

## **SPEAKING UP FOR YOURSELF**

Start thinking for yourself: It's important that you realize that you are unique, a one-of-a-kind person, an individual. Feel comfortable about the style in which you assert yourself. Some people speak very loudly and enthusiastically; people hear them clearly. Some people speak more softly and infrequently; they are heard equally clearly. Do not change your style. The key is to put into words exactly what you want or need.

Some general tips on being heard:

- Look the person you are talking to in the eye. If you are short or use a wheelchair, you will sometimes have to draw attention to yourself by speaking directly to the person. If he or she seems unwilling to look at you, you might find some clever – yet polite – way to say, "I'm right here!" How you do that will depend on your personality. For someone who is extroverted, that might mean carrying a red bandana to wave. For someone who is more introverted, that might mean speaking in a louder, stronger voice.
- Speak clearly and distinctly in whatever way you can. If you have a speech disability, calm your anxiety by trying to relax the muscles in your body, taking in deep breaths of air and exhaling slowly. Speak slowly and as distinctly as you can. Sometimes it helps to calm you by visualizing a soothing image, such as a mountain stream or a quiet meadow in springtime. You will find that your whole body will relax and that you will be able to focus on your thoughts and your message. If you are calm, the other person will relax and be able to concentrate on what you are saying. If you use a speech synthesizer to speak, you may want to give the person a little note explaining this device. You will think of other ways to communicate.
- Be courteous and polite; say "please" and "thank you."
- Do not be overly polite (obsequious).
- If the person addresses everyone around you, but not you, tell the person nicely and firmly that you speak for yourself and that you would like to be addressed directly.
- Think about what you want to say and how you want to say it before you begin speaking.

**Note:** Assertiveness also means that you don't attack others in stating your needs. For instance, you don't berate the store clerk because the counters are too high for you to see over. That complaint will need to be given to the store owner/manager. Assertiveness means that you stand up for yourself in an adult, responsible way. It is not aggressive; it is not passive. Remember to keep the balance! And to be yourself!

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