



LESSON:  
**PEER ADVOCACY**

**What's the Big Idea?**

Advocacy can be a means to ensure others' inclusion and sense of belonging at school.

## Curriculum Links

Social Justice, Social Studies, Leadership

## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain the meaning of *advocacy* and the forms it can take.
- Apply this knowledge to their school environment.
- Understand their agency in *promoting* inclusivity through direct action.
- Support their peers in a mature manner.

## Opening Motivator

Students learn the meaning of advocacy and are introduced to an advocate for people with disabilities, Rick Hansen.

## Main Activity

Students work in groups to brainstorm peer advocacy solutions for school situations.

## Conclusion

Students present their proposed solution to the class.

### Advocate Case Study: Rick Hansen

Ever since his spinal cord injury at the age of 15, Rick Hansen has advocated both for himself and for others with disabilities. He showed what was possible by graduating from high school and going on to become the first person with a disability to earn a degree in Physical Education from the University of British Columbia, overcoming physical and attitudinal barriers along the way. At the age of 27, Rick went on to raise awareness on a global scale by wheeling around the world in his wheelchair as part of the Man In Motion World Tour to show the potential of people with disabilities. On his return he set up the Rick Hansen Foundation, which continues that work to this day. Rick also continues to raise awareness for the rights of people with disabilities through public speaking and his work with government, businesses and not-for-profits.



## Lesson

Option to hand out copies of *Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet* for note taking and completion of activities.

### Opening Motivator - *Defining Advocacy, Examples of Youth Advocates*

Do you know the word “advocacy”? What/who do you associate with this word?

**Definition of advocacy:** demonstrating your support of a cause, a person, or a group of people.

**Forms of advocacy:** speaking up for someone, signing a petition, educating others about a topic.

Introduce students to the story of Rick Hansen, a noteworthy disability advocate using the “Advocate Case Study” on page 2. You can display his story on the board or distribute copies of it to students.

### Main Activity

**Introduce the term peer advocate.**

**Definition of a peer advocate:** someone who advocates on behalf of a peer, a classmate, or someone of a similar status and/or age as himself or herself.

#### Part A. Peer Advocacy Situations

Hand out copies of *Peer Advocacy Situations*.

Each group reads a peer advocacy situation. Students brainstorm and propose a potential advocacy solution for the issue at hand.



Invite students to discuss the questions below before deciding on a solution.

- Is there a need for advocacy in this situation? How do we know?
- Is someone intentionally harming another person in this situation? Could it be unintentional or even friendly joking around? What are we uncertain about?
- What are the risks of advocating for someone in this situation?
- What are the potential benefits of advocating for someone in this situation?
- Do the benefits for someone else outweigh the risks to me?

#### Part B. Sharing Solutions

Students share their proposed peer advocacy solutions with the class. If more than one group responded to the same advocacy situation, have groups compare and contrast their solutions.

## Lesson (continued)



### Teaching Tip

Allow students to assign names to the students in their advocacy situations. Names are absent here to avoid gender bias.

As groups present, have students identify one advantage and one disadvantage to each solution. Students can take notes on Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet.



### What conditions lead to successful advocacy?

- An understanding of the problem/ challenges
- An understanding of a solution
- Specific wording that invites collaboration and resolution
- A motivated individual or group to assume responsibility for articulating the challenge and the solution to the



appropriate audience needed to create change

- Support from others, especially authority figures
- Timeframe: immediate response in some situations and more long-term strategy in other situations

### What are the risks in advocacy?

- You might be the one who gets bullied or threatened
- You might be perceived as a bully or aggressor

### How do you navigate these risks?

- Advocate with others, organize a group to collectively take a stance
- Know what you are going to say and say it confidently
- Use language that is non-antagonistic. (e.g. “I know you might not intend to... but I feel uncomfortable when I see/ hear ... because it looks like...”)
- Offer specific suggestions for how a situation can be remedied
- Don’t become a bully yourself



## Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet

**A. Write and expand upon definitions and personal understanding of the following:**

Definition of **Advocacy**: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Forms of **Advocacy**: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Read your Peer Advocacy Situation, discuss the questions below, and propose a solution.**

Peer advocacy situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there a need for advocacy in this situation? How do we know?
2. Is someone intentionally harming another person in this situation? Could it be unintentional or even friendly joking around? What are we uncertain about?
3. What are the risks of advocating for someone in this situation?
4. What are the potential benefits of advocating for someone in this situation?
5. Do the benefits for someone else outweigh the risks to me?

Proposed Solution:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

.....

What conditions lead to successful advocacy?

\_\_\_\_\_

What are the risks in advocacy?

\_\_\_\_\_

How do you navigate these risks?

\_\_\_\_\_

How do you deal with failure in advocacy?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Peer Advocacy Situations

### Situation 1

Discuss the five questions from *Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet* and then brainstorm a possible peer advocacy solution to the problem presented. You will share your proposed solution with the class. If your solution includes “seeking advice” or “talking to someone,” be as specific as possible – what specifically would you say (or not say) to certain individuals?

