

## THREE PARTS OF SELF-ADVOCACY

### Topic

This video introduces the topic of self-advocacy. In this discussion of self-advocacy with Carol Blessing, BJ Stasio explains that being a self-advocate means speaking up for your rights. BJ makes the strong point that when we speak up for ourselves, we are likely speaking up for others who are having similar experiences.

### Relevance of Topic to System-Involved Youth

- It is important that young people know and understand their rights in order to be actively involved in decisions that affect their lives.
- It is equally important that the rights of youth are acknowledged and supported by the systems in which they are involved.
- Denying or ignoring the rights of system-involved youth perpetuates trauma and oppression.

### Relevance to Youth with Disabilities

- Self-advocacy helps people to make their own decisions which builds self-confidence and self-respect.
- Self-advocacy builds self-sufficiency.
- Self-advocacy helps people speak up for their rights and establish personal boundaries.

### Recommendations for Systems Change

- Listen without judgement.
- Make sure people know what their rights are.
- Create an environment that respects, supports, and upholds a person's rights.
- Cultivate opportunities to support youth voice and leadership at the table where decisions about them and other youth are being made.

### Questions to Consider

- How do you support young people to fully know and understand their rights?
- How do you respectfully support the person through decisions you agree with AND those you may not agree with?
- Are you able to meet the person where they are at, or do you find yourself pushing them toward where you think they should be?

### Learn More

- [Self-Advocacy Association of New York State \(SANYS\)](#)
- [Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered \(SABE\)](#)



## Presenter Information

**BJ Stasio** is the President of the Board of Directors of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS). He has been employed by the New York State Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (NYS OPWDD) for over 20 years, working on person-centered planning, voting issues, and self-determination training and education. Additionally, he has served on numerous boards in Western NY, and has a non-profit organization, Buffalo Racin', that gets people with disabilities involved in 5K races. BJ has represented the voices of self-advocates across New York State during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

**Carol Blessing** is a senior extension associate with the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University's ILR School where she leads systems impact projects aimed at supporting the full inclusion of people with disabilities in typical community life. She developed the landmark [Citizen-Centered Leadership online series](#), an international leadership development theory-to-practice program. Carol is the Training Coordinator for the Y-ReCONNECTS project, working closely with youth and professional Reentry Ambassadors who serve on country level teams.

