

**PART III:  
ROLE AND  
RESPONSIBILITY  
OF THE GROUP ADVISOR**



## Working with An Advisor

### *What is an advisor?*

- An advisor is someone who helps you and your group to do things you want to do.
- Sometimes advisors are called support or resource people.



### *Who can be an advisor?*

- An advisor believes that people with disabilities are people first.
- An advisor believes that people with disabilities have a right to speak out for themselves.
- An advisor believes that self-advocates can do the things they want to.
- Some groups have one or more advisors; advisors may or may not have a disability.

*Your advisor may be:*

- A friend of a group member
- A volunteer
- A family member
- A student
- Someone who works in the community



Adapted from: Learning About Self-Advocacy, Booklet 2, p. 16

*Advisors should:*

- Believe in, recognize, and foster the abilities of all members
- Understand why people join the group
- Recognize and foster the goals of the members
- Help members work together and solve problems
- Help the group find other people who can provide resources and support as needed
- Help connect members with the community
- Help members develop leadership skills



- Help people develop skills for understanding and communicating
- Support the diversity of the group, and find ways for different interests to be used most effectively
- Help people link their individual self-advocacy efforts with group and national self-advocates
- Understand that they are not in charge, and should find a system for advisor support and evaluation
- Support the group to develop networks of other advisory support in case they are unable to continue
- Recognize and avoid any conflict of interest
- Avoid depending on money or agency support for self-advocacy to grow.



*Adapted from: People First of Nebraska State Convention, 1993.*

## *Group Meetings: The Role of the Advisor*

- An advisor can help find a place for the group to meet and discuss with the group any particular needs individuals may have so the space is fully accessible.
- The advisor can help group members set up transportation, or may even help to provide transportation.
- The advisor can help coordinate social activities, refreshments, or outside films and speakers for the meetings.
- The advisor can help in finding information on a particular topic; he or she can present this information when asked by the group.
- The advisor can help officers and group members with tasks such as writing, reading, and banking when requested by group members.
- The advisor should understand the principles of self-advocacy, and can help group members learn these principles.
- The advisor should not be more involved in meetings than necessary and should encourage maximum participation of group members.



- The advisor and other group members can support self-advocates' needs when necessary, or requested.



- The advisor should be present and on time to all meetings.

### *Assisting Group Members to Develop Skills:*

The advisor can assist group members to develop certain skills. These skills can often be worked on during officers meetings. When self-advocates understand skills, the advisor can let the leaders and group members teach others. These skills include:

- How to help the group stay on task.
- How to support everyone's participation in the group's discussion.
- How to lead group discussion.
- How to speak and dress for radio, television, or community presentations.
- How to prepare a speech.



- How to write a letter.
- How to reinforce appropriate statements, ideas, and questions from group members.
- How to research and develop technical skills.
- How to learn to manage group money, and conduct banking procedures.



### *Self-Advocates and Advisors Should:*

- Sit down together and come up with a plan about how they want to work together.



For example:

- How will the advisor take part in the meetings?
- What are the needs of the group that the advisor can help with?
- Do you want the advisor to take notes, and help with money in the beginning?

It is helpful to:

- Have officers and advisors come up with a written contract about the role of the advisor.
- The contract should include reasons why a group may want to ask an advisor to leave.
- This contract should be shared with and signed by all advisors and members of the group.
- The group members should also come up with a plan of how they may find a new advisor; this may include steps related to interviewing for advisors.



***Activity Steps to Help Develop a Plan:***

1. Self-advocate leaders (with support as needed) and advisors spend time together and make separate lists of:
  - qualities they think make a good advisor
  - things that the advisor can be helpful with for their group
  - things that the advisor could do that may harm the group.
2. Take turns and discuss what they have written on their lists.



3. Write down how the responses were similar, and how they were different.
4. Brainstorm together what kinds of things should be in the plan for the advisor.
5. Outline the plan and discuss the plan with all the group members.
6. When all group members understand the plan, write down the details.
7. Have all group members vote on accepting the plan, and have all self-advocates and advisors sign the plan.
8. This plan will be the contract between the group and the advisor.



### *Ten Questions to Ask Yourself as an Advisor:*

1. Am I really listening to what self-advocates have to say or am I imposing my point of view?
2. Do I see the real human growth and potential in self-advocates or do I see “disability” and “limitations”?
3. Have I “checked out” my actions and feelings with self-advocates?



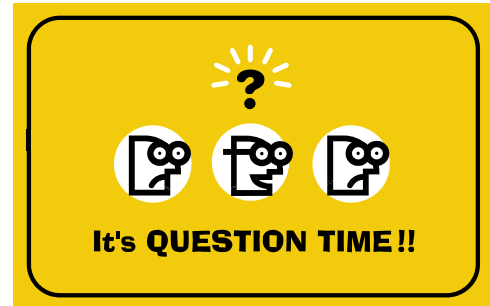
4. Are any of my actions based upon a potential “conflict of interest” or need to be “controlling” in any way?
5. Do my actions:
  - Increase the self-respect, self-confidence, and self-reliance of self-advocates and encourage them to take risks?
  - Decrease the self-advocates’ dependence on me?
  - Increase a “peer support” system and encourage self-advocate leaders to take over some of my roles?
  - Help teach people a “process” for making decisions, solving problems and doing things on their own instead of controlling things?
  - Increase the self-advocates’ opportunities to understand and participate in the decisions that will affect their lives?
  - Encourage a positive role for diverse membership?
6. Do my actions promote, respect, and recognize individual growth as well as group spirit?



7. Do my actions encourage and assist self-advocates in obtaining and understanding a wide variety of information and different points of view so that people can make informed decisions?

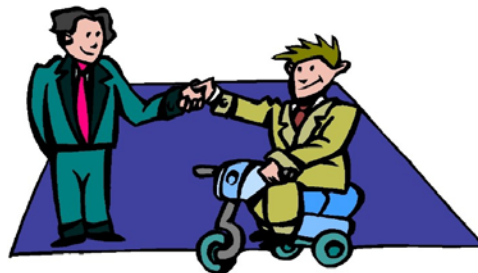
8. Is it okay for self-advocates to:

- Question my point of view?
- Work me out of a job?
- Tell me that they don't need me and can decide on their own?
- Give me negative feedback about what I am doing?
- Not see me as an “authority figure?”



9. Do I realize that advisors as well as self-advocates are human beings capable of making mistakes and having problems just like anyone else in any other organization?

*Adapted from Cindy Rhoades and Philip Browning Training Manual*



## Activities For Training Advisors:



### 1. Discussion between self-advocates and advisors:

- Have self-advocates share past experiences with advisors and each other.
- Have them share experiences when people tried to make too many decisions for them.
- Have someone record any issues that are raised in this activity.
- Have advisors and self-advocates discuss these issues.

### 2. Set up a role-play:

- Have advisors and self-advocates play their natural part in a meeting setting.
- Have the advisor play both a negative advisor and a positive advisor.
- Have the advisors and self-advocates switch roles and carry out the same role-play.
- Have a follow up discussion about how the different interactions felt to both the self-advocates and the advisor.