



Brighton and Hove Speak Out Code of Practice for Paid and Volunteer Advocates

Speak Out aims to:

- Support people with a learning disability living in Brighton and Hove to speak up and be heard or show others what is important to them.
- Protect their rights and interests and challenge discrimination people with learning disabilities face
- Help to break down the barriers that prevent people with a learning disability from living a full life in the way that they choose.

What is Issue Advocacy?

Issue advocates work with their advocacy partner to address a particular issue in their life. The advocacy support ends when this issue is resolved

What is Citizen Advocacy?

A volunteer 'advocate' is matched with a 'partner' who has a learning disability. Over time advocates support their partner to speak up or show what is important to them. The partner is supported by the volunteer to be in control of what happens in their life and find opportunities to be involved with community life if that is their wish.

This Code of Practice is based on the Advocacy Charter applies to both paid and volunteer advocates - <https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/new-advocacy-charter>

By being a Speak Out advocate (paid or unpaid), you are agreeing to follow the advocacy aims and practice outlined in this code.

Volunteers play a very important part in helping Speak Out to do its work and achieve its aims. This code explains what support volunteer advocates can expect from the organisation and Speak Out staff.

Advocates Code of Practice

1. Clarity of purpose

1.1 Speak Out advocates will ensure that potential advocacy partners are clear about the support an advocate can offer them and the boundaries of the advocate's role. Advocates should not act outside these boundaries.

1.2 Advocates (or Speak Out staff supporting volunteers) will inform key people in the service user's life about their advocacy partnership and the role of the advocate. Speak Out will do this with consent from the advocacy partner. They should provide written information about Speak Out, plus a copy of this Code of Practice to other professionals, carers and service users if requested.

1.3 Issue Advocates will ensure that their advocacy partner is clear and in agreement about the issue(s) to be addressed and that they both know when the advocacy work will be completed. Advocates will work with an Advocacy Plan to achieve this.

1.4 An advocate should not take on the role/work of a paid support worker, social worker or other service provider.

2. Independence

2.1 An advocate is entitled to raise any questions regarding the advocacy partner's issue(s), which they **and** their advocacy partner feel require attention. Such matters should be raised with the most appropriate person e.g. staff providing services, relatives, social worker etc. If key people around the service user are obstructive in their response to an advocate, the advocate should seek support and advice immediately from their Speak Out supervisor.

2.2 Advocates should respect the role of relatives and people providing a service to their advocacy partner whilst maintaining their independent status.

2.3 Advocates should take all appropriate steps to avoid conflicts of interest occurring in their work with service users. If an advocate is unsure what to do because of a 'conflict of interest' they should contact the Speak Out staff for support and advice. If a potential conflict of interest is identified a conflict of interest form should be completed.

3. People Led

3.1 Advocates working for Speak Out will treat service users with dignity and respect at all times.

3.2 Advocates should ensure advocacy support is appropriate to the service user's needs and/or expressed wishes.

3.3 Advocates should take instruction from service users wherever possible. Advocates should base their actions on mutually agreed plans and preferred outcomes, and work in partnership with service users to achieve this.

There are some situations where advocates can act without instruction:

- Although people with profound disabilities may not be able to give spoken consent, they may find ways of expressing their feelings and preferences by a range of means e.g. through actions, facial expressions or signing.
- In situations where it is difficult to find out their partner's view then the advocate should do what they think is best for their partner and work with a model of non-instructed advocacy (**See Speak Out's Non-Instructed Advocacy Policy**). If the advocacy is non-instructed then the advocate should endeavour to get a balanced view of a situation by gathering the views from a range of people who support their partner. If the advocate has any doubts they should discuss the situation with Speak Out staff.

4. Empowerment

4.1 Advocates will encourage and support their partner to self advocate wherever possible. Where this is not appropriate the advocate will take the time to ensure they are clearly instructed by their partner.

4.2 Service users should know how they can contact their advocates if they need to. This may be via the Speak Out office.

4.3 Service users should be supported to give feedback about their experience at Speak Out. They should know how to complain if they are unhappy with their advocate and wish to change them (**see Speak Out's Comments and Complaints procedure**).