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You hang out with a group of friends you have known since pre-school. You are a tight knit group that likes the same things:

One day you notice a new student who uses a wheelchair. You notice the new student is sitting alone eating lunch. The new student smiles at people, tries to start conversations, and seems to be trying to make friends. The new student seems like a nice person and the only real difference you see is that the new student uses a wheelchair.

The next day you notice a friend purposefully avoiding the new student. Another friend talks to the new student but in the way she would talk to a 6-year-old. The new student does not look very impressed. You are unsure about approaching the new student. You fear either saying something offensive or doing the wrong thing by offering help. You wonder whether it is appropriate to ask about the new student’s disability.

Recently you have noticed your friends referring to the new student as ‘the gimp’. Sometimes they purposefully block the new student’s path in the corridors. One day a friend approaches the new student in what looks like an offer of friendship but asks what it is like to take the special short bus to school.

It looks like the new student is giving up on making friends at school. The new student seems to be withdrawing and no longer even attempts to talk with others. You really like your friends, but something doesn’t feel right.



## Peer Advocacy Situations (continued)

### Situation 2

Discuss the five questions from *Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet* and then brainstorm a possible peer advocacy solution to the problem presented. You will share your proposed solution with the class. If your solution includes “seeking advice” or “talking to someone,” be as specific as possible – what specifically would you say (or not say) to certain individuals?

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Your school recently decided to introduce wrestling to its Physical Education program. During one of the wrestling classes, you notice Student A is being more aggressive than usual, specifically towards Student B. Both Student A and B are on the wrestling team, and it just so happens that your gym teacher is the wrestling coach. Student A is definitely one of the coach’s favourites and is generally a very popular student in school.

You find it odd to see Student A acting so aggressively, especially in gym class, where there is no need for intense competition. You feel uncomfortable, but you think that if something was really wrong, your gym teacher (the wrestling coach) would say something to the students. You think it’s not your place to suggest a teacher isn’t doing his or her job properly.

But later after class, you notice Student B has some bruises. Is this really just friendly competition between two teammates or could the situation be more serious than that? Do you do something or trust your gym teacher will maintain control of the situation?



## Peer Advocacy Situations (continued)

### Situation 3

Discuss the five questions from *Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet* and then brainstorm a possible peer advocacy solution to the problem presented. You will share your proposed solution with the class. If your solution includes “seeking advice” or “talking to someone,” be as specific as possible – what specifically would you say (or not say) to certain individuals?

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A new student in your school has Down Syndrome. Throughout the school day, this student, Student A, has an aide who helps ensure on-time arrival to classes and positive social interaction with classmates. One of the most popular students in school, Student B, loves to say hello to Student A in the halls. Many teachers appreciate Student B’s support and friendliness towards Student A.

However, you noticed that Student B often tells Student A, “Do your impression! Do your impression!” at which point Student A will make an animal sound and a funny face. Student B finds this hilarious and encourages friends to watch and laugh as well. Student A’s aide often tells Student A, “Enough. That’s enough.” The aide doesn’t seem to find it funny, and you don’t either. You aren’t sure if Student B has bad intentions. You wonder if you should do something, but teachers seem to applaud Student B’s acknowledgement and friendliness towards

Student A. Besides, if someone like Student B hasn’t ever known a person with Down Syndrome before, how can you make them aware of the impact and implications of their behaviour?



## Peer Advocacy Situations (continued)

### Situation 4

Discuss the five questions from *Introduction to Advocacy Worksheet* and then brainstorm a possible peer advocacy solution to the problem presented. You will share your proposed solution with the class. If your solution includes “seeking advice” or “talking to someone,” be as specific as possible – what specifically would you say (or not say) to certain individuals?

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You and a group of your friends formed a private Facebook group that you use to plan events. Sometimes the events are school-related but other times they are just parties you want to throw. The number of members in this group has grown, and the group feels more like acquaintances than friends.

You’ve recently noticed less friendly wall posts than usual. You are thinking of removing yourself from the group, but you don’t want to lose friends or fall out of favour with others in the group.

After your group’s most recent event you and others uploaded photos of the party and added tags, comments, etc. One comment in particular bothered you, as it suggested one student at this party was acting in embarrassing ways. You know this student is very shy and tries not to stand out in a crowd. You think the comment is false and purposefully antagonistic. You know this student is going to be deeply hurt by the comment. In fact, the next day

you notice this student is not at school, and everybody is talking about what this student supposedly did at the party.

In your mind you think, “that’s it. I don’t want to be part of this group anymore.” For a second you consider talking to a teacher at school. However, your school has a policy that Facebook activity outside school hours is not the responsibility of the school. Therefore, no teachers or administrators have jurisdiction over this incident. But now a simple online comment has turned into school-wide gossip...

What do you do?

To find out more or download our resources, visit  
[www.rickhansen.com/schools](http://www.rickhansen.com/schools), call **1.800.213.2131**  
or email [schools@rickhansen.com](mailto:schools@rickhansen.com).



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