

Preparing for Self-Advocacy 101

Tween edition ages 9-12



**TIP
SHEET**

Helping youth gain independence and develop self-advocacy skills required for adulthood needs to start earlier than the teen years. There are lots of ways we support them as they begin to develop these skills. The goal is to work on these skills early and often!

The Work of the Adult

The process of letting our youth grow can be a difficult one. Not only is it sometimes easier to just “do it ourselves,” but it can also be difficult to see a child fail. While this may vary, depending on each youth’s strengths and weaknesses, growth is possible for all. It’s okay to start small, but remember frequent practice will help them develop these skills.

Raising Awareness

- Make them aware of their disability and how their IEP/504 or assistive devices help them in school/home.
- Show them their strengths and build from there.
- Make them aware of their needs and help them to brainstorm about what supports and accommodations would be helpful.

Speaking Up & Building Self-Confidence

- Have them introduce themselves when they meet new people, such as at the doctor’s office.
- Let your child express their feelings. Listen actively and keep your reactions in check.
- Teach them a “no secrets policy” and to speak up if they feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Teach them how to reach out to trusted adults when they need help.
- Encourage your child to attend their IEP meeting or to be present over the phone. If they cannot be present during the meeting, send a letter or PowerPoint to the team a day or two prior to the meeting.

Making Choices

- Encourage your child to make choices within their age or abilities.
- Let them problem solve some small issues, such as a sibling squabble or plan for the day.
- No matter their ability, find ways to allow choices.
- If they make a choice that results in failure, let them know it’s okay. Encourage them to regroup and continue to work through the situation.
- Talk about the future—even if adulthood seems years away. Get them talking about where they see themselves living, what do they see themselves doing for school or work, and how do they see themselves spending their fun time.

Building Life Skills

- Encourage them to plan a meal or snack they want.
- Teach them how to cook safely. This might include using the microwave or oven. Kitchen clean-up is part of the meal.
- Give them age- and ability- appropriate household chores, even if it takes them longer to do the chore.
- Ask them to put together a weekly grocery list and navigate in the supermarket to retrieve those items.

Reducing Stress

- Help your child develop healthy and safe self-coping skills. Help them explore what works for them, including movement and exercise, mediation, healthy eating, and good sleep hygiene.