4.4 Service users should have information about other opportunities as they arise to get further involved in the organisation such as joining other projects or groups and if appropriate applying for volunteer roles or becoming a member of Speak Out's Governance Board.

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 Speak Out is committed to equal opportunities and believes that everyone should be treated fairly and without discrimination. Speak Out recognises that some people may be treated unfairly or face discrimination as a result of a range of characteristics, including a person's ethnicity or ethnic origin, gender or gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, age, disability, class, political affiliations etc. Advocates must work in accordance with Speak Out's Equality and Diversity Policy to challenge discrimination and ensure that no one faces unfair treatment in their involvement at Speak Out.

5.2 Advocates should make sure that they treat their partner in an equal way and that they encourage others to include them and not to discriminate against them in daily life.

6. Accessibility

6.1 Advocates should respond positively to requests from service users to meet in places and at times which are mutually convenient. Where necessary, the advocate should make arrangements for accessible meeting places which are acceptable to the service user. Advocates should ensure that privacy is maintained in the chosen meeting place in order to protect the person with learning disabilities

6.2 Advocates should make every effort to ensure that information they have gathered on behalf of the service user is accessible and understandable to them.

7. Safety

7.1 A risk assessment will be completed for each advocacy partnership, to ensure the safety of both the advocate and the service user. This will be reviewed if circumstances change, or at least annual via a partnership update for long term citizen advocacy partnerships.

7.2 All advocates must follow the Speak Out's '**Lone Working Policy**' and should not knowingly place themselves in any situation which may compromise their personal safety.

7.3 An advocate will be insured by Speak Out's Employer's Liability and Personal Accident insurance, which covers volunteers. A copy of each insurance certificate is displayed at the Speak Out Office.

7.4 It is not Speak Out's policy to expect volunteers to transport service users in their own vehicles. If volunteers feel there are exceptional circumstances while working as someone's advocate, they should discuss this with their advocacy line manager prior to any agreement with a service user (**also see 'Car Safety Policy'**). Any advocate who takes a service user in their car is must check with their insurance company that they are covered to do so.

7.5 Advocates will, in some instances, need to undergo training provided by the trained staff working for the Service Provider supporting their advocacy partner. This training will be relevant to the specific needs of advocacy partner to enable effective advocacy.

8. Supporting advocates

8.1 Advocates must be prepared to undertake appropriate training and receive ongoing support and regular supervision from their Speak Out line manager or the Volunteer Coordinator. Supervision should provide advocates with the opportunity for reflection and analysis of their own practice.

8.2. The nature and frequency of supervision will be agreed with volunteer advocates individually and may vary depending on their experience and the advocacy issues they are working with

8.2 Supervision for Citizen Advocates will generally take place quarterly. Telephone and email support will be given as and when needed in between supervision.

8.3 Citizen Advocacy partnerships (both advocate and partner) will meet with Speak Out staff for a partnership update every 6 months. This meeting is to review how things are going and to think about the next steps in the advocacy partnership.

8.4 Paid issue advocates will receive regular supervision from Speak Out staff, at least every 6 weeks.

8.5 Paid advocates will have an Annual Appraisal against agreed targets.

8.6 Paid and volunteer advocates should ensure they have access to, and know how to use, a wide range of information resources including but not exclusive to, books, journals and the internet which are accurate and up to date.

8.7 Advocates can claim reasonable 'out of pocket' expenses by completing and submitting a claim form each month (see below for details).

9. Accountability

9.1 Advocates should conduct themselves in a professional and responsible manner in all dealings with service users, carers and other service workers. Where disputes do arise, these should be referred to their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

9.2 Volunteer advocates are expected to make a commitment of a minimum of 12 months volunteering for Speak Out. However, if your circumstances change at any time or you are no longer able to maintain this commitment, you must contact Speak Out staff to discuss the situation immediately.

9.3 A Citizen Advocacy partnership will last for as long as both people want it to. If either person should decide that they wish to end the partnership, Speak Out staff must be informed as soon as possible. When partnerships end Speak Out staff will assist in this process and try to ensure that this is a positive experience for both parties.

