Transition Guide: Self-Advocacy

step
Support and Training for Exceptional Parents

Empowering Students to Request Assistance and Support

What Is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy is the empowerment of students to recognize their abilities and to ask for assistance when needed without using their limitations as a crutch.

How to Communicate Your Needs

Share information in a way that works for you:

❖ Talk verbally in person or over the phone.

❖ Write in letter, email, or text.

❖ Use technology such as speech to text software or augmentative communication devices if that is easier for you.

❖ Use pictures and photos, or video yourself, sharing your concerns and needs.

However you choose to share your information there are several things to remember:

❖ You know yourself best. Believe that your opinions have value.

❖ You can use a tool called a personal profile. It will help you understand yourself better and express yourself to others.

❖ Be sure you know about your disability and how it effects your learning and performance, and your actions and reactions.

❖ Know the things you like about yourself.

❖ Share things someone should know about you.

❖ Let others know how to successfully support you.

Courtesy of inclusion-international.org

Check Out These Resources

♦ Leadership development, PATH **planning around an individual's desires and strengths** www.tnmicroboards.org

♦ **A Guide to Self Advocacy "Speak Up"** https://gcdd.org/images/Reports/speaking-up-booklet-final.pdf

♦ **Plan a Perfect Life** - budgeting and planning tool. http://www.tnstep.org/pdf/A-Perfect-Life.xls

♦ **Vocational Rehabilitation Service Locator -** help with job training, employment accommodations, resume development, and job seeking skills coaching. www.tennessee.gov/humanservices/topic/vocational-rehabilitation

♦ **Partners in Policy Making** - leadership training and skills development in the area of self-advocacy. https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/cdd/training-and-news/leadership-training-and-development/partners-in-policymaking.html

♦ **Self-Awareness Booklet** - http://www.tnstep.org/uploads/files/Dude%20Transition%20Book%20-%20Final.pdf

Rate Your Advocacy Skills

- Do you have a basic knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 laws and understand how they relate to you?
- Do you regularly utilize the natural supports in your life? Those supports that occur in your home, job, church, school, or community can be a valuable tool.
- How are your communication skills? Do you ask questions or make requests with respect and clarity?
- Do you keep clear and accurate records of requests you make and the responses of others?
- Do you know your education/transition plan well enough to remind teachers and staff what supports are available to you?

Steps to Self-Advocacy

Connect with other advocates through training opportunities and disability organizations to gain knowledge and practical skills.

1. Identify what is difficult for you
2. Develop a list of things that might help
3. Learn any laws or policies that support what you need
4. Invite people to work with you
5. Plan if/then responses to be prepared
6. Role-play with a friend or teacher to practice your skills
7. Carry out the plan
8. Schedule meetings and document your concerns
9. Evaluate your success and look for ways to improve the next time
10. Thank those who helped you
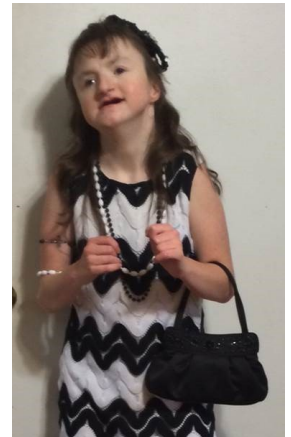
Tips for Students, Parents and Teachers

Students can learn self-advocacy skills, special education laws, Section 504, and other related topics that will prepare students to advocate for themselves. Here is one example: www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow.html

Teachers and parents can use questions to prompt students through requests as they begin learning to advocate for themselves. "What would make school better?", "What would make that task easier?", "What can I do to support you as you make that important decision?".