

BUILDING ADVOCACY AND LEARNING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Know Yourself, What You Need, and How to Get It

KNOW YOURSELF

Step 1: Accept Your Disability

Before you can advocate for yourself you have to admit to yourself that you really do have a disability. Now is the time to admit to yourself that you have some difficulties and may need some accommodations in order to be successful.

Tip: Disability is a natural part of the human experience and it is ok to be comfortable with it. Encourage your teachers to include disability topics in the classroom and let others know that it is ok to ask questions about your disability.

Step 2: Educating Others About Your Disability

You cannot be a successful self advocate if you continue to hide your disability. Naturally, you can't expect teachers to provide appropriate accommodations if they do not know about your disability. When you can be honest about your disability, you will find that you no longer feel ashamed and embarrassed about your disability.

Tip: Make sure you let teachers and others are aware of your disability but also let them know that if you want to talk about it that you will do it and that they should not be the ones doing it for you.

Step 3: Understand Individualism

Negative assumptions about people with disabilities often lead to lower expectations of students with disabilities, and can also have serious consequences. Just because you may have a disability, it does not mean that you can not accomplish goals similar to your peers who do not have disabilities such as education, marriage, employment, driving, etc.

Tip: Teachers or others may have had experiences with people who may have a similar disability as yours in the past, but it is

important for you to let them know that you may not require or even want the same accommodations as others with similar disabilities. Each person's situation is unique and should be handled on an individual basis.

KNOW WHAT YOU NEED

Step 4: Know Your Rights

In order to be an effective self-advocate you need to be aware of the rights that protect people with disabilities. You need to educate yourself about disability laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and how they apply to the needs of people with disabilities.

Tip: Call a disability advocacy organization such as an independent living center or do research on the internet to get information on the legal rights of persons with disabilities.

Step 5: Know Your Responsibilities

It is your responsibility to inform teachers, case managers, employers, etc. of your own individual accommodation needs. It is then their responsibility not only to provide needed accommodations but also to inform you and/or your parents of your rights as they apply to transition planning and IEP's.

Tip: Be a self-advocate. Go to and participate in your IEP meetings.

Step 6: Planning for Transition

Transition is an ongoing process which requires thinking ahead to ensure that you have the resources and accommodations needed to achieve success. Traditionally, students with disabilities often do not plan for long term goals. To be a strong self-advocate you need to think about where you want to be and how you are going to get there.

Tip: It is important for you to be actively engaged in decision making while determining your goals for the future. Professionals and parents should keep in mind that it is your life. Therefore, the

teacher and parents should assist in the achievement of goals, rather than setting goals they deem appropriate.

HOW TO GET IT

Step 7: Utilizing Support Systems

Even an effective self advocate needs support. Good advocates know how to ask questions and how to get the help they need. It is important to have supportive people you trust to go to for advice and support in achieving your goals.

Tip: Identify and utilize a supportive network of individuals including family member, friends, teachers, case managers, and doctors etc.

Step 8: Identifying and Accessing Resources

It is crucial to become familiar with available local and national resources and agencies that can provide assistance in information and referral, financial assistance, skills training, and career planning just to name a few.

Tip: Network with local agencies to learn about the resources that are available and how to go about accessing them. A good place to begin is to contact your local independent living center.

Step 9: Taking Action

Now that you have learned the basic steps of self advocacy, it is up to you to decide how to utilize these steps to accomplish your advocacy needs and goals. Although these steps lay the basic foundation for effective self-advocacy, it may be necessary to modify the steps to fit individual circumstances.

Tip: Get out there and take it upon yourself to learn self-advocacy and leadership skills!!! No one is going do it for you so get out there and get what you need and get what you want.

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