

# SPIILT MILK

THE IMPROV TOOL FOR HANDLING BIG FEELINGS!



**Lesson Eight: Advocates**



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## What is an advocate?

As we learned in Lesson 7...

An advocate is someone who supports or defends us. (Remember how we talked about being self-advocates and sticking up for ourselves? Well, an advocate is someone else who helps us!)

Advocates listen to us and consider what we think and how we feel. They help us understand what others are saying and what might be happening. They help us get in touch with people we need to speak to. They come with us to meetings - there, they sometimes speak for us or just sit beside us so we feel more comfortable.

This is why an advocate can be so helpful if we find ourselves in a stressful situation, like talking to the police or if there is trouble at school or any other time we feel like a situation is too much for us to handle on our own. We all need someone to lean on - someone to talk to and have comfort us - when we are getting overwhelmed. Finding a good advocate is a great way to make sure we can stay calm during a difficult experience.

So, who might make a good advocate to call on?

Well, an advocate has to be an adult, meaning someone older than 21. And it has to be someone who is good at communicating! (Our friends who never look up from their phone won't be very effective if they need to pay attention to something going on in the room!)

But it doesn't have to be someone who is related to you, like a parent or sibling or aunt or grandparent.



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The best kind of advocate is a trust adult.

This is someone whom you know well, who has supported you and listened to you in the past, and someone who wants you to be happy and healthy.

This might be a coach, a teacher, a boss you talk to about your life, a caregiver, or an adult friend.

There are also people who are paid to be advocates, like lawyers and attorneys, social workers, or support professionals.

If you are looking for an advocate to help you when the police want to ask you questions, a lawyer or attorney is a great person to call, because they understand the legal system and your rights. You can even call a trusted adult and they can call an attorney for you!

Be sure to let them know that you want to call your lawyer/attorney before you answer any questions the police may ask!

How do I know if I'm allowed to ask for an advocate?

We are always allowed to ask for an advocate when questioned by the police - it's one of our rights! (Remember from Lesson 7, a right is a freedom that no one can take away from us! When we have a right to do or have something, no one is allowed to say "no!")

If you let the police know that you want to attorney, they have to stop asking you questions until that attorney arrives.

If you are having trouble at work or school and feel like you need a trusted adult to be with you, you can always ask. However, the school or your boss has the right to say "no." In this case, having your coping strategies handy (like, in your head!) is perfect, because you can calm yourself down yourself. ...Which makes you your own advocate!



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So, how do I ask for an advocate?

It depends on what kind of advocate you need, and for what situation.

If you are approached by a police officer who wants to ask you questions or you are brought to the police station and questioned there, you should definitely ask for an attorney. Do not answer any questions - even if you're not in trouble - and say,

"I know I have the right to stay silent until I have an attorney, and I'd like to call one now."

If they try to ask you any questions before saying "yes" or "ok," or you call an attorney and the police want to ask you questions while you wait, you should say,

"I won't answer any questions until my attorney gets here.  
That is my right."

And it is your right! Even if you're not in trouble.

So no answering questions - or talking at all, really! - until your attorney comes.

If you feel the need for an advocate because of trouble or if you become upset at school or work, simply say to the person in charge:

"I'm feeling a little upset/overwhelmed right now. I'd like to call my (caregiver/support professional/cousin) to come be with me right now. Then I'll be able to talk with you more calmly."

If they allow it, just thank them and make the call!

If they do not, use one of the coping strategies you've learned from the 7 lessons we've gone through already. You've got this!



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Can I ask for an advocate if I'm non-speaking?

So many people communicate without speaking words - three million people in our country! And we all have the right to advocacy!

With the police: If you are able to write, use a pen and paper to make the request or type it onto your phone. If not, keep a communication card with you that has an advocate picture, like this:



or



or



I'd like an attorney, please.

I'd like an attorney, please.

I'd like an attorney, please.

(You can even cut out these pictures, cover it in thick, clear tape to protect it, and carry it around with you!)

And remember: no talking until that attorney shows up!

For school or work or if you need an advocate while in a store or the part, try these:



Can I please call my advocate?  
I'm feeling overwhelmed and  
would like their help to get calm.

Can I please call my advocate?  
I'm feeling overwhelmed and  
would like their help to get calm.





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What do I do while waiting for my advocate or lawyer?

For one, shhhhhhhhhhhh. We have that right to stay silent, so we should use it! No need to talk - just relax and look pleasant... and maybe practice your deep breathing! (Remember, *practice helps us remember things!*)

What if I can't seem to calm down?

We've all had those moments when our BIG feelings felt HUGE.

And sometimes we need someone to help us calm down.

There are some resources for you and your loved ones to keep on hand.

Feel free to cut out or copy the numbers below and keep it with you.

You can cover it in clear, wide tape to keep it from bending or tearing.

