

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 ([self-advocacy handbook](#)).

- 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 \(Questionnaire\)?](#) 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

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- 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 ([Tips from I'm Determined](#)). 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

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plan for the meeting, you 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.