

SELF-ADVOCACY & STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself. It is an important skill for students with disabilities. It helps them understand what they need, talk about their needs, and be a part of making decisions about their learning and life. Below is a simple guide to explain what self-advocacy is, why it matters, and how it can be practiced.

Why it is important for Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities may face unique challenges at school and in daily life.

Learning to speak up for themselves can make a big difference. Self-advocacy helps students to:

- Become more independent and feel more confident
- Make sure their learning plans (like an IEP or 504 Plan) are working for them
- Ask for help or changes when they need them
- Get ready for life after school, like going to college, getting a job, or living on their own

Self-advocacy means being able to speak up for yourself. It includes:

- ✓ Knowing what you are good at and what you need help with.
- ✓ Understanding your rights and what you are responsible for.
- ✓ Telling others what you need and what works best for you.
- ✓ Making smart choices about your life.

IMPORTANT SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

Knowing yourself – Understanding your disability, how you learn best, and where you may need help.

Knowing your rights – Learning about the rules and laws that help students with disabilities, like IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA.

Talking clearly – Being able to explain what you need and ask for help in a respectful way.

Solving problems – Finding ways to fix or work through challenges

Making choices – Being part of the decisions about your learning and future.



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Teaching and encouraging self-advocacy in school helps students with disabilities take charge of their learning and their lives. When schools, families, and communities work together to support this, students can grow stronger, face challenges, and do their best.

CHALLENGES TO SELF-ADVOCACY

Sometimes it can be hard for students to speak up for themselves. Some challenges include:

- Not feeling confident or being afraid of what others might think.
- Not fully understanding their disability or the help they have a right to get.
- Not getting the right support from adults or getting too much help, which can stop them from learning to be independent.

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS LEARN SELF-ADVOCACY

- Teach it clearly – Make sure students learn how to speak up for themselves in class.
- Practice with role-play – Let students act out how to ask for help or explain what they need.
- Include students in meetings – Let students join their IEP meetings and share their thoughts.
- Create a safe and kind space – Make sure everyone feels respected and included.
- Use buddy support – Older students can help younger ones learn how to speak up and be confident.

Helpful Resources

- [SPAN Youth in the Know](#)
- [SPAN Parent Advocacy Network](#)
- [Self-Advocacy at a Glance](#)
- [Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center](#)

Scan the QR code for more resources

