



NEW YORK STATE MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM

TITLE: Self-Advocacy within Schools

DESCRIPTION: This session will help parents incorporate various self-advocacy tools and skills into a self-advocacy plan they can use when addressing a particular issue. By having a self-advocacy plan, parents will be empowered to act on holding the school accountable for whatever issue the family may be engaged in. This session will allow the parent(s) to identify an issue that needs to be addressed, define their role in addressing this issue, design how they will effectively communicate their concerns, needs, and preferences, and finally identify the people they will contact and hold accountable. Throughout this session, parents will continue to fortify their belief that they and their children are worth advocating for.

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SERIES: This is Module 5 in the 5-part “Developing Self-Advocacy Skills” series. While this module puts together all of the individual parts of the other modules into making a self-advocacy plan, this module can be used on its own.

Facilitator Guide

OBJECTIVES/LEARNING TARGET(S)

At the end of this session, parents should:

- Understand the issues they and their children are facing within schools
- Strengthen their self-advocacy tools including revisiting various aspects of self-advocacy strategies
- Identify specific areas of concern and begin to explain/share these concerns and expectations for change to schools/teachers
- Create a working self-advocacy plan

WORKSHOP/MODULE DESIGN

This module is designed for use with a group of parents, but it can be adapted for use with an individual parent within a home. This module can also be adapted for use with adolescents. The Facilitator Notes within the guide will have information about how to facilitate based upon your setting.

CONNECTION TO THE NYS MEP THEORY OF ACTION

Advocacy to Self-Advocacy

- Learning the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of a successful advocate
- The workshop instills a sense of empowerment by guiding parents to make deliberate and purposeful choices to speak up for their needs.
- The workshop provides parents with the tools and knowledge necessary to know what accommodations they need and ensure they receive all the services they qualify for
- The workshop helps understand the importance of willingly asking questions when something is unclear or needs clarification.

Identity Development

- Building a sense of expectation that they belong in the school Advocacy Plan

SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS

- Participant Handouts (*English, Spanish, Karen, Burmese*)
 1. Participant Agenda
 2. Self-Advocacy Continuum
 3. Self-Advocacy Plan
 4. Key People in Schools
- Markers/Pens, Paper
- Chart paper to write volunteer responses to model the Self-Advocacy Plan

- **Facilitator Note: *PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME:*** The activity uses responses from volunteers to model how to use/fill in the Self-Advocacy Plan. You can enlarge a copy of the Self-Advocacy Plan to write on in front of the group, or prepare chart paper with the questions written ahead of time.

STAFFING NEEDS

- When this session is being done with a group at a local Parent Engagement location, childcare will be needed.
- Interpretation should be provided when the parents and facilitators speak different languages or more than one language is present.

ADJUSTING FOR USE WITH INDIVIDUAL FAMILY IN THE HOME

If you are facilitating in a home with one family, the activities become conversations between you and the family with everyone sharing.

ADJUSTING FOR USE WITH ADOLESCENTS

These workshops will work with young people. Review the Facilitator Guide, and decide what elements you will use with students. You may need to modify some of the activities to work with your adolescents.

Facilitator Note: The estimated times in this Guide are based on using one language. When adjusting to incorporate a second language, a general rule is to double the time needed.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

(10 minutes)

Facilitator Note: A facilitator should welcome the group to the workshop, state the name of the workshop, and then move into introductions. As you know, workshops are often foreign to migrant parents whether they are immigrants or not. When participants are shy, move around the group and give attention and a warm smile to each person as they introduce themselves.

In addition to “Name,” pick one question from the choices below for participants to use when introducing themselves. Feel free to think of your own question to use instead.

Questions

- Name?
- Share a time when you stood up for something important to you.
- Share a time when you wanted to stand up for something but did not or were not able to.
- Share a motivational saying, book, or song that you feel is important in your life.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

(5 minutes)

Key Points

- This is a process.
- Everyone is on a journey along the Self-Advocacy Continuum.
- It is important for parents to embrace self-advocacy strategies.
- It is important for parents to have a self-advocacy plan.

It might sound like: *Let me start by sharing our Self-Advocacy Continuum. As adults, we know that you have experience advocating for things you need, and interacting with schools to get what your need for your child can be hard. Parents have told us that when they move to a new community, they need more extra help getting to know what resources are available.*

Facilitator Note: If you are facilitating this in a home with one family, personalize the conversation instead of using the general ‘parents’.

Looking at the Self-Advocacy Continuum, you can see that as a family stays in one place, the parents can start taking over more of the role of advocating for their family’s needs. I would like you to think about where you see yourself on the continuum, from needing someone to advocate for you and your child to you being able to advocate for your child independently?

There are three years of eligibility in Migrant Education. During this time, it is our goal to support you as you increase your skills for self-advocacy. These activities are one way to help you build strength as you become more independent at advocating in schools.

