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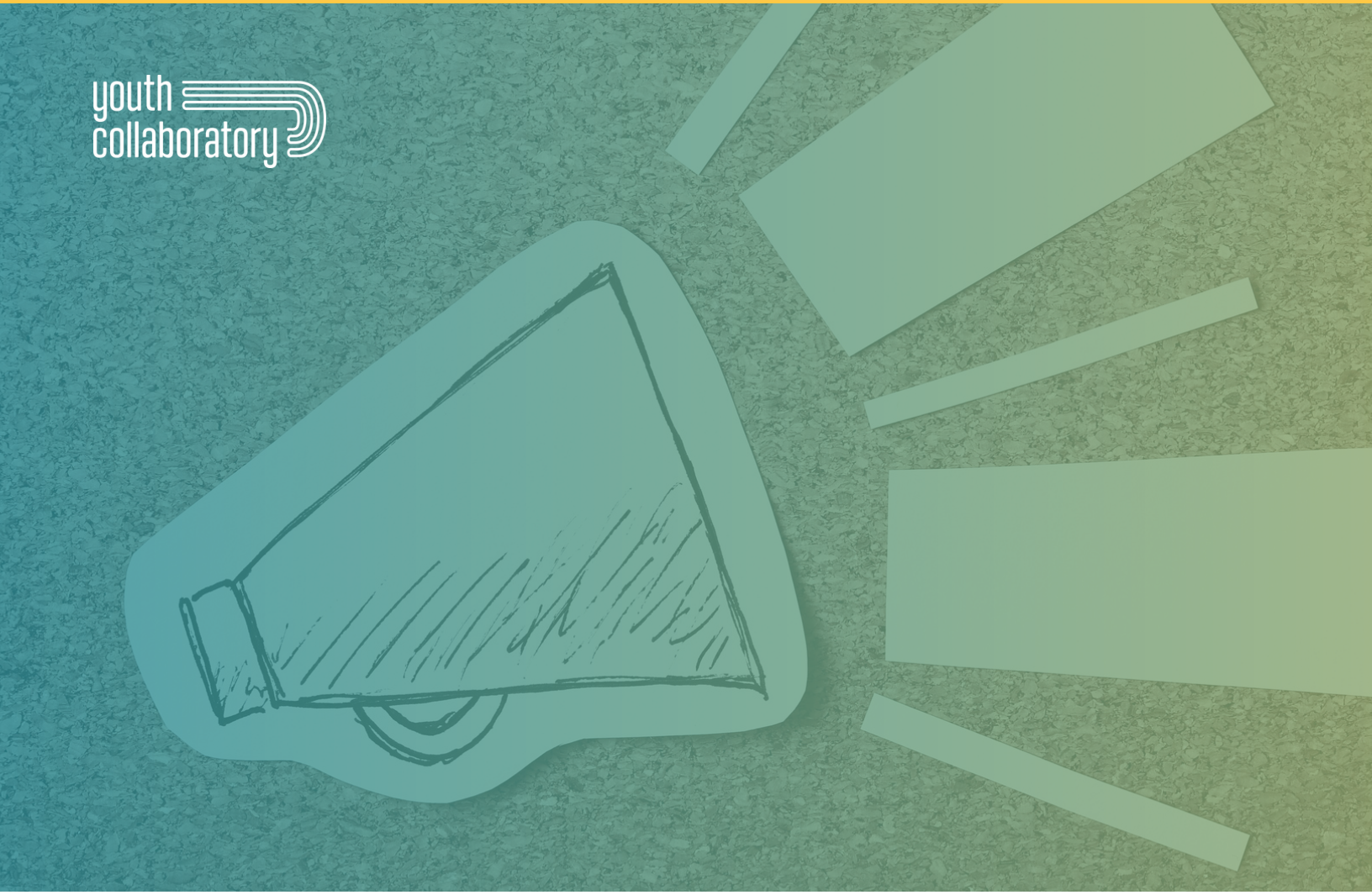

Youth and Young Adult

Self-Advocacy Toolbox

October 2026

Self-Advocacy Toolbox

Advocating for yourself is not adversarial. This toolbox is designed to help you speak up for yourself and navigate self-advocacy. Use these tools with teachers, employers, caseworkers, landlords, health care providers, or anyone else you need support from. The goal is to make your situation, request, and next step clear. Adapt the words so they sound like you.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

These questions are your multitool—the tool you can always rely on to navigate various needs.

