



## **We Are the Voice - Self-Advocacy in Students with a Hearing Loss**

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As children develop and grow into young adults they need the confidence and self-belief to advocate for themselves.

Self-advocacy occurs when a person can speak or act on their own behalf to improve the quality of their life, effect personal change or correct inequality, which is particularly important for those with a disability. To be a successful self-advocate, one must have the ability to articulate one's own needs and make informed decisions about what is required to address these needs.

Before self-advocacy can occur, a strong sense of self-identity and self-belief needs to be present. Self-identity occurs when a person can identify, acknowledge and understand their own qualities, characteristics and needs. They have an understanding of, and are comfortable with, who they are.

In order to empower students with the confidence to advocate for themselves, a program was established. To be a powerful self-advocate students must first understand 'who they are' and 'where they fit in their world'. They need to have a strong self-identity as a person with a hearing loss who lives in the hearing world.

This presentation will focus on the practical tools that have been used with students to develop their self-identity and self-advocacy. Through participating in various activities, discussions and problem solving strategies within a trusting environment with like-minded students, they can begin to further understand themselves, build connections with each other and grow in self-confidence. The establishment of a mentoring program provided the students with opportunities to connect with, older students who also have a hearing loss and who are further along the journey of self-advocacy.