

Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Guide

Foundational Understanding

In the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, section 1400 (c) (1) states, "Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities."

Teaching students with disabilities to exercise self-determination and self-advocacy is one of the important ways educators prepare them to engage in equally in educational and employment opportunities in order to live independent adult lives.

Section 1 – Describing the Need

The purpose of this guide is to assist teachers and other school personnel to understand the importance of teaching self-determination and self-advocacy for students with disabilities. Self-determination and self-advocacy skills support students in their efforts to work toward their measurable postsecondary goals.

Research indicates that students with disabilities are lagging behind students without disabilities in post-school outcomes. Fiedler and Danneker (2007) explain that students with disabilities face the following difficulties after exiting high school:

- Lack of employment or underemployment.
- Achieving independent living.
- Lack of connection to their communities.
- General dissatisfaction with their lives.

Self-determination and self-advocacy skills can help students with disabilities to improve the achievement of their postsecondary goals as well as other personal goals.



Elements of Self-Determination

Choice Making The skill of selecting a path forward between two known options Cm	Decision Making The skill of selecting a path forward based on various solutions that have each been thoughtfully considered Dm	Problem Solving The skill of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues Ps
Goal Setting & Attainment The ability to develop a goal, plan for implementation and measure success Gs	Self-Regulation The ability to monitor and control one's own behaviors, actions and skills in various situations Re	Self-Advocacy The skills necessary to speak up for and/or defend a cause or person Ad
Internal Locus of Control The belief that one has control over outcomes that are important to one's life Lc	Self-Efficacy Belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish specific tasks Ef	Self-Awareness The basic understanding of one's own strengths, needs and abilities Aw

Section 2 – Defining Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

What do we mean when talking about self-determination and self-advocacy? One of the most comprehensive definitions of self-determination reads as follows, self-determination is:

A combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society (Field et al., 1998, p. 10).

Simply stated, self-determination skills are those skills needed to effectively manage one's own life.

The I'm Determined website, a project of the Virginia Department of Education, describes self-determination and the power component, self-advocacy, in a table of elements that represent the skills, abilities and understandings students need to advance in self-determination.



Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is technically included as an element of the skills clustered under self-determination. However, some have rightly recognized it as a stand-out skill. "Self-advocacy has been identified in research as a power component among the numerous self-determination characteristics, and one that educators may have a high impact contribution in teaching, fostering and improving in students" (Fiedler et al., 2007).

Communicating one's needs, wants, strengths and preferences is vital to autonomy and self-control for individuals. The Project 10 website describes self-advocacy as follows:

Self-advocacy is recognized as the ability to speak and act on behalf of oneself or a cause. Self-advocacy is an important skill that students use in their youth and throughout life. Self-advocacy skills include being assertive, knowing one's rights, negotiating and speaking up for oneself or a cause.

Self-advocacy skills are essential for navigating life after completing high school. Accessing postsecondary education or training that students need to establish themselves in careers, community life and independent living are dependent on strong and consistent self-advocacy and other skills in the self-determination skillset.

Section 3 – Self-Determination Instruction

Teachers play an important role in the students' development of self-determination skills. Educational researchers report the following:

- Teachers' attitudes toward students can have a positive or negative impact on the students' self-esteem (Scott et al., 1996).
- Teachers need sufficient understanding of self-determination and its importance to all students, especially students with disabilities. ". . . without training and support, teachers may not have the resources or knowledge to implement self-determination instruction" (Shogren et al., 2014, p. 445).
- Passionate teachers enhance the quality of student learning in all subject areas.

The connection between informed, passionate teaching and student learning can be explained as follows:

- Students benefit from teaching that comes from a place of strong understanding and belief in self-determination. Informed, passionate teaching helps students to consider the topic important and are inspired to work hard rather than being forced to work.
- Students benefit from teachers who work to develop respectful relationships with their students. Students learn that they are valuable individuals with important things to learn and do.
- Students benefit from teachers who are dedicated to helping their students understand the relevance of what they learn. Students are motivated to learn when they see the connection to the world outside of the classroom (Fried, 2001).

The universal design for learning (UDL) framework is an ideal strategy for providing self-determination instruction to any student while also maintaining accessibility for all students. UDL gives all students the options to choose how they engage in learning; receive information; and express what they are learning. [The Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\) UDL Guidelines](#) explain that the structure of learning options within the UDL framework supports self-determination through opportunities for choice-making and by strengthening the student's connection to learning (2018). Because UDL is easily used with a wide range of students, learners find what they need on the scale of more challenge to more support (Gronnenberg et al., 2015). Secondary transition researchers explain, "Teachers wanting to provide secondary transition instruction along with academic skills can use the UDL checkpoints overlapping with secondary transition to help guide their planning" (Bartholomew et al., 2018, p. 246).

