

## Step 1

### Get to Know Yourself

Think about all the things that make up your personality...your strengths, needs, hopes, fears and talents. The more you know about yourself, the easier it will be to advocate for what you want or need.

Think about these questions:

#### What do you want to do after high school?

Being a self-advocate means asking questions and finding out what you would really like to be doing after you graduate high or finish high school. Self-advocates speak up for themselves to let others know what they need. When you advocate for yourself, you can be more involved in planning for your future. It is important [to learn about self-advocacy skills](#).

- Do you want to work after high school and if so what kind of a job would you like?
- Do you want to take classes, learn a trade, or attend a vocational school or college?
- What classes do you need to take in high school to help you get where you want to go?
- Do you want get a driver's license and do you need any specialized training to get one?
- When do you want to complete high school?
- Do you want to participate in [Early College](#) or [Dual Enrollment](#)?
- Do you know what [Flexible Pathways](#) to graduation is?
- After high school, where do you want to live and who you would like to live with?
- What do you like to do for fun?

#### [How do you learn?](#) What do you need to be successful?

- How do you think you learn best:
- What services and accommodations will you need to be successful in school?
- What will you need help with after you complete high school?

#### How can you communicate your needs to others?

Here are some suggestions that will help you explain your needs to others:

- Identify the skills a person needs to be an effective self-advocate
- Find out how you can learn these skills as part of your education

## Speak Up For Yourself and Your Future

- Speak up when things are NOT working
- Make suggestions about what teachers can do to help you learn and what works best for you
- Talk to your parents and teachers about your educational evaluation and what information means
- Talk with parents and teachers about how they think you learn and what they think your strengths and needs are

### Step 2

**Identify the help you need and the people who can help you.**

Being a self-advocate means you can ask for help when you need it. Think about the people in your life who can support you:

- Members of your family
- Your friends
- Your special educator or case manager
- Vocational rehabilitation transition counselor
- Guidance counselor
- Other teachers
- Doctors and other health professionals

Think about things you might need help with and who might be a good person to ask for each kind of job:

- Getting connected to jobs
- Solving problems
- Getting information
- Improving school services
- Finding a place to live
- Feeling better about yourself
- Learning to live independently
- Managing health care needs

### Step 3

**Play an active role in your IEP or 504 meetings.**

Practice your self-advocacy skills by [taking an active part in your meetings](#). At these meetings, your teachers, parents, and others will be talking about your education program or 504 plan. [Your IEP meeting is a great place to practice self-advocacy skills](#). They will also talk about your plans for the future. To plan for the meeting, you

## Speak Up For Yourself and Your Future

will need to work with your special educator. [You can be your own best advocate!](#) You can ask your parents, teachers, or other people for help.

Some questions to think about and actions you can take to get ready for a meeting:

- Do you want someone to come with you to support you or help you explain your ideas?
- Do you know who has been invited to the school and what is going to be discussed at the meeting?
- Did you make a list of what you want to talk about and the questions you want to ask?
- Do take your list to the meeting and make sure you talk to your special educator or case manager on how you would like the meeting to run so that you are included in the meeting.
- Use your [IEP meetings to learn how to advocate for yourself](#).
- [Develop a sample self-advocacy plan](#).

### Step 4

#### Practice speaking up when you do not like something.

Self-advocates speak up about what they want and need, and they also speak up about what they do not want. It is your right to refuse something you do not like. A good way to speak up about things you dislike is to use “**I messages**”. Here are some examples:

- If someone says you did not try hard enough to do something, you might say, “When you say I didn’t try hard enough, I feel hurt because I was trying my best.”
- If people are making decisions about your education without asking you first, you might say, “When you make decisions about me without asking my opinion, I feel left out, because I would like to have a say about my education”.

“**I messages**” also work well when you want to speak up about things you like or to praise or thank someone else.

- “When you all pitched in to clean up, I was glad because things go much easier when we work as a team”.
- “When you made me laugh, I was cheered up, because I could tell you really care about me”.

## Speak Up For Yourself and Your Future

### Step 5

#### Get to know your communication style.

Your communication style is how you get information across. Self-advocates choose a communication style that fits their personalities and that gets their wants and needs met. To find out what kind of communication style you have, answer these questions:

- When you try to communicate, do others understand your message most of the time?
- Do people respond pleasantly when you try to give them information?

If you responded NO to either of these questions, ask your parents, friends, teachers or others to help you understand and improve your communication style.

### Step 6

#### Find out what happens when you turn 18.

- At age 17, the school must tell you that all your special education rights will transfer to you. At age 18, you will have the right to make your own educational decisions, unless you have a guardian.
- A guardian is a parent or other adult who has the power to make legal decisions for you.
- Most people become their own legal guardian at age 18
- Talk to your parents or guardian about making decisions for yourself when you turn 18
- Also, remember to register for the selective service if you are a male age 18.

