

Rights and Responsibilities: Standing Up for Yourself

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

Green Mountain Self-Advocates

Rights and Responsibilities: Standing Up for Yourself

Do you feel stuck trying to explain what the word “rights” means?

Self-advocates in Vermont felt that way so they produced a video called Our Bill of Rights to help people with developmental disabilities understand their rights and learn how to speak up about them.

This workbook goes along with the video. It is for you to use and take home. Write down or draw what you learn. Share this workbook with a friend and tell them what you learned in this workshop.

Here are some questions to think about before we watch the video:

- ☆ What is the “ADA”?
It is also called the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- ☆ What does “created equal” mean?
- ☆ What are “civil rights”?
Disability Rights are Civil Rights.

“Everyone may not be equally athletic, intelligent, or tall. But everybody can be equally happy and respected.”

Number 1: "The right to privacy"

"We'd like the right to confidentiality and to control who has access to our personal information like files and case notes. Also please don't touch our stuff!"

"Body privacy needs to be respected. We'd also like the right to private time with a special person."



Dolley says, "Let others know when they can and cannot look at your records. If you do not understand your records look at them and ask questions. Always ask people before you touch them and let others know when they cannot touch you. Let people know when you want to be alone and make it a safe place. Always ask people before you borrow their things."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 2: "The right to communication"



"We'd like to be able to communicate in the best way we can: speaking, talking devices, sign language, gestures, pictures, and writing."

Dolley says, "If you want people to listen to you, you have to be a good listener yourself. No matter how people communicate, be patient, they might have something important to say."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 3: "The right to schedule our time"

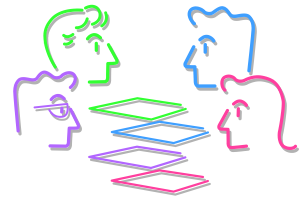


"We'd like to decide what we do with our time. To be able to pick something else to do when plans have changed."

Dolley says, "Let others know what you would like to do. Ask for help if you need it. And remember, last minute plans might not always work out."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 4: "The right to join a group"



"For instance, a self-advocacy group. They meet all over the state."

Dolley says, "Choose what group you would like to be a part of. Show up for meetings. Respect the others in the group."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 5: "The right to have relationships"



*"Relationships with our parents and family.
Having friends.
Love relationships.
To be married.
To have children."*



Dolley says, "You don't always have to take your parent's advice but at least respect them. Keep your commitments with your friends. Talk about big decisions with them. Learn about safe sex and birth control."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Hot Topic...Dating!

- ☆ You have the right to date.
- ☆ What are your responsibilities when dating?
- ☆ What are the laws or rules for dating?

Number 6: "The right to choose our own support staff"

"We'd like to be directly involved in the hiring process. This avoids total strangers walking into our lives and taking over."

Dolley says, "If you have a problem with your support worker keep an open mind. Support workers are people too and sometimes they make mistakes. If you have a problem with your support worker talk to them about it. If it doesn't work, tell someone else."



RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 7: "The right to make decisions"



*"For instance, where we live and who we live with."
"To pick a doctor we feel comfortable with."
"To decide how we spend our money."*

Dolley says, "Make good decisions. Choose a safe place to live. Make up a budget and live within it. When you try new things, be careful, don't get taken advantage of. Everybody makes mistakes and when you do, take responsibility for it. "

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 8: "The right to live in a safe home and to be treated with respect"



"These are the things we need in our home so that we can feel safe and respected."

"To make my own decisions and have them respected. Help me when I need it and leave me alone when I can do it myself. I need to be free from physical harm, verbal abuse and swearing. Please respect my boundaries. People should use good listening skills when being with me. Look at me when I'm talking and pay attention. To come and go from my home as I wish."

Dolley says, "Well said Amy, I think if you treat everyone with the same respect you are asking for you'll be acting very responsibly."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 9: "The right to get a job if you want one"



"We'd like to pick the job we want and to get the support we need to do the job. We also want to be able to quit and look for a new job. We might need to go to school or get training on how to do a new job."

Dolley says, "Go to work on time. Do the best work you can. Listen to directions and constructive criticism. Ask for help if you need it. If you are sick and can't go to work call your boss and let them know. Give notice if you want to quit the job."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

Number 10: "The right to a safe community"



"We think that the police should be trained by people with disabilities on how to approach a person with a disability."

"We'd like to be treated like everybody else and go about our business without being teased."

Dolley says, "If you are being teased, tell someone. And be safe, stay within your circle of safety."

RESPONSIBILITIES: _____

"I please myself with imagining a state at last which can afford to be just to all and treat the individual with respect as a neighbor."

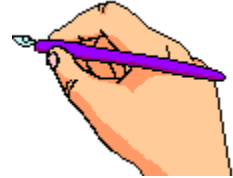
-Thoreau

Review the following steps to take if you think “your rights have been violated” or someone is discriminating against you:



1. Ask questions about why you are being told you can do something (your rights are being limited). Keep asking questions until you understand what is happening.

