

Empower Us: Good support

A guide for self-advocates, families,
organisations and the people who
support us



Inclusion
International



Background

This guide is for self-advocates, our families and the organisations that support us.

Self-advocates are people with an intellectual disability who understand about their rights and how to advocate and work for the inclusion of all people in our communities.

Empower Us is Inclusion International's programme to build self-advocacy. Empower Us is led by us – people with intellectual disabilities who are self-advocates.

We give advice, support, and training to Inclusion International members on self-advocacy and inclusion.

In this guide when we say 'us' or 'me' we are speaking from a self-advocates point of view. This is because this guide has been developed by self-advocates with an intellectual disability.

This guide has been developed in plain-language to make it easier for people with intellectual disabilities to understand.



What is support?

Support is the extra help that a person may need to do a task, understand information, or develop our skills.

Everyone gives and receive different kinds of support every day. People with an intellectual disability may need extra support to:

- make and understand decisions
- learn new skills
- understand difficult information
- communicate with other people
- be included or involved in an activity or an event

The amount and type of support someone needs are different for everyone.

We all have the right to get the support we need to live good, happy lives that we choose in the community.

Who supports us?

We all get support from different people on different things at different times in our lives. We get support from:

- our families
- our friends
- our colleagues
- professionals who know us

For people with an intellectual disability, our families are often our first and most important supporters. They are often the people who support us to understand about our rights and advocate with us to be included in our communities.

Anyone can be a supporter as long as we are happy to work with them and they give us the support we want and need.



What is poor support?

Often self-advocates have to put up with poor support because there are no other options.

We need to be able to tell when we are getting good support and when we are getting poor support so we can speak up about it and train our supporters.

Poor support is when:

- people make decisions for us without including us
- our supporters control what we do and when
- our supporters overprotect us or treat us like children
- we do not understand what is happening or why
- we are not part of what is going on and can't join in
- we are not listened to
- our supporter talks over us or answers for us
- our supporter does things for us or to us not with us
- the support is not about what I want or need but about what the supporter wants to do

Poor support makes us feel:

- left out
- confused
- unimportant
- angry



What is good support?

We have the right to get good support which helps us to be included in our communities, and lead good, happy lives.

Good support is when:

- we are in control
- our decisions are respected
- we are listened to and can say what we think
- we understand what is happening around us and are included and involved
- we are developing new skills
- the support is personal to us
- supporters are being active, this means they are paying attention to us, understand what support we need and understand how to support us at that time

Good support makes us feel:

- included
- empowered
- confident
- powerful
- respected

Tips on getting or giving good support

These are some tips on how to give good support or how to know if your supporter is giving you good support.

The people who support us may need training on these things to help them to understand how to give us the best support.

Get to know each other

- Support works well when we know each other
- If we do not know each other some things to talk about could be:
 - who are we?
 - what are we good at?
 - what are we interested in?
 - how do I like to be supported?

Remember! Self-advocates are the experts! We should be the ones who do the training!

Include me and listen to me

- Include and involve me when you are with me
- Do not talk for me or assume you know what I think or feel. Ask me!
- If I don't use language to communicate you can still include me – you can find out about how I express myself from my friends and family

Make sure I have choice and control

- I should always have the choice over what I do and how I want to do it
- Good support makes sure I understand my options and the outcomes
- Giving me choices and listening and acting on my decisions makes sure that I have control and that you respect my decisions even if you do not agree with me!

Help me develop new skills

- **Everyone** wants to try new things – developing our skills helps us to become independent.
- To support me to develop my skills we can break an activity or information down into small chunks that I understand

- As I learn a something we can figure out together what I can do on my own and what I may need support with
- We should be patient and not give up!

Give me the right support when I need it

- A good supporter understands when and how much support to give and understands I do not need support all the time!
- Giving us too much support means we might lose out on our independence, but too little support means that we cannot do what we want to do!
- Give us support that is personal to us, not a 'one-size-fits-all' type of support. Just because you supported someone else one way doesn't mean it will be the right way for me!



What is self-advocacy support?

Self-advocacy is about 3 things:

- a self-advocate having personal power – understanding our own rights and how to make decisions
- self-advocates coming together working as a group and supporting one another
- working together and with others to make change happen by advocating for inclusion

Because of this we might need different kinds of support depending on where we are in our self-advocacy journey and what we are working on.

We may need support, to begin with to help us:

- make decisions
- understand our rights
- build our confidence
- express ourselves

When we come together in groups we may need support with:

- organising meetings and groups
- running or facilitating a meeting
- understanding the information that we are discussing

When we advocate and take action on things we may need support with:

- understanding laws and policies
- making an advocacy plan
- support to communicate with decision-makers and governments

The support we get when we are working on self-advocacy must still be empowering and help us to develop our skills.



Remember! It is important supporters who are working with us on self-advocacy understand about inclusion and our rights, so that they can give us good support to understand and work on these things too!



More information

Empower Us is the name for Inclusion International's work on self-advocacy. Empower Us is led by us – people with intellectual disabilities who are self-advocates.

We give advice, support, and training to Inclusion International members on self-advocacy and inclusion.

If you would like more information about good support, or you are interested in other Empower Us training on self-advocacy and inclusion, please email empowerus@inclusion-international.org

You can find out more about becoming an Inclusion International member on our website www.inclusion-international.org