Bartholomew and Griffin (2018) developed a [Universally Designed Secondary Instruction Checklist](#) that assists teachers to consider how to use UDL to secondary transition principles and academic instruction through UDL. A few examples from the checklist are included as follows:

- Have you provided instruction on identifying interests, preferences, strengths, and needs?
- Have you provided instruction on how to set appropriate goals based on interests, preferences, strengths, and needs?
- Is the instruction on goal-setting specific to the academic task or do the students learn a general goal-setting strategy that can be applied across academic tasks?
- Do the students learn a general choice-making strategy that can be applied across tasks outside of academics (e.g., work, home, social situations)? (Bartholomew et al., p. 247-248)



**The Passionate Teacher -
"Someone who is in love
with the field of
knowledge, deeply excited
about the ideas that
change our world, and
closely interested in the
potentials and dilemmas
of young people who come
to class every day"**
(Serin et al., 2017, p. 60).

**Research demonstrates,
that when teachers are
trained in teaching self-
determination, greater
gains are observed in their
students' self-
determination skills and
there is an increase in their
students' opportunities to
use self-determination
skills. (Shogren et al.,
2014).**

Section 4 – Instructional Ideas for Teaching Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

The instructional suggestions listed in this section are aimed at the classroom. Families can also use and support these ideas at home.

Choice-Making – The skill of selecting a path forward between two known options

- **Model positive choice-making.** Discuss everyday choices students make.
- **Provide opportunities for students to make choices every day,** such as multiple options for homework assignments, project styles and assessment methods.

Decision-Making – The skill of selecting a path forward based on various solutions that have each been thoughtfully considered

- **Analysis of Options** – Ask students to write down a decision they need to make. Instruct them to write down all of the possible choices. Next, the students should list the outcomes of each possible choice. Students then weigh the outcomes and make the decision that helps them to achieve the outcome they want. Use a decision tree framework if visualization of the decision options would be helpful.
- **Pro-Cons List** – Another angle on decision analysis in the pro-cons list. A pro-cons list is a simple tool used to record and compare the advantages and disadvantages for the available alternatives. In the television series, "The Gilmore Girls", Rory Gilmore was an avid pro-cons list writer. When she was making her decision about which college to attend, she used a pro-cons list to evaluate the alternatives.
- **Use literature to identify important decisions.** Discuss decisions that were made and why they were made. Discuss other options that could have been considered.

Problem-Solving – The skill of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues

- **Create a culture of problem-solving.** Having problems is a normal part of life for everyone. Solving problems is also normal. Humans solve problems at all ages and sizes. Help students learn to name the problems they are experiencing and recognize problem-solving strategies that are not working. Identify productive solutions to try.
- **Model useful problem-solving skills.** Demonstrate patience and persistence in solving problems that emerge in the classroom. Describe the strategies that you are using as you use them or ask students to identify how you are resolving the problem.
- **Strategies to Teach Problem-Solving:**
 - "Teach within a specific context. Teach problem-solving skills in the context in which they will be used. . . Do not teach problem solving as an independent, abstract skill.
 - Help students understand the problem. In order to solve problems, students need to define the end goal. This step is crucial to successful learning of problem-solving skills. If you succeed at helping students answer the questions 'what?' and 'why?' finding the answer to 'how?' will be easier.
 - Ask questions and make suggestions. Ask students to predict 'what would happen if. . .' or explain why something happened. This will help them to develop analytical and deductive thinking skills" (Teaching Problem Solving Skills, n.d., paras 3-8).

Goal Setting and Attainment – The ability to develop a goal, plan for implementation and measure success

- Use a variety of assessments that help you and the students to better understand the students' strengths, preferences interests and needs. Assist students to see the connections between the assessments and goal setting. (See the list of assessments in the self-awareness section.)
- Encourage students with IEPs to attend their IEP meetings and participate in the writing of postsecondary measurable goals and annual goals. Students may want to make leading their IEP meetings a goal.
- Use goal setting in the classroom. Assign students to write goals for their learning and performance outcomes.

Self-Regulation – The ability to monitor and control one's own behaviors, actions and skills in various situations

- **Assist students with self-regulation by using familiar routines.** When routines change, prepare students in advance and help them to plan how they will respond.
- **Students will use the Analysis of Options exercise** to evaluate a past decision about a specific behavioral choice. It works like this: Identify the outcome of that choice. Was that the preferred outcome? If not, identify other choices that could have been made to achieve the desired outcome.

