

# The Wind Beneath Your Wings!



## *Tips for Being an Ally in the Self-Advocacy Movement*

**August 14, 2017**

**11:00am – 12:30pm EST**



# Presenters

- **Max Barrows**, GMSA Outreach Director
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- **Skye Peebles**, GMSA Ally

# Green Mountain Self-Advocates...

We are a peer support network. We support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities but not in the typical way people think of getting services.



# GMSA/ Vermont has 23 Local Self-Advocacy Groups



# What is Self-Advocacy?



**Self-Advocacy** is the civil rights movement of individuals and organizations to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to speak for ourselves, make our own decisions and stand up for our rights.

# What is an ally?



**An ally** is someone who helps a self-advocacy group. In lots of self-advocacy groups the ally is not a person with a disability.

# Recipe for being a great ally:



1. Listen
2. Treat people with respect
3. Stay in the background – you should not run the meeting
4. Slow down and step back
5. If someone asks a question, support a peer to answer
6. Get everyone involved and give them a chance to speak up
7. Present options only after peer leaders have had a chance to problem solve. Be neutral and please do not control
8. Promote decision making
9. Focus on people's strengths and presume competence
10. Make information understandable for all
11. Be open to making mistakes and learning
12. Have fun!

# #1 - Listen



- The #1 thing an ally should always do is LISTEN. Ask “What does the group want?”
- Let the group members talk.
- Encourage self-advocates to make others feel welcome especially if they are new
- Listen to people’s stories and ideas!
- Don’t take sides
- Always provide ways for people who use alternate ways to communicate to feel they have a voice
- Listen to your officers or leadership team! They will tell you how the group wants to move forward.



# #2 – Treat people with respect

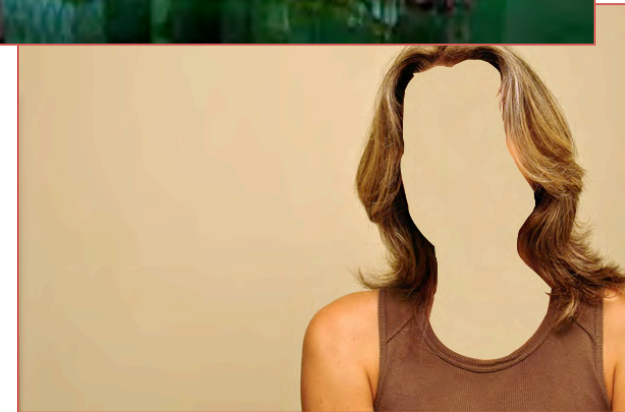
- Be open to everyone's ideas
- Feel comfortable with people with all different kinds of disabilities
- Understand that labels (mental #tardation client, consumer) are hurtful and use respectful, person-first language
- Treat people like adults not children
- If someone gets upset, encourage peer support. It is not your role to reprimand or say or do anything to make the situation worse.



Show  
Respect.  
Don't Judge.

# #3 – Stay in the background (you should not run the meeting)

- Think of yourself as the “man behind the curtain” from the Wizard of Oz
- Stay quiet and let self-advocates take control
- Ask and don’t assume!
- Ask if the group wants your help. If not, head back behind the curtain!



## #4 – Slow Down and Step back

“There is a need, in this area, for those "supporting" self-advocacy to slooow dooown and step back. It may seem to some that is more efficient to take an active role in getting this off the ground. It is a hollow effort that simply reinforces passivity and apathy on the part of the self-advocate.

It seems much better for us to support the meeting happening, then allow it to unfold at its own pace. It may sometimes be necessary for us to remind each other of this.”

8/14/17



**- Tracy  
Thresher**

# #5 – If someone asks a question, support a peer to answer

- Self-advocates say, “the truth comes from us!”
- Have self-advocates teach and help each other out



# #6 - Get everyone involved and give them a chance to speak up

- The group should figure out HOW to make sure everyone gets a chance to talk:
  - Use brainstorming strategies
  - Do a Round Robin - go around the room and give everyone a chance to speak up
  - Start with an ice-breaker activity
  - Ask people to raise hands and defer to people who have not had a chance to speak
- Allies can support peer leaders to make sure the group sticks to this plan

# #6 – Get everyone involved

- Make sure self-advocates are involved in ALL the planning.
- Tell people what the tasks are and invite self-advocates to take on the role they want.
- Learn how each group member likes to participate, communicate and learn so you can involve them.



