



Special Considerations for Maximizing Student Success: Supporting Self-Advocacy

Developed by Psyched Services
December 2023




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Training Guidelines

To get the most out of this training, please take a moment to review the following guidelines:

- Download all training materials prior to starting video
- Have pen and paper ready
- Learn, so that you can *do*!




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Learning Objectives

At the end of this webinar, participants will be able to:

- Define self-advocacy and how it relates to students receiving mental health services
- Demonstrate understanding of how self-advocacy is linked to social-emotional learning
- Identify ways to help students with disabilities advocate for services and supports that meet their needs



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What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy for students = ensuring that they can effectively communicate their needs.
Sounds simple, but it involves multiple components..



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Prerequisite Skills

Students first need to:

- Know, understand, and accept their diagnosis and challenge areas
- Know their strengths and their rights
- Understand their needs
- Know what supports benefit them
- Identify who in their sphere they can ask questions or for help



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Key Elements

- Self-awareness and taking responsibility
- Knowing, understanding, and describing strengths, disability, needs, and goals
- Speaking up by communicating those needs and requesting supports from the right individuals who can help



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Self-Reflection

Prior to today, what have your thoughts and beliefs been related to self-advocacy? Were they positive, negative, or neutral?

After learning a little more about self-advocacy, have your thoughts changed?



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Self-Reflection Follow-Up

My answers...



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What is the Relationship between Social-Emotional Learning and Self-Advocacy?

- Both contribute to overall student well-being
- Neither are fixed; they can both be developed
- There are evidence-based interventions (EBIs)
- EBIs are correlated with positive school outcomes
- Skills in each of the five SEL areas are necessary for successful self-advocacy

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SEL Competencies Related to Successful Self-Advocacy

- Self-Awareness:** Knowing one's strengths, challenges, and goals
- Self-Management:** Regulating thoughts, emotions, and behaviors
- Relationship Skills:** Communication and collaboration
- Social Awareness:** Empathy and perspective-taking
- Responsible Decision-Making:** Considering and deciding on solutions



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Self-Advocacy and Mental Health Services

Self-advocacy allows students who are receiving mental health services to:

- Acknowledge and articulate their needs
- Increase their own and others' insights
- Request relevant approaches and supports
- Actively participate in their services



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Self-Advocacy and Mental Health Services

Self-advocacy allows students to:

- build a community of support
- decrease stigma and promote awareness
- increase resilience, coping, and self-efficacy
- develop a sense of ownership and empowerment
- increase independence



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Self-Reflection

What have your experiences been with self-advocacy as an educator?

Any negative situations?

Any successes?

Any situations in which you wish a student HAD self-advocated but didn't know how?



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Self-Reflection Follow-Up

My answers...



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Self-Advocacy as a Social Justice Issue

There are persistent gaps in outcomes for students with disabilities:

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics:
 - In 2022, 21.3% of individuals with disabilities were employed (compared to 65.4% without a disability).
- According to the National Council on Disabilities (2015):
 - Up to 85% of the population in juvenile detention facilities have disabilities that would qualify for special education services.

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Barriers to Effective Self-Advocacy: Disability Shame

Students with disabilities:

- May experience stigma and prejudice due to their learning and/or behavioral differences
- Often struggle to develop a positive worldview related to integrating the challenges they encounter into their self-concept
- Experience feelings of insufficiency, which can then result in negative outcomes, such as maladaptive behaviors and underachievement

(Izzo & Horne, 2016)



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Barriers to Effective Self-Advocacy: Lack of Meaningful Involvement

- Research consistently shows minimal active participation by students in their IEP process
- Students report feeling that their opinions are not truly considered or valued



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What is Meaningful Involvement?

Active participation and engagement looks like:

- Attending meetings
- Participating in discussions about their own strengths, challenges, and interests
- Advocating for accommodations
- Contributing to postsecondary goal-setting
- Facilitating the IEP meeting
- Taking on a leadership role in the educational decision-making process



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Benefits of Self-Advocacy

When students are skilled self-advocates, they may experience:

- Self-confidence in their ability to succeed
- A belief in using abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes
- A positive attitude toward work and learning
- An understanding that postsecondary education/vocational training and lifelong learning are necessary for long-term career success



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Self-Reflection

Can you think of additional barriers and/or benefits to self-advocacy that you have experienced in your school(s) or with your student(s)?

Refer to the activities that reflect active student engagement. Where is your school currently on that continuum for students with IEPs?



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Self-Reflection Follow-Up

My answers...



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How to Support Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities

Teaching students the importance of self-advocacy

- In school
- In therapy/counseling
- For their future



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How to Support Self-Advocacy In School

Help your students:

- Know Their Needs
 - The better students know how their disability affects them, the more effective they can be in determining what assistance they need
- Practice Assertiveness
 - Ensure that your students know their rights and can vocalize their needs
- Develop Self-Confidence
 - Fight against any shame and encourage a positive self-image
- Utilize Support
 - Make sure that your students feel safe to ask questions and accept help and support



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How to Support Self-Advocacy: Counseling

Work on self-advocacy skills in counseling by:

- Role modeling
- Role playing
- Using hypothetical examples
- Practicing real-life examples
- Providing corrective feedback
- Encouraging and supporting
- Following up



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How to Support Self-Advocacy For The Future

- Assess past/current accommodations/supports and how they transfer to postsecondary activities
- Learn about different types of work/vocational/postsecondary supports for different areas of need/disability categories
- For vocational training, collaborate with vocational rehabilitation and/or job coach when available
- For college, brainstorm ideas with the Disability Services Coordinator



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Self-Reflection

Think of two or three classroom examples in which students could appropriately use self-advocacy strategies.



