

AREA TITLE: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

AREA TITLE ADVOCACY

About...

What is advocacy?

All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account when decisions are made about their lives. This legal right is protected in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Children Act 1989.

Advocacy is about **speaking up** for children and young people. It is about **helping** children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and their views and wishes are heard at all times. Advocacy is about **representing** the views, wishes and needs of children and young people to adults responsible for making decisions about their lives.

Who needs an advocate?

It can be really difficult for children and young people to make their views and wishes clear. This is particularly true if you have difficulty with communication as you may already find it hard to make yourself understood. If you have autism or Asperger syndrome, you might find it hard to talk to other people about how you are feeling or what you would like to do next in your life.

It is really important that children and young people who have a disability or have difficulty with communication get **advocacy support** as they are going through changes and making choices about what they want in their life (see the document about Transition in this section of the website). Disabled children and young people are often left out of making decisions about their lives and the use of advocacy is an important way to support a disabled child's right to participate in decision-making.

Who can be an advocate?

Many different people could be an advocate for a child or young person on the autism spectrum. Some of them are listed below:

- Parent or family member
- Independent advocate or children's rights officer (for looked after children)
- Foster carer or residential worker
- Social worker, teacher, teaching assistant, mentor, youth worker or personal advisor
- Friends or other young people

What will an advocate do?

An advocate will help you, in a way which is most appropriate for you, to make your views and wishes about a situation understood. For example, you might be in the process of deciding, together with your parents, which school would be best for your particular needs. You might be finding it difficult to make your parents understand your views about a school. An advocate could help you do this.

How do non-verbal and less able children make choices?

It is more difficult for non-verbal children and young people (those who communicate without speaking), and those who have more severe difficulties, to make choices about their lives. Not many people have the training needed to

help these children and young people effectively and so more work is being done in this area.

Get help from...

- [ChildLine: Your rights in a nutshell](#) Some basic information from ChildLine about your rights. ChildLine offers a free and confidential helpline to all children and young people to talk about anything which might be worrying you. **0800 1111**
- [Barnardos: Advocacy services](#) Barnardos is a UK based charity working for children and young people in care. They offer advocacy services for all children and young people in care on a range of issues.
- [Voice for the child in care](#) 0808 800 5792 Providing advocacy for looked after children
- [National Youth Advocacy Service](#) 0800 616 101 NYAS A UK charity providing children's rights and socio-legal services
- [Action for Advocacy](#) 020 7820 7868 A central information resource for all independent advocacy
- [DCSF Quality Protects](#) Information and good practice around those children looked after by councils; in the child protection system; and other children in need.
- [Children's Rights Alliance for England](#) (CRAE) protect children's rights by lobbying government, bringing or supporting test cases and by using regional and international human rights mechanisms. Free legal information and advice, raising awareness and research. Each year they publish a review of the State of children's rights in England.
- [Children's Commissioner for England](#) The Children's Commissioner for England, Sir Al Aynsley-Green leads the organisation called 11 MILLION which works to make sure that adults in charge listen to the views of the 11 million children across England.
- [Teachernet](#) Includes pointers and good practice examples for advocacy in the context of education.

Links

[Your Voice Your Choice: A Guide for Children and Young People about the National Advocacy Standards](#)

Author - Nicola Wyld

Published by Voice for the Child in Care

Date: 2002

Information: A guide aimed at children and young people explaining about their rights, the role of an advocate and the National Children's Advocacy Standards.

[National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services](#)

Published by the Department of Health

Date - 2002

Information - A standards framework to plan, develop and review advocacy practice for children at all levels.

[Get it Sorted: a guide for young people](#)

Published by The Who Cares Trust

Date – 2004

Information – a guide for children and young people explaining their rights to advocacy as set out in the Government guidance 'Get it Sorted'

[Get it Sorted](#)

Published by the Department for Education and Skills

Date - 2004

Information - Guidance for providing effective advocacy services for Children and Young People making a complaint under the Children Act 1989

[Advocacy for Looked After Children and Children in Need](#)

Author - Christine Oliver, Abigail Knight and Mano Candappa

Published by - Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London

Date - 2006

Information - A summary of the key findings of the first national study of children's advocacy in England. The study was prepared for the Department of Health and the DfEs.

[Growing Up Speaking Out](#)

Author: Sounds Good Project

Date: December 2005

Information: A guide about community-based advocacy for young learning disabled people in transition (14 - 25 years). Sections within the guide go into detail on most aspects of providing advocacy for this age group.

[When Will We Be Heard?](#)

Published by The Children's Society

Date: 2007

Information: The survey that is reported here was commissioned to further an understanding of how advocacy services respond to disabled children.

Case
Studies

[Voice for the Child in Care: children's stories](#) Stories of children helped by Voice for the Child in Care – a charity dedicated to helping children and young people have their voices heard.

Shout to be Heard: Stories from young people in care about getting heard and using advocates

Published by: Voice for the Child in Care

Date: 1998

Available from Voice for the Child in Care as a booklet – not available online

Transition and advocacy

It is really important for young disabled people to get advocacy support as they are going through changes and making choices about what they want in their life. Young people on the autism spectrum can find it very difficult to cope with change and making choices. For example, dealing with what will happen after school, where to live, what social life, and what chance for work or other training? 'Transition planning', with the help of an advocate, is a formal process from aged 14 years designed to plan ahead for the future, with formal meetings each year.

- **A young woman on the autism spectrum was leaving school and did not want to move on to the Further Education Unit School that was offered to her other classmates. The School, Social Services and Connexions were involved and did not understand her**

resistance. With advocacy support, it was established that the young woman had been in an all male class for years and did not want to continue to be the only female. She wanted to move on and have some female company. So she left school and starts college in September.

Advocacy for children living away from home

Some children on the autism spectrum may live away from home in residential care, health settings, residential schooling or foster care. Many disabled children in residential placements receive funding from social services authorities. Some local authorities treat such children as 'looked after' because they are providing accommodation for them. Other authorities do not see such children as looked after, perhaps because of the stigma and perhaps because parents have not asked social services to provide accommodation. For those children who are 'looked after' by a local authority, the full protections of the Children Act 1989 apply. Advocacy can provide an important means of independent help for children in these circumstances to enable them to make decisions about their own lives.

- **A young man with ASD was placed out of county in specialist 52 week education placement and was given 'looked after' child status. The young man's advocate identified that his SEN annual review had not been carried out and alerted the local authority who duly brought together the key people to review his educational achievement and needs. The advocate helped represent the young man in the process.**

[Sunfield residential school in Worcestershire](#) – Case study on Teachernet

Author: JS