Self-Advocacy – The necessary skills to speak up for and/or defend a cause or person

- Encourage students with IEPs to attend and participate in their IEP team meetings.
- Provide example situations for students to practice self-advocacy. Ask students to determine how they would advocate for themselves in the situation. A sample situation: John spent four hours studying for a biology test. He hoped to make at least a passing grade or higher. When he got his test back, he was disappointed to find out that he failed the test. John's IEP indicates that he can have someone read the test questions to him, but he did not ask for a reader and the teacher did not offer that option. Ask the students to identify multiple ways John could advocate for himself, such as the following:
 - Ask the teacher if a reader can be provided for all future tests and quizzes.
 - Ask if the test can be taken again with a reader.
 - Ask the teacher about tips for test preparation.
 - Invite a guest speaker related to the area in which you teach. Ask the speaker to work in some information about times when they needed to speak up for themselves or advocate for others.



Internal Locus of Control – Belief that one has control over outcomes that are important to one's life

Internal locus of control can be a slippery concept for students to grasp. Locus of control (LOC) refers to whether individuals believe their lives are controlled by themselves or by external factors. If students have an internal locus of control, they generally see themselves in control of their own life events. On the other hand, if students have an external locus of control, they generally attribute the cause of their life events to factors outside of themselves. Strategies that teachers can use to help students develop internal locus of control include the following:

- Developing attribution pattern: Teachers should exercise extreme caution when evaluating a student's performance. Help students to understand that most failures can be connected to temporary factors that they can change or control, such as assignment completion, amount of study time, the need to ask questions or request help, etc.
- Analyzing the strengths: Teachers can help students to recognize their individual strengths. When students are aware of their strengths, it helps them to exercise and build those strengths. It also helps students to develop more confidence in themselves (Shinde et al.).

Self-Efficacy – The belief in one's ability to succeed in special situations or accomplish specific tasks

- Integrate the recognition of student strengths into learning. Encourage students to recognize their value by helping them to see the connections between their efforts and their successes.
- Make sure that your students know that you believe they are capable.

Self-Awareness – The basic understanding of one's own strengths, needs and abilities

Student assessments are an excellent way to assist students to learn more about themselves. These assessments can also be used to measure student growth in self-determination skills. Included below are free assessments that can be found online and cover a range of skills and interests.

- [AIR Self-Determination Assessments \(Free\)](#)
- [ARC's Self-Determination Scale \(Free\)](#)
- [California Career Zone: Quick Assessment; Interest Profiler; Skills Profiler and Work Importance Profiler \(Free\)](#)
- [Career Cluster Interest Survey \(Free\)](#)
- [ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment](#)
- [Holland Code Career Test \(Free\)](#)
- [Interests & Preferences – List of Inventories \(Free\)](#)
- [Life Skills Inventory \(Free\)](#)
- [Personal Preference Indicators \(Free\)](#)
- [Wisconsin Technical College Career Quiz](#)



Section 5 – Self- Determination and the Individual Educational Plan

While self-determination skills are essential for all students, they play an added role in the support and success of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities often lack opportunities to learn and practice self-determination skills in everyday life and often require explicit instruction and support.

As a result, educators and families need to pay special attention to requirements identified by the student’s individual educational plan (IEP) team and IEP document surrounding self-determination. Many times, a student with a disability requires instruction in self-determination in specific ways and settings. Annual goals and services are often developed around the need for self-determination, and a summary of progress may be reviewed at IEP meetings. Find additional information about self-determination and IEP compliance in the [Indicator 13 Toolkit: Writing Compliant Transition Individual Educational Plans](#) (p. 6).

Legislation has provided a strong connection between the IEP and the need for self-determination instruction. Section 1003.5716 (1)(a) in the Florida Statutes states that, by age 12, or during the 7th grade, whichever occurs first, the student’s need for self-determination and self-advocacy instruction must be considered. The statute explains that this instruction is needed to ensure that students are actively and effectively participating in their IEP meetings (section 1003.5716, F.S).

How does an IEP team determine whether or not a student needs instruction in SD/SA?

- Student participation in IEP team meetings is irregular.
- The student attends the IEP meetings, but participation is minimal or ineffective in communicating strengths, needs, interests and preferences.
- The student is having trouble self-advocating with peers.
- The student is afforded accommodations in the learning setting but struggles to request and/or utilize such accommodations.
- The administration of a self-determination assessment demonstrates areas of need or under-performance.



When a student’s need for self-determination instruction has been identified, what actions can be taken to ensure this need is addressed?

