

Leadership & Advocacy

This document is adapted from Jack.org's many resources to train and equip young leaders to take action for mental health in their communities across Canada.

Objectives

- To understand that being a leader and an advocate is more than a title
- To think of leadership as a process of listening, reflecting, and representing your community
- To understand advocacy as the process of taking action that addresses your community's concerns surrounding a particular social issue

What is Leadership?

While leadership and management often go hand-in-hand, they are not the same thing. Managing a team's structure, progress, and work is an important part of being a team leader, but leadership involves so much more than that. It's a process of listening to your community, reflecting, and representing their interests, priorities, and concerns in the work you do. Listening is just as important as taking action in your community, as it informs the priorities you will address, the impact you have on your community, and who benefits from this impact. Incorporating the voices and experiences of the diverse population of people in your community is paramount for your success as a team leader.

What makes a good leader?

Leadership is less of a static identity and more of a process that requires constant reflection and improvement. There is no clear-cut definition of being a leader, and everyone has a unique leadership style that is dependent upon their skill-set and community context.

Think of a leader you admire. It could be a family member, a historical figure, a politician, or an athlete. Think of the qualities of this leader – honesty, delegation, communication, confidence, commitment, positive attitude, listening, creativity, inspiration, compassion, vision, courage, integrity, strategic planning, reflexivity, cooperation – then think of which of these qualities you have and which ones you'd like to strengthen.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is sometimes a vague and confusing term, but at the core it's quite simple: advocacy is the process of taking action to support a cause. Therefore, as you take action to create communities that are more supportive towards mental health, you're engaging in mental health advocacy.

One of the most important things to note about advocacy is that, like leadership, advocacy is a process and not a title. It's a process that involves continuous reflection and adaptation to meet your community's priorities as they evolve and change over time.

How Are Leadership & Advocacy Related?

Through critically reflecting on both of these topics, you should have a better idea of what it means to be an effective leader and advocate for mental health in your community. Leadership skills are not only beneficial for the purpose of advocacy, but they're essential for carving out your work. All of your advocacy work will require some of the leadership qualities discussed in this resource.

Don't forget – social change can be a slow process, and you may not see results in your community right away. With hard work and perseverance, you should observe a difference in your community's culture surrounding mental health within the first year. culture surrounding mental health within the first year.