

Teaching Your Young Person about their Rights

As parents, you are your young person's first and most important advocate. An 'advocate' is someone who provides support to another person to help express their views and wishes. Advocating for your young person, and supporting them to learn to advocate for themselves, is important for all children but even more vital for children with a disability. This handout provides practical ways you can support your young person to understand and assert their rights related to therapy and support services as they grow.

What are Your Young person's Rights?

'Rights' are moral or legal guidelines that protect a person's values, identity and ability to live the life they want. All children have fundamental human rights, and these apply equally to children with disabilities. In the context of the NDIS, these rights specifically ensure they:

- **Are treated with dignity and respect:** Their unique needs, preferences, and choices should always be considered.
- **Are included and can participate:** They have the right to be part of their community, education, and social activities, just like any other young person.
- **Have their best interests as the primary consideration:** Any decisions made about their NDIS plan must prioritise what is best for *them*.
- **Are heard and can express their views:** Even young children can communicate their likes and dislikes. As they grow, their voice in decisions about their support becomes increasingly important.
- **Are safe from discrimination, abuse, neglect, and exploitation:** The NDIS system and all service providers must ensure their safety and well-being.

- **Can access appropriate support:** They have the right to receive the reasonable and necessary supports that will help them achieve their goals and participate in life.
- **Have privacy:** Their personal information and circumstances should be protected.
- **Can make complaints:** If something isn't right, they (or you on their behalf) have the right to raise concerns without being concerned about how people will react.

Why is it important for your young person to understand their rights?

- **Choice and Control:** The NDIS is all about choice and control. The more your young person understands their rights, the more they can really participate in decisions about their own life and supports.
- **Safety and Well-being:** Knowing their rights helps your young person recognise when something isn't right or if they feel unsafe, giving them the confidence to speak up.
- **Self-Advocacy:** Learning about their rights from a young age builds essential self-advocacy skills, which are vital for their independence and future.
- **Empowerment:** It empowers your young person, fostering confidence and a sense of ownership over their life.



How to talk about rights:

The way you explain rights will change as your young person grows and develops. Here are some ideas:

For Younger Children:

Focus on simple concepts of fairness, safety, and choice in their everyday life.

- **"My Body, My Rules":** Teach them about personal space and that they have the right to say "no" to unwanted touch. This is fundamental for safety and understanding consent.
- **Choice in Small Things:** Offer choices in daily activities ("Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt?", "Do you want to play with blocks or read a book?"). This helps them learn about the idea of them having a say about things in their life.
- **"What makes you happy?":** Ask them what activities they enjoy and make them feel good, this helps connect the idea of therapy and supports being for their happiness and well-being.
- **Simple Language that helps them understand:** When you first start talking about support services, use simple terms. "This person helps you learn to talk" or "This chair helps you move around." Focus on how the support helps *them*.
- **Expressing Needs:** Help them communicate their needs in whatever way works for them, for some children this is talking but there are lots of other ways (for example, using visuals, pointing, sounds, behaviour responses). Acknowledge and respond to their communication.

As they grow and understand more:

Introduce more specific rights and connect these rights to their supports.

- **"Fair Go" and Respect:** Discuss what it means to be treated fairly and with respect by everyone, including their providers. "Everyone deserves to be listened to."

- **Their Voice Matters:** Involve them in discussions about their NDIS plan and goals. Ask them: "What do *you* want to do more of?" or "What helps *you* at school?" For young people who express themselves in other ways pay attention to what they like, do not like and what is important to them by watching them.
- **Who Helps Me?:** Help them identify the different people who provide support and what each person does.
- **Privacy Explained:** Talk about privacy – who they share information with and what parts of their body are private. Explain that providers should always ask permission before touching them or sharing their information.
- **Speaking Up (Safely):** Encourage them to tell you if they do not like something a provider is doing or if they feel uncomfortable. Reassure them that you will listen and help. Remember not all young people tell us with words.

Further Steps:

Encourage greater self-advocacy and understanding of the NDIS system.

- **Direct Involvement:** Involve them directly in NDIS planning meetings (if they are comfortable). Support them to contribute their ideas their own goals and preferences.
- **Understanding Their Plan:** Help them read and understand their NDIS plan. Discuss what supports are funded and why.
- **Choice of Providers:** Explain that they have a right to choose who provides their supports and that they can change providers if they are not happy.
- **Making Complaints:** Discuss the process for making a complaint if they have concerns about a provider or their plan. Emphasise that this is their right and helps make things better.
- **Future Planning:** Talk about their long-term goals and how the NDIS can help them work towards an independent future.



- **Connect with Peers:** Encourage them to connect with other young people with disabilities who are also navigating the NDIS. Peer support can be incredibly empowering.

Practical Strategies:

- **Use Everyday Examples:** Connect rights to situations in their daily life (for example, "You have a right to choose your snack," "You have a right to feel safe at school").
- **Model Advocacy:** Let your young person see you advocating for them. Explain why you're asking questions or raising concerns with the NDIS or providers.
- **Visual Aids:** Use pictures, social stories, or simple diagrams to explain concepts, especially for children who are visual learners.
- **Role-Playing:** Practice scenarios where your young person might need to express a choice or a concern (for example, "What would you say or do if you did not want to do that activity?").
- **Empower Their Choices:** Whenever safe and appropriate, allow your young person to make choices about their supports. Even small choices build confidence.
- **Listen Actively:** Always listen carefully to your young person's feelings, even if they can't express them clearly. Their behaviour is also a form of communication that can help you understand.
- **Celebrate Their Voice:** Praise and encourage them whenever they express a preference or speak up for themselves.

By actively supporting your young person to understand their rights, you are laying the foundation for them to be confident, empowered, and in control of their own NDIS journey and their life.

More Information:

Child Rights : Key Concepts [Child Rights - Australian Centre for Child Rights](#)

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