9.4 Advocates will maintain regular contact with the service users they are supporting:

- If an advocate is unable to attend a pre-arranged meeting they **must** inform their partner and other key individuals.
- Advocate should plan ahead so that their partner is clear when the next meeting will be.
- Arrangements should be made that are mutually convenient and fit in with other commitments.
- Advocates are expected not to make any commitment that they cannot fulfil and should be clear with their partner about the limitations of their role.

9.5 From time to time, Speak Out staff may contact the advocacy partner to see how things are going.

9.6 Advocates should never do the following:

- Handle their advocacy partner's money
- Enter into any financial transactions with their advocacy partner e.g. Catalogue sales, loans etc.
- Borrow money or accept gifts from their advocacy partners. Advocates should speak to their line manager if a situation occurs where it would cause offence if a small gift were not accepted (**see Speak Out's Receiving Gifts policy**).
- Witness any legal documents without first discussing it with their advocacy line manager.
- Breach the boundaries of their advocacy role by entering into an inappropriate personal or intimate relationship with service users.

10. Recording Information

10.1 Advocates should comply with the organisation's **Data Protection (GDPR) Policy** and the Data Protection Act 2018 and ensure service user information is kept securely and monitoring information is routinely collected and fed back to the organisation.

10.2 Advocates should follow **Speak Out's Case Management and record Keeping Guidelines** and keep accurate and up to date written records of action taken and progress made with their work. Case notes will be held securely on Speak Out's database. Speak Out are obliged to hold case notes for three years after a case has been closed, thereafter information will be deleted.

10.3 Whilst working on a case, volunteers should hold any paper case notes in a secure location on their own device or PC that is password protected. Any paperwork must be stored in a locked cabinet or lockable box.

10.4 When a case ends volunteer advocates must promptly return any related paperwork to Speak Out and delete case notes from their personal devices and PC's after all case notes have been forwarded onto Speak Out.

11. Confidentiality

11.1 Information given to an advocate by or about their advocacy partner will remain confidential unless an advocate is instructed by their partner to disclose the information to others. An advocate will **only** disclose information to others without permission if there is a strong belief that the service user is at risk of harm or could harm others (See Safeguarding below). In such instances the advocate will first let their partner know what information is to be disclosed and why (**see Speak Out's Confidentiality Policy**).

11.2 Advocates should:

- Let service users know that they receive supervision and will be required to discuss their work with their line manager on a regular basis.
- Inform the service user about all actions taken on their behalf.
- Disclose to the service user full details of all communications and correspondences that concern them in a way that they can understand.
- Avoid colluding with hearsay and speculation about a service user.
- Ensure that all written information kept on a service user is securely stored and routinely updated and checked for accuracy.

11.3 A service user has a right to be present when an advocate is discussing his or her circumstances with another agency.

11.6 A service user has a right to see any information about them recorded by their advocate.

11.7 An advocate's personal details will **not** be given to a service user or their carer's/service providers unless agreed by the individual advocate. Correspondence can be made via the Speak Out Office or a work mobile phone or email address.

12. Safeguarding

12.1 Advocates should be clear with service users at the start of an advocacy partnership or case about the level of confidentiality they can realistically guarantee. This means explaining any conditions under which confidentiality may be breached (e.g. harm to self or others, abuse) and the means by which this may occur.

12.2 If an advocate suspects their advocacy partner has been abused, financially, physically, emotionally or sexually a safeguarding alert should be made. Advocates should discuss their concerns with their line manager first if possible. Advocates should be familiar with the policy and guidelines produced by Brighton and Hove Adult Services on '**Safeguarding Adults at Risk**'. Advocates should follow these guidelines in responding to suspected abuse.

13. Complaints

13.1 Advocates should ensure that service users are made aware of their right to make a complaint about the advocate or Speak Out. This will involve giving service users a copy of **Speak Out's accessible Comments and Complaints leaflet** and explaining the various stages of the complaints process to them at the start and during the course of the relationship; and being open to criticism and suggestions without becoming defensive.

