

Module 4 Self-Advocacy and Disclosure: video 1: Development Self-Advocacy Skills

Video 1: managing your career strategies for graduates with disabilities module for self-advocacy and disclosure

Module 4: developing self-advocacy skills

Welcome to module 4 of our career in disability series brought to you by the UTSC AccessAbility Services and the Academic Advising and Career Centre. This module focuses on self-advocacy and disclosure. Self-advocacy occurs anytime people speak or act on their own behalf to improve the quality of life, affect personal change or correct inequalities.

You have advocated for yourself many times possibly without even knowing that this is what you were doing. Examples of self-advocacy in university include, asking the AccessAbility Services office for accommodations for your assignments, tests and exams or negotiating group project in term deadlines with group members to ensure that you have sufficient time to prepare your material. Being able to advocate for yourself in the work environment is very important and can help you to feel empowered.

It is your responsibility to communicate your needs to an employer. Research indicates the self-advocacy can help to positively change employers' attitudes. There are certain opportunities for self-advocacy in the workplace these include asking an employer for a raise or a promotion. Additionally, you may encounter a specific situation that requires disability specific self-efficacy, these situations may include a requesting clarification of the instructions for a work assignment, or asking for alternative communication methods or the modification of job tasks to support your success on the job. A strong self-advocate develops and uses effective communication negotiation and interpersonal skills. In addition, they possess a strong sense of self-awareness related to the disability and how it affects them.

Here are some general tips on how to advocate effectively for yourself, be able to describe your strengths and know your needs, set goals and develop plans to be successful in advocating for your needs. Make decisions and accept responsibility for your decisions, ask for assistance and support when needed, learn who you need to talk to about your disability related needs -- either your direct supervisor or Human Resources.

What are the steps to effective self-advocacy in the workplace first?

1. Identifying to find the issue: is it your workspace communication methods in the workplace specific job-related tasks that need to be adjusted.
2. Strategize possible accommodations or solutions adjustments to workspace alternative communication methods or assistive technology to complete job-related tasks.
3. Request information and support from appropriate persons in the workplace such as human resources or the Health and Safety Office or your current supervisor.
4. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your accommodations.

Let's review an example together. You find it difficult to focus and get tasks

accomplished in busy and distracting environments. You've effectively managed this issue in school by studying and completing assignments in quiet workspaces like library cubicles and study rooms. In your new job you're working in an open concept environment there are no cubicles, instead the workspace contains large tables that employees share - you're finding this environment distracting. There are also constant visual distractions with people getting up and down from the table and moving around the room. You recognize the noise and visual distractions are the main issues interfering with your ability to focus and to complete tasks. You start to think about solutions, you realize that other employees are wearing headphones and that your noise cancelling headphones would be extremely helpful in this work environment. Additionally, you look at the layout of the tables in the room and notice that there are a few spots that face a wall or a window which would minimize your awareness of colleagues moving around the room. Now that you have some solutions if you need support implementing your plan, you can speak with your Human Resources office your health and safety office or your current supervisor. They may also be able to offer additional strategies or support for the accommodations after implementing your strategies. Monitor the accommodation to ensure that it's working for you, if it's not, it's important that you continue to consider other strategies and communicate with your employer to identify additional strategies or options.

There are many resources that you can use to learn more about self-advocacy and how to build skills in this area. Please see our resources section for more information. In addition, please attend workshops read online resources and talk with people you trust -- conversations in which you advocate for yourself feel easier. If you have prepared and practiced what you want to say I encourage you to take a few minutes now to start planning for the kinds of self-advocacy you may have to do. Go to the My Accommodation Needs worksheet -- we're confident that you can make progress on it on your own. When you'd like some help please visit your Disability Consultant or a Career Advisor in the AA&CC.

If you would like to provide feedback on these videos or if you have questions or concerns. Please contact the Academic Advising and Career Centre at aacc.utsc@utoronto.ca or the AccessAbility Services at ability.utsc@utoronto.ca