### Step 7

#### Continue to be a self-advocate after you finish high school.

Speaking up for yourself and your future is something you will do for the rest of your life. As you grow, your wants and needs may change, or you may find new people who can help you or new things you need help with. Self-advocacy is a lifelong process.

## Take Charge of Your IEP and Transition Plan

When you are involved in planning your education, your teachers and others will better understand your goals and what is best for you.

### What is Special Education?

Special education includes programs and services for students with disabilities to help them succeed in school. If you receive special education, you also have an IEP.

### What is an IEP?

An Individualized Education Program, or IEP, is a written plan that describes:

- Your strengths, interests and needs
- Special services the school will provide
- Skills and goals that you will accomplish during the school year
- Where your learning will take place
- Accommodations you will need to succeed in school

Your IEP needs to be reviewed every year so that you and the people on your team can decide what changes should be made. [Chart your own future, your IEP can help!](#)

**Tip:** [Use your IEP meetings to learn how to advocate for yourself!](#)

### What are related services and accommodations?

[Related services](#), such as assistive technology, counseling or speech therapy, help you make the most of your education. [Accommodations](#) help you meet a need. Examples include a piece of equipment, a change in school assignment, or extra time on tests.

### Why do I need an IEP?

A law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004 for short) requires that students with disabilities who receive special education services have IEP's. The IDEA requires that you have as part of your [IEP a transition plan](#) for what you want to do after you complete high school.

### What do I need to [think about when I make my transition plan?](#)

Your transition plan describes the classes, services and accommodations you will need to prepare for your future. This plan will include information about:

- **Post-secondary (after high school) or vocational training** -You will decide whether you want to go to college or technical school.

## Take Charge of Your IEP and Transition Plan

- **Job preparation** -To get ready for work, you will need to think about the kind of job you would like to do and the kind of skills and education you will need to do this job.
- **Independent living** -After high school, some students continue to live at home while others find an apartment or group living situation. Think about whether you will be living on your own or with others after high school and with help you may need with activities of daily living. Think about things like how to budget, manage your money, what kind of transportation you may need and training you may need in those areas.
- **Community experiences** -After high school, you will need to think about what you want to do for fun outside of your home and the accommodations you may need to participate in the activities you enjoy. Think of your interest and the clubs, sports and social experiences available in your community.

### When should I start thinking about my [transition plan](#)?

When you turn 16 or before, your IEP should describe the classes you will take to help prepare you for the future. Think about your goals, needs, dreams, hopes and interests before the age of 16. [You can be your own best advocate!](#) Person centered planning helps the IEP team gather this information. At 16, the school is required to have your transition plan written (but you need to have given input!)

- Classes could be college preparatory or vocational, or they could teach you independent living skills or include specialized driving instruction.

At or before age 16, your IEP should describe the services you need to help you accomplish your goals for the future. Services might include:

- Helping you find a job
- Helping you write a resume
- Identifying the supports you may need in your community
- Learning how to describe your disability and how it affects your learning or needs in the workplace.

Your IEP and transition plan should include information about your interests and choices even if you do **NOT** attend the IEP meeting.

### Why do I need to be part of the IEP meeting?

At IEP meetings, the team will be talking about your education program. Your opinions are important, and others need to hear what you want and what works best

## Take Charge of Your IEP and Transition Plan

for you. [Your IEP meeting is a great place to practice self-advocacy skills.](#) Here are some questions to answer before attending a meeting:

- Do you want to invite someone who can help you explain what you want? If so, who?
- What goals do you want to include in your education plan?
- What services and supports do you need?
- Who will help me with services and accommodations?
- Do you understand your evaluations and are they up to date?
- [Have you developed a sample self-advocacy plan?](#)

Your evaluation identifies the accommodations and services you will need in school.

### What happens when I turn 18?

At age 17, the school must tell you that all your special education rights will transfer to you. At age 18, you will have the right to make your own educational decisions, unless you have a guardian.

- A guardian is a parent or other adult who has the power to make legal decisions for you.
- Most people become their own guardian at age 18
- It's important to talk to your parents or guardians about making decisions for yourself when you turn 18

### What about going to college?

If you want to go to college or a technical school, some may require you to take an entrance test like the ACT or SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or Accuplacer test. If you think you need accommodations start the planning early. They take time to apply for and your special educator, guidance counselor, parents or guardian can help you.

### Will I have an IEP after I finish high school?

After high school, you will not have an IEP. If you go onto college or a technical school, you may qualify for accommodations under a 504 plan. You do not need to be on a 504 plan to go to college. They will determine if you qualify for accommodations. The college you attend will want to know what accommodations you need and how the college can help you succeed. Before you can get accommodations, you will need to send the college an up to date (not older than 3 years old) evaluation of your disability.



## Take Charge of Your IEP and Transition Plan

Remember, you are not alone! There are many people to help with your education plan!

- Family
- Friends
- Special Educator or 504 case managers
- Voc Rehab Transition counselors
- Guidance counselors
- Doctor or other health professionals