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Self-Reflection: Self-Advocacy Examples

- Asking for additional explanation or clarification
- Requesting extra time for an assignment
- Requesting to redo an assignment
- Advocating for the use of additional learning supports, such as visual aids, copies of notes, or lecture recordings
- Asking for directions to be repeated
- Requesting that a long-term assignment be broken into shorter segments



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How to Support Self-Advocacy In the IEP Process

- Add self-advocacy IEP goal(s) if it is an area of need (hint: it's almost always an area of need)
- Encourage and promote student engagement in their education process by pre-teaching and practicing skills
 - IEP meetings (or 504 meetings when relevant)
 - Transition meetings



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Self-Advocacy In Pre-IEP Meetings

Prior to IEP meetings, staff members can prepare students during an individual pre-meeting, small-group, and/or whole-group lesson to:

- Explain their disability(ies) to others
- Set goals for themselves
- Share with IEP team members what works and does not work
- Ask for accommodations
- Accept help from others
- Be active participants in their IEP meetings



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What if a student is reluctant to attend?

- Encourage students to come to the meeting for a few minutes and share what is and is not working
- Help them write down ideas, questions, and concerns ahead of time
- Practice or role play what to say and how to introduce oneself
- Assign them a responsibility within their area of competence/comfort, such as introducing team members at the beginning of the meeting
- Have them tell team members about their interests, strengths, and/or desires for the future
- Explain to the team how their disability is impacting them at school



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Additional Collaboration

- Before the meeting:
 - Write the agenda for the IEP meeting
 - Create goals
 - Identify accommodations
- At the end of the meeting:
 - Summarize the meeting highlights
 - Review decisions, updates, and/or changes to the plan
- After the meeting:
 - Debrief their reactions and feelings about the experience
 - Praise their participation



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Questions for Students to Consider

- What are my strengths?
- What do I want to learn or work on improving this year?
- What are my special concerns?
- How do I learn best?
- What do I need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for me?
- What positive information about myself can I share at the meeting?



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Self-Reflection

What are some questions you could teach students to ask of their teachers in order to self-advocate?



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Self-Reflection Examples: Self-Advocacy Questions for Students to Ask Teachers

Can we try it a different way?
 Can you help me with something?
 Can you explain this to me?
 Can we set up a time to talk about this?
 Can I do part of this later?
 Can I have extra space to write these answers?
 Can I use a dictionary or spell check?

For additional information: <https://www.understood.org/articles/self-advocacy-sentence-starters-for-kids>



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Downloadable Resource: Student Worksheet for IEP Meeting Page 1



STUDENT WORKSHEET FOR IEP MEETING

Name _____ Date _____

List a few of your greatest strengths.

What are some of your favorite things to do?

List a few things that seem harder for you than other students your age.

Provide a few examples of your recent success, both inside and outside of school.



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Downloadable Resource: Student Worksheet for IEP Meeting Page 2



What has gone well this school year?

What has been a struggle this school year?

What do you think would be helpful to include in your IEP?

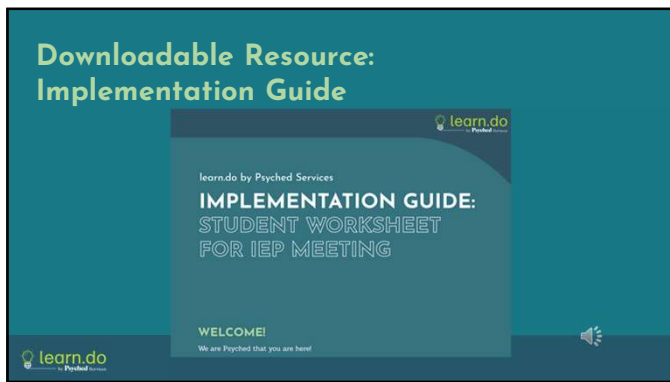
What are your personal goals for this school year or next school year?



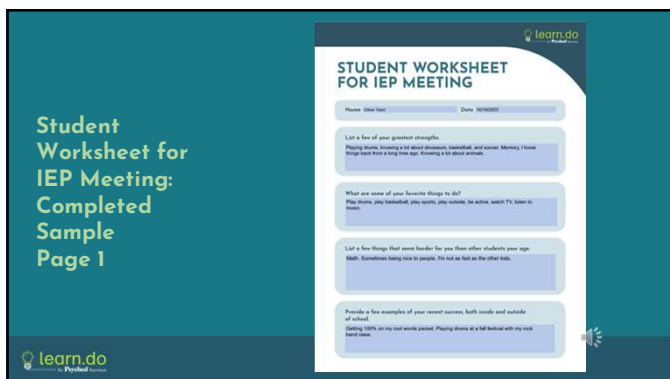
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Next Steps: What is Your Action Plan?

- Teaching your students about self-advocacy
- Addressing prerequisite and SEL skills
- Increasing meaningful involvement (reducing barriers, encouraging participation)
- Scheduling pre-meetings with students
- Conducting small-group or classroom-wide self-advocacy lessons
- Practicing through role plays
- Using the learn.do by Psyched Services Student Worksheet



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Post Test



Participant Survey



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