1. **What is happening?** *"Here's what's happening…"* Briefly explain the situation and how it affects you.
2. **What do I need?** *"Here's what I need…"* Make a specific request so the other person knows how they could help.
3. **What next step can we agree on?** *"Can we agree on a next step?"* Ask who will do what and when you should follow up.

THE FOUR TOOLS IN YOUR TOOLBOX

These are the tools you can use to set up your advocacy and follow-through.

1. **Prepare**

   This is where you lay the bedrock of your advocacy. What preparation makes you feel most comfortable? Maybe it's researching supporting details for your ask. Maybe it's practicing different ways your conversation could go. Some guiding questions that can help you think through preparing are:

   - *What do I need?*
   - *Who can help me navigate this need?*
   - *What am I comfortable sharing with the person I am advocating with? Note: You can share as many or as few supporting details as you would like! Do not feel the need to justify your needs!*

2. **Make the Ask**

   Use the three questions above to build a short script if you find it helpful. Focus on the information the person needs to understand your request. The goal is not to sound perfect or even to sound confident, the goal is simply to be prepared and to have faith in your skills.

3. **Respond to a Difficult Answer**

   If the person says no, interrupts, or dismisses your concern, ask about options, clarify your request, or take a pause. You can return to the conversation when you are ready.

4. **Follow Up**

   In order to successfully hold everyone accountable to the advocacy ask, it is important that your conversation ends with specific action items. Identify who will be responsible for completing specific tasks and when those tasks can reasonably be expected to be completed. Then write that information down! You can even plug in a reminder to follow up in your calendar app if that is most useful for you.

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PHRASES FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

Speaking up does not guarantee an immediate yes, but it can help you get a clearer answer and decide what to do next. Sometimes the person you are trying to advocate for yourself with will say no, sometimes they will be dismissive, sometimes they're the wrong person to ask. Here are some questions you could have in your back pocket to navigate when the conversation doesn't go the way you had hoped.

- **If the answer is no,** *"Can you help me understand what options I do have?"*
- **If they cannot help,** *"Who else could help me with this?"*
- **If you are interrupted,** *"I'd like to finish explaining what I need."*
- **If the next step is unclear,** *"When should I follow up?"*
- **If you need a record,** *"Could you put that information in writing?"*
- **If you need a pause,** *"I need a moment to think. Can we come back to this?"*

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now let's take a look at how the toolbox can help you advocate for yourself with a scenario. Let's say your manager changes your shift with one day's notice. You already arranged transportation for the original time.

1. **Prepare**

   "I need enough notice to arrange transportation. My manager can help. I can explain the scheduling problem without sharing every detail about my transportation situation."

2. **Make the Ask (Using the Three Questions)**
   a. **What is happening?** *"My shift changed after I arranged my ride."*
   b. **What do I need?** *"I need advance notice so I can arrange transportation."*
   c. **What next step can we agree on?** *"Could you text me when the schedule changes, or tell me where I should check for updates?"*

3. **Respond**

   If the manager says, "Schedules change," you could ask: "What options do we have when I can't arrange a ride at short notice?"

4. **Follow Up**

   If you agree that schedule changes will come by text, confirm that agreement. Ask when you should check back if you have not received an update. If the problem continues, ask someone you trust to help you plan your next conversation.

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BUILD YOUR OWN ADVOCACY SCRIPT

Choose a fictional scenario below or use a situation of your own. You can make up details, practice privately, and decide whether to share your script.

- **School:** You missed an assignment because you could not access the online portal. You want to find out how to make it up.
- **Housing:** A repair you reported has not been addressed, and you need an update.
- **Healthcare:** You did not understand an explanation at an appointment and want the provider to go over your options again.
- **Program Support:** You asked about a resource but do not know who is responsible for the next step.

Before I begin..

Who can help, and what am I comfortable sharing?

_____

_____

What is happening?

_____

_____

What do I need?

_____

_____

What next step am I asking for?

_____

_____

When will I follow up, and who could support me if I need help?

_____

_____

Check your script. Is the request specific enough that the other person knows what to do? Have you asked when or how you will follow up?

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