

Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

Main Messages

Self-advocacy and self-determination are about engagement and empowerment.

- Students should be active participants and share information regularly with trusted team members. The more an individual shares about themselves, the more confident and stronger they become. This is especially true when it comes to making decisions about the future and asserting their rights.

Empower students early by nurturing self-advocacy and self-determination skills from a young age.

- In Indiana, students are to be involved in transition planning starting at age 14 or sooner when possible. Students should be exposed to, taught, and encouraged to use these skills as early as possible. The earlier, the better!
 - **Support students to make decisions for themselves.** Exposure to job exploration, education and training options, and independent living possibilities is vital in helping students make informed decisions about their future. Help them carefully and thoughtfully narrow their focus and find a starting point based on their choices. Connecting them to community support and available jobs, education and independent living services prepares them to decide what level of support they may need and who they would like to help them along the way.
 - **Start the discussion going into middle school.** Middle school starts in 6th grade and goes to 8th grade. Talk about what to expect each year at the annual case conference. It's okay to start talking about high school in middle school. The more prepared and knowledgeable they are, the more opportunity for students to share their ideas and goals.
 - **Empower parents to engage in transition conversations with their child.** Share information with parents regularly so that they know what to expect each year as the student progresses through school. Share new and innovative ideas for carrying out meaningful goals. Encourage parents to actively participate in team discussions including any concerns or barriers.

The more parents know, the better equipped they are to answer their child's questions or explore options.

- **Address challenges with new ideas and approaches.** When team members address challenges and uncertainties early, it can ensure that a plan is in place and options are explored. When families and team members practice tackling obstacles and achieving goals, the whole team adopts new ways of thinking and doing. Encourage a mindset of “improvise, adapt, and overcome.”
- **Prioritize participation.** When everyone feels heard, the team grows stronger and outcomes for students are better. Ensure everyone can take part via phone, virtually, or in person. If someone cannot make it, ask them to send in their comments or suggest another meeting time and date. The team should make student participation a priority

Teach and model self-advocacy and self-determination at home and in school.

- Teachers and parents should communicate what skills they are addressing in the classroom and in the home. When team members share their knowledge of effective practices in both environments, it creates consistency and a full circle of support for the student.

Gradually increase student responsibility.

- The team should view the student as a capable and competent learner. As the student learns and masters new skills, the team should provide opportunities to use those skills and increase responsibility. This will help the student feel confident and empowered in all aspects of their lives.

*Developed by the Indiana Family Employment First Coalition,
with funding support from the Indiana Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services' Bureau
of Disabilities Services, a division of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.*

Produced by

