

## How Parents Can Support Self-Determination

Most people would agree that self-determination begins in the home. This applies to all children. Parents typically transfer more responsibility and control as a child develops the skills to handle the new demands. When and how this occurs is different for each family, but the goal is the same - provide the basis for an independent and productive adult.

For children with disabilities, this may be a very different process. While their parents may be aiming for the same outcomes, they are often more heavily invested in protecting their children from making the "mistakes" other children utilize to learn important lessons for taking on more responsibility. A mistake-free upbringing, while comforting to parents, may cost their children valuable experiences that contribute to good citizenship.

To counter this, parents should be welcomed to take advantage of their excellent position to foster self-determination outside of school. Good practice would include collaborative planning and instructional strategies with school and community agency staff to assure consistency and a well-rounded set of experiences. Below are some suggestions for parents to help their child become self-determined:

Walk the tightrope between protection and independence. Allow your son or daughter to explore his or her world.

While there are obvious limits to this, all parents have to "let go," and it is never easy.

Discuss with your child his or her disability, learning strengths and needs, and how he or she learns best.

Include your child in conversations with others during planning meetings -even through, listening he or she can learn about collaboration and problem solving.

Provide opportunities for making plans and choices within the home routine.

Include your child in family discussions and decision-making sessions. This is good modeling for future meetings.

Self-advocates need to be informed and organized in order to be effective. Help your child become organized and prepared for meetings and other activities that involve decision-making.

Self-worth and self-confidence are critical factors in the development of self-determination. Model your own sense of positive self-esteem for your child. Help your child to feel good about what he or she does well.

Provide opportunities for your child to meet adults with disabilities as a way to learn from the experiences of others.

A sign that someone is an effective self-advocate is when he or she demonstrates the ability to positively influence others. Encourage your child to tell others when their efforts are appreciated.

It is never too early to start including your child in meetings with teachers. Ask the facilitator at school conferences to make time for your child to report progress and express concerns.

Help your child prepare for meetings or conversations with teachers and other situations involving his or her education.

Take the time to help your child write down or rehearse what he or she would like to discuss. Modeling and role-playing are good ways to practice. The student's input and involvement should increase as he or she moves through school.

Self-advocacy skills need to be modeled, role-played, practiced and evaluated. Providing extensive assistance in the middle school/junior high years will produce greater expectations for independence in high school.

Consult with your child's teachers about strategies and suggestions for teaching self-advocacy skills.

Involve your child in planning and implementing IEPs, treatment plans or Plans of Care.

Help your child set goals and evaluate performance for learning and assess progress in achieving these goals.

Recognize how difficult self-advocacy can be and support the attempts your child makes.

<http://www.selfdeterminationak.org/parents.html>