

Defining Leadership & Advocacy

WELCOME! This document is adapted from Jack.org's many resources to train and equip young leaders to take action for mental health across Canada. We're thrilled to be sharing our learnings externally with this resource.

Objectives:

- To understand that team members are leaders with the purpose of mental health advocacy
- 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 is 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 your team 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.

ACTIVITY: What makes a good leader? (15 mins)

The purpose of this activity is to get the group thinking about leadership as less of a static identity, and more of a process that requires constant reflection and improvement. The group should also take away from this activity that there is no clear-cut definition of being a leader, and that everyone has a unique leadership style that is dependent upon their skill-set and community context.

Steps:

1. Ask everyone in your group to each think of a leader they really admire. This could be a family member, a historical figure, a politician, an athlete, or anyone! **(2 mins)**
2. Next, have each person write down the qualities of that leader that they admire. **(3 mins)**
3. Once they've created a list, ask each student to determine which of these qualities they feel they have, and which they would like to strengthen over the year. **(2 mins)**
4. Have the group pair up with someone else and each share what they've come up with, including: who they've chosen, their qualities, and which they have and which they'd like to strengthen. **(3 mins)**
5. Bring the group back together, and collectively share the qualities you've come up with and which ones you'd like to prioritize strengthening. Have someone record your findings. **(5 mins)**

Feel free to add some of the following to your list if they didn't come up in your group: honesty, delegation, communication, confidence, commitment, positive attitude, listening, creativity, inspiration, compassion, vision, courage, integrity, strategic planning, reflexivity, and cooperation.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is sometimes a vague and confusing term, but at the core it is quite simple: advocacy is the process of taking action to support a cause. Therefore, as your team takes action to create communities that are more supportive towards mental health, you are 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 is a process that involves continuous reflection and adapting to meet your community's priorities as they evolve and change over time.

ACTIVITY: What makes advocacy successful? (15 mins)

This activity will require the group to reflect on and discuss the types of advocacy that already exist within your community. Through critically reflecting on these examples, the group will gain perspective on what qualities make advocacy effective, and learn to be conscious of who is being reached and who is not being reached in the process.

Steps:

1. In pairs, have people discuss what types of advocacy take place in your community. *Remember, this means you're looking to name any actions that support a social justice cause.* **(3 mins)**

2. Choose 1-2 examples of advocacy, and in pairs discuss the following: **(8 mins)**
 - a. What issues are being addressed through this example of advocacy?
 - b. What is the goal of this advocacy? Is it clear?
 - c. What was effective? What could have been improved?
 - d. Who did this form of advocacy reach / not reach?
 - e. What changes resulted from this advocacy?

3. Come back together as a group and share what you've come up with. **(4 mins)**

How Are Leadership & Advocacy Related?

Through critically reflecting on both of these topics, your team should have a better idea of what it means to effectively be a leader and advocate for mental health in your community. Leadership skills are not only beneficial for the purpose of advocacy, but they are essential for carving out your team's work. All of the actions that your team does this year will require some of the leadership qualities discussed in this resource. Therefore, through the process of developing your team's leadership skills throughout the year, your mental health advocacy work as a group will also be strengthened.

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, most groups observe a difference in their community's culture surrounding mental health within the first year.