2. Write down the answers you are given, or get the answers on tape. Get as much information as you can. Make sure it is correct.



3. Get a friend to help you if you want to. Some towns have services that can help you get a friend who knows about advocacy.
 - ☆ Call Protection and Advocacy
 - ☆ Call the Disability Law Project

4. Find out what all the choices are. Pick out the ones that are best for you.



5. Decide what you think about what is happening. Decide what steps you need to take to reach your goal.

6. Know who to talk to and who is in charge. Go to the person who makes the decisions.



7. Know and use your rights. The main ones to remember when your rights are being limited are:
 - ☆ the right to know all the information,
 - ☆ the right to appeal and ask for a change in decision before you agree, and
 - ☆ the right to know what is happening all the time and why it is happening.

The three R's to keep in mind when figuring out what to do are:

1. Rules
2. Rights
3. Responsibilities

1. Rules help us understand what we need to do to keep our rights. We all must follow rules. Rules and laws help us know what our rights and responsibilities are to ourselves and others.
2. Rights apply to everyone! Rights are the rules that help make people equal.
3. Responsibilities—we are responsible for respecting the rights of others. To have our own rights respected, we must act in a responsible way.

Let's imagine...

You completed an application for an apartment you really want.
You have a good reference from your old landlord.
You were the first to see the apartment.
The landlord never called you back and so you called him.
He said he rented it to someone else.
You find out later your cousin got the apartment but they actually applied for it 2 weeks after you did and his reference was not as good as yours.
You think that the landlord didn't want to give you the apartment because you have a disability.



- ☆ How do you feel?
- ☆ What can you say?
- ☆ What can you do? (Who can you contact?)
- ☆ How can you stand up for yourself?

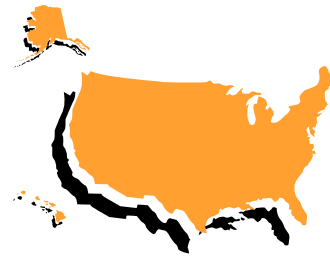
What is VOTING?

Voting means making choices. Our government makes laws in Montpelier and Washington DC. Obviously, we can't all go to Washington to run our own government. We can't all go to city hall to make decisions for ourselves. For that reason, we vote. We choose people to decide for us. This is a big, important job. We must choose well. We want to be happy with our choices. We make choices that will affect the whole United States. Voting is a serious responsibility.

Who can vote in Vermont?

YOU can if:

- ☆ *You are a citizen of the United States.*
- ☆ *You are a resident of Vermont and a resident of the town where you turn in your voter registration form.*



- ☆ *You take the Voter's Oath*
- ☆ *You are 18 years of age or older (or will be 18 on or before the day of election).*

You can vote even if you have a guardian!

Who can help me if I decide to vote?

Who takes you to the doctor? Maybe that person is the one to ask. Neighbors, family or friends sometimes help.

Read the newspaper or watch a debate on television.

Call the League of Women Voters for help. It is an organization that helps people vote. It is listed in the phone book.

Get some phone numbers to call for a ride at the last minute, in case your helper can't take you to vote.

What if I can't read very well?

Ballots are often hard to read. However, most polling places will let you take someone with you to read for you.

How can I decide on my choices?

Voting requires some study. Sometimes you will vote on new laws for your community. Other elections are about choosing the right people as leaders. You may need some help making your decisions. There are many places to get help. Don't forget that every citizen must make his/her own choices. Another person cannot make you vote for something or someone you don't like.

Here are some ways you can learn whom and what you want to vote for:

- ☆ Talk to teachers, parents, friends and neighbors about their choices.
- ☆ Listen to television and radio news.
- ☆ Look at the people running for office (called candidates).
- ☆ Listen to what they say.
- ☆ Keep a notebook about voting and candidates.

Contributors

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How this video was made:

In August 2001, GMSA sponsored four forums across Vermont attended by 150 people with developmental disabilities. Dave Hingsburger, a disability rights activist and teacher, facilitated self-advocate's brainstorming what they meant when they spoke of their rights. The forums were restricted exclusively to people with developmental disabilities. No one else was present. It was a unique opportunity.

Comments made at these forums were drafted into a document called *Our Bill of Rights*. Self-advocate leaders spent months meeting with local self-advocacy groups to get feedback on how to make the document easier to understand. Self-advocates needed help to understand their rights and learn how to speak up about them. The idea to make a video was born. Funding from the Vermont Developmental Disability Council and Division of Disability and Aging Services made it a reality.

The Awareness Theater Company, a local acting troupe comprised of actors who have developmental disabilities, was hired to help create the script for the video and to ultimately act it out. Much spirited discussion ensued among focus groups, the actors and GMSA. Developing a script that truly represented a common voice and understanding of people with disabilities took the better part of a year. By autumn 2003, the script was complete and the video filmed.