Facilitator Note: Families can requalify for a new three years of eligibility if they make another qualifying move.

This session will help you incorporate various self-advocacy strategies into a working self-advocacy plan to be used when advocating for yourself and your child at schools.

Facilitator Note: If participants attended Session 1, 2, 3, or 4 this Overview would be a good opportunity to connect the Sessions together.

It might sound like: *This is the fifth session in a 5-session series focused on the journey from advocacy to self-advocacy. The first session allowed you to understand the importance of your culture. The second session allowed you to develop a Testimonio, your personal story based on your personal life experiences and cultural experiences. The third session helped you learn how to effectively communicate with people in different spaces. The fourth session helped you develop an understanding of school and community networks. We looked at how to access the key stakeholders in those networks to help you and your child succeed in education and in life. Now we are putting all of this information together to create a Self-Advocacy Plan.*

INTRODUCTION: EMBRACING SELF-ADVOCACY STRATEGIES FOR A PURPOSE

(5 minutes)

Key Points

- Parents and their children are worth advocating for.
- Summary of strategies from earlier sessions that can strengthen self-advocacy:
 - Value of own culture and personal story
 - Effective communication
 - Roles of people at school, and who to contact
- This session will focus on addressing issue parents are facing at children’s schools and creating a self-advocacy plan to empower parents to challenge these issues.
- Self-advocacy is also an opportunity to hold schools and educational systems accountable.

It might sound like: *We will take a minute to think about some different strategies that impact your ability to become a strong self-advocate. First, you should know that you and your family*

are worth advocating for in the schools. There is value and importance in your culture and personal story.

There is importance in communicating effectively to ensure that your child's school is serving your child equitably. There is importance in understanding the different people and their roles within your child's school. It helps to think about who to contact in different situations.

You have the right to advocate for your rights. Our time during this session will focus on putting together a self-advocacy plan to address an issue you and/or your child may be facing at the school. Or it can be a plan to advocate for your child to receive services, placed in honors/AP classes, or given other opportunities to ensure they are successful and receiving the same opportunities as other children. This is a plan to ensure that your voice is being heard and that you are aware of the need to hold the school accountable.

ACTIVITY: CREATING A SELF-ADVOCACY PLAN

(55 minutes)

Key Points

- Identify and discuss issues that may be impacting group members.
- Address and define the role of parents in addressing the issues

It might sound like: *To begin, let's discuss some of the issues you or your child may be facing related to education and the schools. What are some of the issues or challenges at the school that you are facing?*

Facilitator Note: Allow the group to share some challenges they are facing. Based on what is shared, select one person to serve as a volunteer to walk through Sections 1 and 2 of the Self-Advocacy Plan Worksheet.

Thanks for sharing. [Cecilia], you mentioned _____. Would you mind volunteering your experience to help us walk through Section 1 and 2 of the Self-Advocacy Worksheet? Great, thanks.

Facilitator Note: This Guide has places where the facilitator might want to use a participant's name. The sample dialogue uses a [sample name] with brackets around it as a reminder to substitute a real participant's name.

Model Section 1: Issue

- *"[Cecilia], let's look at Section 1 on the Self-Advocacy Plan. What might you write to name your issue or any challenges at the school that need to be addressed?"*

Clarifying Questions:

- Why is this an issue or challenge to you?
- What has or has not been done to address this issue/challenge?
- How were you made aware of this issue/challenge?

Facilitator Note: Feel free to write on whiteboard or chart paper some of the key points as the volunteer is speaking.

Model Section 2: Role of Parent in Addressing this Issue

- “[Cecilia], are you ready to look at Section 2? What do you think is your role as a parent, in relation to this issue?”

Clarifying Questions:

- Why are you and your child worth advocating for?
- What are your rights and responsibilities?
- What do you need to successfully advocate for yourself and/or your child?
- What might hold you back from advocating for yourself and/or your child?

Thank you, [Cecilia]. Now each of you should take about 5 minutes to complete Section 1 and 2 on your own worksheet. Think of an issue/challenge you are facing, and write it down in Section 1. Then think of your role as a parent with this issue, and write that down in Section 2.

Key Points

- Parents begin to think about how to effectively communicate their concern.

It might sound like: *Is everyone ready to move on to Section 3? Many of us jump from our concern to contacting someone at the school.*

This section helps us begin to think about how to effectively communicate our concern. We will create a clear message, figure out if there is any important cultural story that can make the message more powerful, and think about questions we need to ask to get more information.

Would someone be interested in volunteering the issue you wrote down to help us walk through Section 3? Thank you volunteering, [Jose]. We’re going to walk through Section 3 using [Jose’s] example.

Model Section 3: Effectively Communicating Your Concern Regarding the Issue

[Jose], let’s use this Plan to develop the message to communicate. First, we need to name your issue or concern again. We use the same concern that you wrote in Section 1 at the top.

