



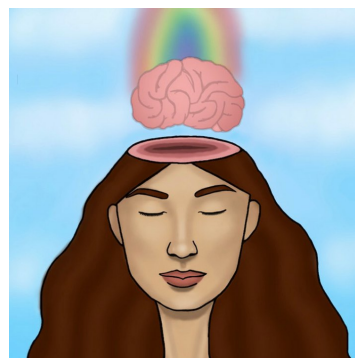
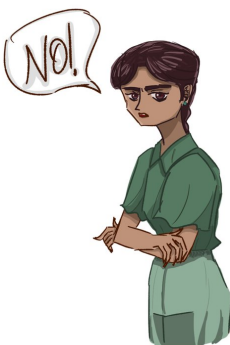
NEURODIVERSE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Guide: Become a Self-Advocate



Self-advocacy is about communicating your needs and interests.

We need self-advocates from the neurodiverse community to share our experiences and perspectives.



The artwork featured in this guide was created by NAC members.

“Nothing about us without us”

The Neurodiverse Advisory Council is a group of 17 to 22 year old students who think differently. Neurodiversity means that there are lots of different ways brains work, and that there is no “right” or “wrong” way. This guide shares five areas we practice as self-advocates, along with strategies you can try.

01 Build Confidence

Confidence is a state of being where you feel sure of your skills and abilities.

STRATEGIES

- **Be around supportive people.** Surround yourself with people who care about you and all you do.
- **Use positive language when talking to yourself.** Use nice words to think about yourself and speak to yourself in a positive way. Instead of “I can’t do it” say: “How can I do it?”
- **Find a role model.** Look for someone that you admire, whether it’s a family member, friend, celebrity, or fictional character. Think about what qualities you like in that person and how you can incorporate them into your own life.
- **Show yourself the compassion you’d show a friend or family member.** Compassion means caring, showing kindness, and the desire to help.



02 Find Your Voice

Tune into your own voice. Spend time getting to know yourself; what you like and dislike, what you look forward to and things you avoid.

STRATEGIES

- **Practice talking to others.** Do this by practicing in front of a mirror or rehearsing before a phone call.

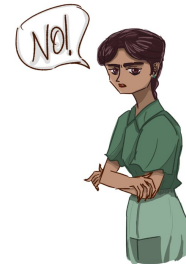


- **Be loud.** Know that your ideas count and talk loud and clear enough so that people can hear and understand you.
- **Take time to reflect.** Explore your feelings and needs. Take personality tests to get a better sense of yourself and your traits. There are many types of personality tests — [here's an example](#).
(seemypersonality.com)
- **Keep a journal.** Write or draw in a notebook to help you explore your emotional and physical needs.

03

Enforce Your Autonomy

Autonomy is the ability to act on your values and interests. It means being independent, but it also means being responsible for your actions.



STRATEGIES

- **Establish boundaries.** A boundary is a limit or rule that you set in a friendship or relationship to protect your emotions and health. Communicate your boundaries to the people in your life.
- **Stand up for yourself.** Choose your words carefully and be respectful, but stay firm. Don't let others define who you are.
- **Know your rights.** This is especially important at school and in the workplace — you are entitled to accommodations that help you be your best self. Here are:
 - [Accommodations you can get in school](#) (understood.org)
 - [Accommodations in the workplace](#) (dol.gov)
- **Reflect** on your actions and own up to it when you are wrong.
- **Be like a cat.** Cats do a great job at establishing boundaries and advocating for their needs.

Find Your Community

To connect with people who will always have your back — that's what finding your community is about.

STRATEGIES

- **Pay attention to body language.** Your body's reactions can reveal how safe you feel in a situation. Observe other people's body language to measure their level of interest.
- **Practice reading people's cues** to identify appropriate moments to start conversations and bring up certain topics.
- **Be yourself** and people who are interested in being your friend will come to you.
- **Look for similarities** or shared interests with other people. Maybe you have the same sense of humor or maybe you like the same movies.
- **Educate people about your experiences!** You can write, talk or make artwork about your life.

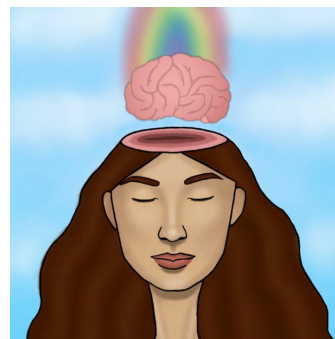


Caring for Your Mental Health

Your mental state affects how you think and behave. Taking care of your mind and working on emotional well-being can help you handle the challenges of everyday life.

STRATEGIES

- **Build an emotional toolkit** by gathering tools that help you feel good. For example, make a playlist of songs that calm you down.
- **Practice self-care** to manage stress and increase your energy! Take time to go out with friends and take breaks when you need them.
- **Treat yourself kindly** and also remember that self-care is also about taking care of responsibilities.
- **Practice self-regulation.** For example, you can play with stim toys, meditate and do breathing exercises to regulate your body.



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Questions?

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