# #7 — Present options only after peer leaders have had a chance to problem solve. Be neutral and please do not control

- Brainstorm options. Support members to weigh the pros and cons.
- Don't assume you know what the group wants to do.
- Lay out options after members brainstorm ideas.
- Self-advocates say, "Be our equal, not our boss."
- Don't set goals for the group. Instead, help groups complete THEIR goals by helping to make plans, set up tasks, and complete tasks.
- Give neutral, factual information that helps people make decisions.



# #8 – Promote decision making

Making decisions... 1 – 2 – 3 !



- 1. List choices:** make a list of the choices your group has to make
- 2. Talk:** talk about each option. Brainstorm what is good and bad about each option. Think about success and challenges you had in the past.
- 3. Choose:** The group chooses what they want.



# #9 – Focus on strengths!

- Know that everyone brings something to the table – your job is to help discover what their talents are!
- Work with your officers or leadership team to find ways to get all the group members involved
- Consider creating a group resume that highlights what each person is good at.



# #9 - Presume Competence

**WHEN YOU SEE,  
MEET, OR THINK  
ABOUT A PERSON  
WITH A DISABILITY  
PRESUME  
COMPETENCE**



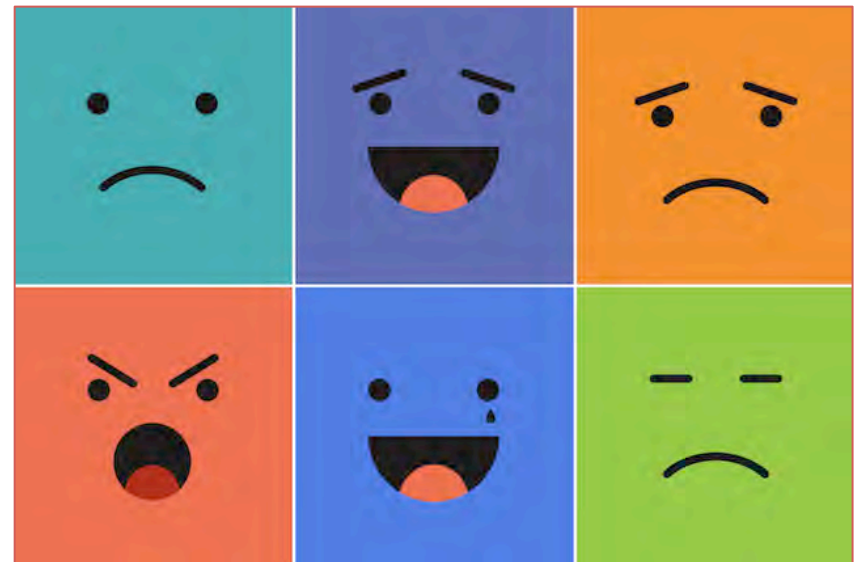
# #10 - Accessible...understandable...help get everyone on the same page!

- During officer or leadership team meetings, support peer leaders to practice how they will explain new ideas and complicated information so everyone understands
- Help make sure everyone understands activities, ideas, and decisions
  - Words + pictures
  - Use examples
  - Take clear notes everyone can see
  - Ask everyone if they understand



# #11 – Be open to making mistakes and learning

- Check your ego at the door
- Be open to giving and getting feedback
- Remember that mistakes are often the best lessons!
- Find your own support people – self-advocates and allies to lean on for advice.
- Do regular evaluations of allies



# #12 – Have fun!



# Some key areas where allies should offer support

- Officer or leadership team meetings
- Group Goals
  - What the group wants to learn
  - What the group wants to speak up about
  - A community service project
  - Something fun to do together
- Support peer leaders to facilitate group check-in
- Logistics – rides, meeting times, locations, food

# Some other ideas

- The group should write a job description for what they want their ally to do.
- Being organized and prepared is a big part of your job!
  - Use the GMSA Handbook!
- Reach out and get information from other allies!
  - At GMSA - they can connect you to other groups
  - National Ally Listserv.
  - SARTAC

# How GMSA can Help You...

- Providing resources for Allies
- Ally Email List and Facebook Page
- GMSA web page for groups
- Trainings for groups and allies
- Ideas about activities
- Connect allies (buddy system!) based on interests
- GMSA Handbook



Find out more!

## Resource List

1. [GMSA Handbook](#)
2. [Owning Your Organization: Working with Advisors or Facilitators](#)
3. [Advising Through Self-Determination](#)
4. [A Curriculum for Self-Advocates \(p.52\)](#)

# Thank you!!! Have a great week!