- Ensure that intentional self-determination instruction is happening through recognized self-determination curriculum, such as Standing Up for Me Plus (SUFM+), I’m Determined: How Self-Determined Are You?, ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Curriculum, or Me! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy. A few popular settings that support facilitation of self-determination curriculum include, Learning Strategies course, transition-based courses (Self-Determination, Transition Planning, Career Preparation, Career Experience, Preparation for Adult Living) and courses that utilize Unique Learning System and modified curriculum. See the [Helpful Online Transition-Related Resource Guide](#) by Project 10.
- Ensure that all teachers are trained in self-determination and are encouraged to incorporate it into their classrooms for all students.
- Supplement self-determination training provided by the school by referring students with disabilities, ages 14 – 22, to enroll in pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), which includes self-determination training and is free through Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Transition services, Pre-ETS and courses of study must be included when determining the assistance students need to meet their measurable postsecondary goals as required by s.1003.5716, F.S.
- Consider the use of the [Person-Centered Planning \(PCP\)](#) process activities and participation as an effective means to support the development of self-determination skills.
- Use planning worksheets (such as those offered by Konrad et al., 2008, [A Model for Aligning Self-Determination and Curriculum Standards](#)) which can help educators in all settings identify and track specific self-determination skills within one or more students to support effective and efficient teaching
- Promote and teach students about the importance of actively attending, participating in and leading their IEP meetings.



How can self-determination gains be assessed?

Student progress in the development of self-determination skills can be verified in a number of ways, including both informal and formal assessments.

- Include self-determination as an annual goal in the IEP and include benchmarks to be reached.
- Use self-determination assessments such as AIR Self-Determination Assessments, ARC's Self-Determination Scale, ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment, or the ME! Scale in a pre-test/post-test manner for tracking improvements (see page 5).
- Use self-assessments, such as the Self-Determination Checklist Student Assessment or the Annual Self-Determination Checklist for students to identify their own growth.
- Conduct observations to look for student progress, especially in areas that were identified as specific needs. Use a customized checklist or an existing checklist, such as Self-Determination Checklist: Progress Check or, for students with more significant disabilities, Self-Determination Goals and Checklists.
- Use student portfolios to show progress in self-determination.
- Engage with students periodically to reflect on self-determination progress and accommodations utilization (particularly in class-specific settings). Note progress in self-determination skills during those brief meetings. Enhance the meeting by sharing feedback with the student through a teacher-led or student-led tracking sheet.

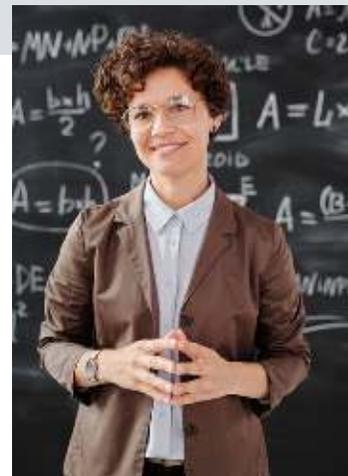
Section 6 – Self-Determination - An Ongoing Process

Self-determination not only applies to all students, it applies to all people. Self-determination theory (SDT) states that all humans have three primary psychological needs. These are the needs for:

- Competence (feeling effective)
- Autonomy (the feeling of being the origin of one's behavior)
- Psychological Relatedness (feeling cared for and understood by other people) (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Houston, 2020).

This tells us that self-determination is an ongoing process for our students. . . for ourselves. . . for everyone. Use this moment to think about your self-determination skills.

Complete this [Self-Awareness Worksheet for Adults](#) to gain a better understanding of self-determination strengths and needs in your life.



Section 7 – Resources and Reference

Resources

7 Ways to Encourage Learners' Independent Thinking

<https://wabisabilearning.com/blogs/future-fluencies/encourage-learners-independent-thinking>

60 Ways to help Student Think for Themselves

<https://www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/how-students-learn/>

I'm Determined

<https://www.imdetermined.org/>

O*NET Ability Profiler

<https://www.onetcenter.org/AP.html>

O*NET Interest Profiler

<https://www.onetcenter.org/IP.html>

Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction - Teacher's Guide

https://beach.ku.edu/sites/default/files/SDLMI-Teachers-Guide_4-2017.pdf

Standing Up for Me Plus (SUFM+)

http://project10.info/Documents/Project_10_Trainings_with_Map_on_Back_Updated_4.2.2020_1.pdf

(Request training and curriculum materials through a Regional Transition Representative)

Student Dream Sheet

<https://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/dreamsheet.pdf>

Teaching Problem-Solving: Let Students Get 'Stuck' and 'Unstuck'

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/10/31/teaching-problem-solving-let-students-get-stuck-and-unstuck/>

UDL Transition Checklist

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzNJE_acB1cjWXA3VVFVVFU4RDQ/view

Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment

<https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow>



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[App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.5716.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.5716.html)

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