Facilitator Note: Continue to write on chart paper for the volunteer, for the group to see, if appropriate.

Next, we are asked to explain what the issue is in your own words. [Jose], can you think for a moment, and then explain this issue/concern to us?

Turn to page two to find the next part where we are being asked, “What supporting evidence do you have?” This can be something that happened, statistics, and/or a regulation that says your student deserves a specific service. [Jose], do you have some supporting evidence that you can share with us? However, if it is too personal, or you need more time to think about it, you don’t need to.

Find number 4. This says, “Conclusion.” Now we write what we want to have done. What information will help you hold the school accountable? [Jose], have you had enough time to think about this?

Thank you, [Jose]! Now you can all take some time to think about your own issue or concern. You can work with a partner and share ideas with each other.

Facilitator Note: Give participants time to work on developing their own concerns, or to collaborate with a partner. The time needed will vary by the group.

Thank you all. We’re going to look at Section 4 now. This section helps us begin to identify those people in the schools or in the community that we need to contact to make sure something is being done to address this issue/challenge. This section helps us figure out how to hold the school accountable.

Introduce Section 4: Networking and Contacting the School

Key Points

- Who do you contact at the school to someone know your concern or question?
- Who do you contact at the school to find out what has been done about the concern?

It might sound like: *Now we are at Section 4 – Networking and Contacting your School. This is space to think about your issue, challenge, or concern, and to figure out who might be the best person to contact at the school about this.*

Let’s look at the handout, Key People in Your Child’s School. What kind of information do you see here? Yes, there are different topics listed, and then who might be the person in your school who can answer that kind of question.

If you look at the very bottom, each school building in New York State has someone to contact about bullying concerns.

Please take about five minutes to look through the topics to see if the topic you are concerned about is here. Then go across the chart to see who might be the person in school to contact, and write it down on your Plan.

Facilitator Note: Give participants time to identify the people they will contact about their concern. Participants can work individually or with a partner. The time needed will vary by the group.

Parents may need follow up assistance for phone numbers and actual names for the people in their own school.

Let's come back together. Do you have any questions? Any suggestions?

Who can you contact when you don't know who to call or send a note to? Maybe this list of suggestions is not handy. (The school secretary, classroom teacher....)

Let's say the person you contact is helpful, what do you do next?

Let's say the person you contact is not helpful – what do you do next? Who do you contact next?

Closing & NEXT STEPS: PUTTING YOUR SELF-ADVOCACY PLAN INTO MOTION

(5 minutes)

Key Points

- Reflect on the importance of self-advocacy and instilling a spirit of self-advocacy in children.
- This is a learning process. Continue to practice and strengthen your role as a self-advocate.
- None of us get this right after a couple of times.
- We can work together to strengthen our plans and prepare to use them in real time.

It might sound like: *Our time together was spent working on a self-advocacy plan to help us address an issue that is impacting our families. Continue to use this plan and practice how you will self-advocate for yourself and your family. Remember, this is a process. None of us get this right after a couple of times. Think of this as still learning how to be effective self-advocates. Also, continue to think about how you can help other parents become stronger self-advocates.*

Think about how you will take what you learned and include it in your self-advocacy. Think about how you would share this with your children. How do you tell them the importance of self-advocacy? How do you tell them they are important to fight for?

Please continue to work with each other on the plans. Support each other. Remember, you and your children are worth advocating for. You have the right to advocate for your rights.

It has been great spending time together today. Thank you for your time and commitment to your children's education.

APPRECIATIONS

Key Points

- Take time to share appreciations for self, others, or a new concept or idea learned.
- Create a climate that honors individual risk-taking.
- Create a forum for supporting each other.

***It might sound like this:** We like to close our workshops by taking time to share something you appreciate about yourself, someone in the group, or an idea or concept that you have learned. Appreciations are important because they create a climate that honors individual risk-taking. It can be hard to share in front of others. Workshops are a new way to learn for some of you. Appreciating what we have learned from each other is a good way to support each other.*

Facilitator Note: If you are facilitating in a home, first appreciate something about what the parent shared. Then ask the parent to identify what they appreciated most about what they shared today.

In any given group, different parents might need different areas of support in their quest to self-advocate for themselves and their families.

Modules 1 and 2, "***Our Culture is a Positive Tool in Schools,***" and "***Our Stories Impact Self-Advocacy,***" are designed to build confidence in parents that they and their children deserve to have their concerns addressed.

Module 3 of this series, "***Developing Effective Communication Skills,***" goes in depth with tips about how to listen well, how to focus on the message one is saying and the inadvertent non-verbal cues one might be giving.

Module 4 of this series, "***Networking – Building a Circle of Trust,***" spends more time thinking about the community and school support system a parent already has and how the parent might be able to expand that list of people. Module 4 spends more time with the handout, Key People in Your Child's School, identifying actual names and phone numbers for the individual schools.