13.2 Any complaints received by the advocate in the course of their work, whether verbal or written, should be passed on to their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

Summary

Speak Out expects Advocates to:

- Stick to this Code of Practice
- Stay in regular contact with people they are advocating for and respond promptly to emails and correspondence
- Take part in regular supervision
- Take part in training relevant to their role to help improve skills and the quality of advocacy delivered:
 - Paid advocates will undertake the national Qualification in Advocacy (QIA)
 - Volunteers will attend at least 2 Advocacy Forums and take part in at least one training event each year
- Be aware of issues that may be relevant to their advocacy role

I have read, understood and agree to work in accordance with Brighton and Hove Speak Out's Code of Practice for Advocates.

I have also read, understood and agree to work in accordance with the following Speak Out Policies and guidelines:

- Confidentiality Policy
- Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk – Policy and Guidelines
- Non-instructed Advocacy Policy (if appropriate)
- Complaints Policy & Procedure
- Guidelines for Case Management and Record Keeping
- Lone working policy
- Volunteer Policy

Signed (Advocate)

Print name.....Date.....

Signed (Speak Out manager/ Volunteer Coordinator)

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Print name.....Date.....

The following policies are available for reference on Speak Out's website. Paper copies can be provided if requested:

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Data Protection (GDPR) Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy

If volunteers for any reason fail to act within this Code of Practice, this will be addressed in the first instance in supervision. Where deemed necessary, corrective action may be taken following supervision. Examples of corrective action include the requirement for additional support and training, close monitoring of work, or staff disciplinary action.

Volunteers who continue to not adhere to the rules and procedures laid out within their Code of Practice, or who fail to perform their volunteer work may be asked to finish volunteering at Speak Out. No volunteer will be asked to leave without the opportunity to discuss the reasons with their project lead or Volunteer Coordinator (See Volunteer Policy).

This Code of Practice will be reviewed annually.

What Volunteer Advocates can expect from Speak Out staff:

1. Speak Out staff will provide induction training to help volunteers advocates prepare for their role.
2. Speak Out staff will introduce volunteer advocates to their potential partners and facilitate the initial stages of the relationship. Staff will ensure that relevant information is exchanged using useful communication tools.
3. Speak Out staff will assist advocates and their advocacy partners to work out the advocacy role(s) or issues to be addressed. This will be ongoing.
4. Speak Out staff will take responsibility for ensuring that key people or organisations learn about the roles of advocates and where appropriate receive a copy of this Code of Practice.
5. Speak Out staff will provide ongoing support and advice. The form and frequency of this support will be negotiated between Speak Out staff and the volunteer advocate.

6. Speak Out staff will help the advocates work out their own training needs and seek to meet these. Training may take place internally at Speak Out or with other approved trainers

7. If a crisis arises and Speak Out staff are not available at the office, advocates should seek emergency assistance from key people in their partner's life or the community support duty team. Speak Out staff will get in contact with the volunteer advocate as soon as possible.

8. Speak Out will ensure that volunteer advocates are insured in the following areas:

- Professional indemnity
- Public liability
- Personal accident

9. Speak Out staff will maintain direct contact with and seek feedback from service users about their experience of having an advocate.

10. Speak Out staff welcome and will seek feedback from both advocates and service users about the effectiveness of all aspects of Speak Out's work. If volunteers have specific comments or complaints that they wish to make confidentially, then they should use Brighton and Hove Speak Out's 'Comments and Complaints procedure'.

11. Speak Out aims to make volunteering both a valuable and enjoyable experience. Therefore, if after volunteering for 6 months volunteers would like their supervisor at Speak Out to be a referee for a job application, they will do so.

12. All Volunteer Advocates can claim expenses. These must be reasonable expenses including travel expenses, parking, and light refreshments where meetings may occur in community venues, along with other necessary costs incurred in their role such as postage, phone calls. On occasion volunteers can claim for the cost of supporting their partner in a community activity, however this should be discussed and agreed with the volunteer co-ordinator beforehand.

13. Advocates and advocacy partners will be invited to Speak Out's socials and events which occur throughout the year.