wear my hair the way I like it.	To meet the expectations of an employer and others around me in my dress and grooming.
To go to church if and where I want.	To respect the choices of others regarding church.
To have privacy with my mail and phone conversations.	To respect others’ rights and privacy with mail and phone conversations.
To keep things of my own.	Not to take things from other people.
To be alone and to keep people out of my space.	To respect others’ privacy and accept help graciously.
To have time alone with friends – male or female.	To respect others’ rights to be alone and to keep all others safe.
To go to school if school age.	To cooperate and participate in school.
To work in a safe place for fair pay.	To have only fair and equal treatment.
To have vacation and sick time.	To give adequate notice for vacation and only take sick days when sick.





Telling Others What We Want Activity 3-4

Purpose:

This activity addresses communication styles and methods that are aggressive, passive, or assertive. Participants work together to design various scenarios and role-play or practice assertive communication techniques in those scenarios.

Time Required:

Approximately 60 minutes.

Learning Experiences:

Small group and large group discussions and role-plays.

Materials:

Handouts:

- Communication Styles
- Being Assertive
- Choosing Behaviors that Get Results

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

Preparation:

Review the handouts and become familiar with the principles of assertive communication. Reflect on your own experiences using the different communication styles, and be aware of situations in which you may be more prone to choose one specific style over another.

Welcome And Reconnect:

If the class has not met for several days, welcome them back. Follow up on any significant or common issues that arose during the last session, and see how participants are feeling about the situation. 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. Remind them of the spiral model. 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:

“We talked earlier about what rights we all have, and about some situations where our rights were not respected. Is it important to you that your rights be respected? Is it important for you to respect the rights of others? How about feelings and opinions: is it important that your feelings and opinions are respected? How about the feelings and opinions of other people?”

Tell The Participants:

“The way we communicate often makes a difference in how other people respond to us. If we speak to people in a cruel or mean way, other people may become angry or they may not trust us. Or, if we let other people demand things and take advantage of us, we won’t feel empowered, we’ll feel powerless. But if we speak clearly and tell people in a respectful way what we want or how we feel, then we can feel good about ourselves and how we treat other people.”

Go over “Communication Styles” with the participants in the large group. Ask for examples of situations in which they may have used each style, or times when other people used the various styles in communicating with them.

Tell the participants that one way to learn about communication skills is to do a short role-play. You may want to describe what a role-play is, as participants may not have had experiences doing them. A role-play is just a way of practicing and demonstrating a skill to others. Tell the participants that role-playing is the acting out of real-life situations in a safe setting where you can try out new skills or different approaches. It is best to start out using volunteers, rather than assigning people to play certain roles. Also, a demonstration of a role-play may be beneficial.

Emphasize that the role-play is just for practice. The purpose is to see how an approach might work in real life. Instruct all observers to be sure to listen respectfully and to offer suggestions when the role-play is completed. Plan on brief role-plays, rather than extended or complex interactions. You may want to provide a collection of inexpensive props (hats can be especially helpful) to encourage “putting on the role” and having fun with the role-play.

Explain to the participants that they are going to have a chance to act out the three styles in small-group role-plays. Ask the participants to generate ideas for a scenario for the role-plays. They may want to devise a simple scenario around an issue they identified in Activity 3-1 (such as a choice not being respected, or a choice that is made by someone else), or Activity 3-3 (such as a right not being respected). Or, if they are struggling with an idea, suggest a few alternatives from previous discussions, and have them choose. It’s preferable to select a scenario from the participants’ own experiences, but if you’re stuck as a group, consider the following situations:



1. A friend says he needs to borrow a lot of money. You like the friend but if you give him the money now, you won't be able to buy groceries.
2. A support staff person tells you to hurry and sign a form; she needs it right away and there isn't time for you to read the form, but she'll tell you about it later.
3. Your roommate often invites people over for parties. The parties get very noisy and it's hard for you to sleep.

Divide the participants into three smaller groups. Ask the groups to volunteer who will portray which style, or assign styles if necessary. Give the groups plenty of time to prepare their role-plays. Move among the groups and offer suggestions or support as needed. Remind the participants that the role-plays can be fun, but should clearly show the communication style they've been assigned.

When the groups are ready, have them conduct their role-plays for the group entire. Try to do the role-plays in the same order as the "Communication Styles" handout (passive, aggressive, assertive). After each role-play, ask the participants questions such as:

"What did _____ do that demonstrated [the assigned style of] communication?"

"How do you think the other people in the scene probably felt?"

"What might happen if _____ continued behaving in this way?"

"Does this seem like a good way to get your needs met?"

Congratulate the participants on their creativity in designing the role-plays and on their acting skills!