If you find you

need some extra help from someone who knows just what to say and do (but only if you really, really need it!), take it out and ask if you can make the call!

## **Crisis Services:**

**For adults (18+):**

**Division of Developmental Disabilities Crisis Response System (CARES):**

**1-888-393-3007**

**For children (under the age of 18):**

**Mobile Response and Stabilization Service Project**

**1-877-652-7624**



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## Discussion questions and exercises:

1. Think about the last time you became overwhelmed with uncomfortable emotions.
  - a. What did it feel like in your body?
  - b. How did you behave? (Meltdown? Shut down? Crying? Something else?)
  - c. Did you turn to someone for help or to talk about it with? How did they or didn't they help you?

*get up*  
**ON YOUR FEET**

Ask a volunteer to stand up in front of the group to play Advocate. The facilitator should join them and pretend to be very upset, then have Advocate calm them the way Advocate would prefer to be calmed by someone. What does that look like? How does their voice sound?

2. Think about all the trusted adults in your life - your family, the people you live with, the people who are close to you.
  - a. Who would you call if you needed an advocate?
  - b. Why would you choose this person?
  - c. Have you ever called on someone to be with you when you were upset? Why did you choose that person? What did they do to help calm you down?

*get up*  
**ON YOUR FEET**

Have two volunteers stand. The first volunteer will ask for an advocate (don't forget to explain why - "I'm feeling overwhelmed and I'd like to call..."). The second volunteer will say "no." The first volunteer should then practice how to respond to that (do they try again? Do they quietly accept that? Facilitator should be sure to reinforce the importance of staying calm and have appropriate responses.

**BONUS:** Have the first volunteer use a calming technique they have learned when they are told "no." Remind them to tell the other person, "I just need a moment to calm down. I can talk in just a minute. Thank you."



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## Calming technique spotlight: **AFFIRMATIONS**

What are “affirmations?”

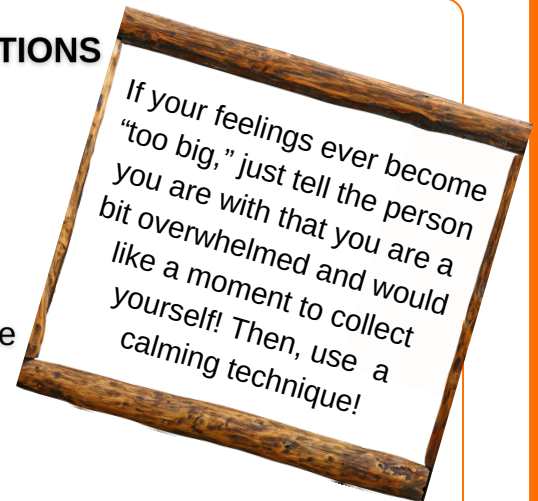
They are good thoughts about, well, you!

They are things we say to ourselves - whether out loud or in our head - that remind us how great we are.

Think about all the nice things we think and say about those we love: family, friends, pets, famous people who do good things. Now... say them about yourself!

Affirmations are also great for getting ourselves calm.

And the more we say (or think) them, the more we come to believe them!



How do I choose the right affirmation?

- Keep it simple and clear
  - What you say to yourself should be short and easy to remember!
  - Use as few words as possible to get the point across (or even just one word, also known as a “mantra!”)
- Make it personal
  - What you say should mean something to you
  - It should make you feel good to think and feel it!
- Have it relate to who you are
  - If you love sports, maybe make it sports-related
  - If you practice cooking, have it relate to your cooking skills!
- Focus on the *now*
  - Instead of “I *will be* strong,” say, “I *am* strong”
  - Remember how great you are today!
- Use positive language
  - Saying what you are is better than saying what you are not
  - Instead of “I am not mean,” say, “I am kind” - because you are!





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## Examples of positive affirmations (make yours as specific as you like!):

- I am worthy of love and respect.
- I believe in myself and my abilities.
- I am proud of who I am and all that I've accomplished.
- My opinion matters, and my voice deserves to be heard.
- I am deserving of happiness and success.
- Mistakes are proof that I am trying.
- I am confident in my ability to face challenges.
- I trust myself and my instincts.
- I have the strength to overcome obstacles.
- I can achieve anything I set my mind to.
- I am fearless and ready to take on the world.
- I am stronger than any challenge that comes my way.
- I have the power to persevere and keep moving forward.
- Every challenge is an opportunity to learn and grow.
- I am capable of finding solutions to any problem.
- I have the support I need to face difficulties.
- I am comfortable being myself and celebrating my differences.
- My uniqueness is my superpower.
- I am proud of the person I am.

## And for times of stress:

- I am in control.
- I am safe.
- I am here in my body.
- This moment will pass.
- I've got this!

Now, give yourselves a big round of applause and go do some improv!