After doing role-plays, it is important to do some debriefing, which may involve:

- Allowing role-players to vent their feelings
- Reminding role-players and participants that these were just demonstrations, and that the role-players were just acting
- Reinforcing what can be learned from these demonstrations
- Soliciting the participants' ideas on how they can use the preferred skill in their own lives



Ask The Participants:

“We’ve talked about and demonstrated passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles. Which style do you think is most effective for a self-advocate to use? What about that style makes it effective? What situations might be improved by using assertive communication?”

Tell the participants that role-playing is also a good way to practice being assertive in difficult situations. Offer to help the participants devise simple role-plays to practice assertive behavior in specific situations they face.

Point out the “Being Assertive” handout. Also, “Choosing Behaviors that Get Results” will help the participants to remember what assertive communication looks like and how they can use it

Summarize And Transition:

Have participants highlight the most significant points for them from this activity, or offer a brief summary of the key points. Indicate to participants that there is a lot of information about assertive communication available in libraries and on the Internet. Offer to assist them in locating more materials if they so wish.

Transition to the next section by telling the participants that having skills such as assertive communication and having knowledge about their rights are important factors in being effective team members and leaders.

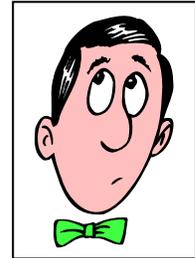
Activity 3-4

Communication Styles

The way we communicate feelings and ideas often influences how other people respond to us.

Passive behavior: means that you allow other people to treat you, your thoughts, and your feelings in whatever way they want.

- Passive people don't try to get their needs met.
- They don't advocate (speak up) for themselves.
- They let other people make choices for them.
- They let other people take advantage of them.



➤ **Passive behavior causes you to feel powerless.**

Aggressive behavior: means getting what you want even if it hurts other people or takes away their rights.

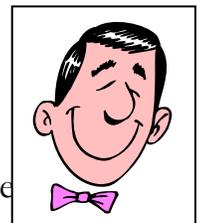
- Aggressive people insist on getting what they want or need.
- They don't respect other people or their rights.
- They attack and criticize people.
- They demand things.
- They offend other people and they don't listen to other people.



➤ **Aggressive behavior causes other people to fear you.**

Assertive behavior: means standing up for your rights and expressing your thoughts and feelings in direct and honest ways, while still respecting other people.

- Assertive people advocate (speak up) for themselves.
- They respect other people and their rights.
- They focus on solving problems, not criticizing others.
- They avoid name-calling and they deal with anger appropriately.
- They express their own feelings and respect the feelings of other people.



➤ **Assertive behavior helps you feel good about yourself and how you treat others.**

Activity 3-4

Being Assertive

Assertive communication is something you can learn and maintain with practice. Be alert to how you communicate with others, and try to include these behaviors:

- Maintain direct eye contact (but don't stare rudely).
- Stand or sit up straight.
- Speak clearly.
- Don't use a whiny or too-soft voice.
- Be willing to negotiate if needed.
- Listen respectfully to others.
- Avoid criticizing the other person.



Should you be assertive in every situation?

Most people find it easier to be assertive in some situations than in others. For example, it's easier to be assertive with a stranger than it is with someone you care about who might get mad at you if you express your true feelings. But people who are important in our lives need for us to use assertive communication so they will know what we want. Assertive behaviors help others to respect you more, to see you as a self-advocate who respects himself or herself, and to treat you as a worthwhile person.

But sometimes being assertive is not the best approach, especially with your boss. If your boss does not like people to speak up for themselves, being assertive may upset him or her. If you are in this kind of situation, talk it over with someone you trust, and see if there are other things you can do to deal with the situation.



Being assertive is the best approach with people you care about and with people who are providing help and supports to you.

Activity 3-4

Choosing Behaviors that Get Results

You can choose how to communicate with other people. In most situations, being assertive will help you to feel good about yourself and the way you respect others. Here are some behaviors that can cause other people to shut down communication. To get the results you want, try using the assertive behaviors and avoid using the negative behaviors.

Negative behaviors that can shut down communication

- > lacking respect in tone of voice
- > not listening
- > not looking at the other person
- > making unreasonable demands
- > being judgmental
- > using attacks or threats
- > using aggressive gestures like pointing
- > interrupting
- > using negative words
- > lying
- > criticizing the person

- > using profanity or name-calling
- > making accusations

Assertive behaviors that get results

- > showing respect
- > listening respectfully
- > making eye contact
- > suggesting practical solutions
- > keeping an open mind
- > using a calm, firm tone
- > using neutral, open gestures

- > letting the other person finish
- > using positive words
- > being honest and truthful
- > asking the person to change his or her behavior
- > being respectful
- > telling the person how you feel about their behavior

