



### **1. Why is self-determination considered a critical skill for individuals who have disabilities?**

Self-determination is a critical skill in all individuals' lives, not just those with disabilities. A self-determined individual controls their own life and choices. Too often, individuals with disabilities are presumed unable to make their own decisions. Structures have been implemented which encourage reliance on others, learned helplessness, and hinder self-determination in a myriad of ways. Examples of these structures include working with a one-on-one paraprofessional, not attending or not leading the IEP, or having parents and other stakeholders make important life decisions. Self-determination is an important set of skills to teach to encourage individuals to take ownership and control of their own lives. Individuals who are self-determined have more positive life outcomes in the areas of academics, employment, independent living, and community engagement.

### **2. How can I teach students to handle conflicts where they will need to speak up for themselves?**

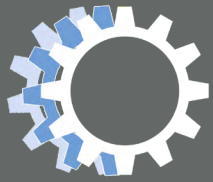
Conflict is a part of adult life, and it's important to help students prepare to navigate conflict in a healthy way, while still encouraging them to express their opinion. Teachers can model appropriate conflict resolution through role-plays in the classroom. Present students with an issue where conflict might arise. Have them practice choosing among multiple responses, and assess the possible consequences from each response. A popular tool teachers use is the "If \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_" technique. The "If, Then," technique involves the student choosing a response (or behavior) to a conflict and then assessing what might happen if they choose this behavior. Preparing for IEP meetings are often a good time to practice these conflict resolution skills.

### **3. How can I teach leadership skills to a student with severe/multiple disabilities?**

Leadership skills are a great way to build self-advocacy and self-awareness skills for all students. Teachers can help their students develop leadership skills by supporting and preparing their students to lead their own IEP meeting. Students can introduce everyone in attendance, distribute handouts, navigate the PowerPoint presentation, and facilitate the conversation. For students with severe or multiple disabilities, accommodations or modifications might need to be implemented to help them effectively lead the meeting. For example, a student who cannot verbalize their own opinions can still lead their own IEP meeting by communicating with an Augmentative and Alternative Communication device. Students might need to use a switch to move forward the presentation. Through accommodations and modifications, all students can be equipped to lead their own IEP meeting.

### **4. Should I teach my student/child about their disability?**

Yes! Teaching individuals about their disabilities and the additional challenges they may face can be a huge tool in their success. Self-advocacy focuses on an awareness of self, knowing one's rights, and having the ability to communicate preferences, interests, strengths, needs, and rights. It is foundational to this concept that an individual knows about their disability and how it might impact their daily lives. Parents, educators, and other mentors can discuss with the student how their disability can impact their daily lives and work together to find



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target skills and solutions. It is also important that students understand his or her rights when addressing their disability. Students who understand their rights should also be taught their rights as related to services and systems post high school including but not limited to the American with Disabilities Act, Social Security Administration, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

### **5. What does self-management entail?**

Self-management is the ability to manage one's own behavior. This skill is highly important as it allows individuals to be more independent in activities. Research shows this can increase positive outcomes in academics, keeping a job, and other areas of self-determination including choice making, problem solving, and goal setting. Self-management encompasses goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement. An individual can use many different tools to monitor his or her own behavior including but not limited to calendars, rubrics, checklists, task analyses, and more. When an individual is able to independently manage his or her own behavior, their world opens up to new possibilities!

### **6. What is the difference between choice making and decision making?**

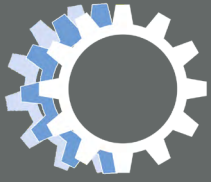
Choice making refers to the ability to show preference between two or more options. This skill allows students to express their interests and needs in order to obtain a preferred option. This may look like allowing a student to decide between what materials to use for an activity, whether to work with a partner or to work independently, or having a free choice of activity during a break. Decision making is much larger scale and tends to have a lasting impact. It involves evaluating all potential solutions and the associated consequences when making a decision. Examples of decisions could include: a student's decision to pursue postsecondary education, moving out of their parents' home, or choosing to pursue a job.

### **7. What are some areas that individuals may struggle with when problem solving? How can I remedy these?**

Individuals with disabilities may struggle with generating multiple solutions to solve problems, selecting the appropriate solution, or overgeneralizing a previous solution to an unrelated problem. It is important to teach and model appropriate problem-solving skills for students and provide repeated instruction and exposure.

For individuals who may struggle with generating multiple solutions, adults can provide various solutions and allow the individual to choose the best solution. It is important to incorporate scaffolding and fading when using this technique so the student does not exhibit "learned helplessness." It is also important to have the individual explain the reason why they chose certain solutions and justify why it was the best option.

For individuals who may struggle with selecting the appropriate solution, adults can encourage brainstorming



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multiple potential solutions. In the classroom, this can be a group activity to solve a class-wide problem. This allows students to understand the process of brainstorming solutions, and how to pick the best one.

For individuals who may struggle with overgeneralizing a previous solution to an unrelated problem, adults can ask leading questions that may provide support for finding a more appropriate solution. These questions would guide students to brainstorming solutions.

While all of these are great strategies, remember to take data and monitor student progress. It is important to fade supports as students show success so they do not become over reliant on adult assistance.

## **8. What is the difference between supported decision making and conservatorship?**

Supported decision making is a framework that allows individuals with disabilities to seek support, input, and help from trusted individuals such as friends, family members, and professionals. Supported decision making aids individuals in understanding the situation and selecting the best choice without formal conservatorship. Supported decision making can be used in various areas such as finances, medical, housing, employment, education, communication, interpersonal or social, behavior, daily living, organization, and recreation and leisure. Supported decision making is customized to every individual and provides support based on the individual's needs.

Conservatorship is a court mandated process where an individual is deemed incompetent to make their own decisions and a competent adult is appointed to make choices. Conservatorship is hard to reverse and can restrict the rights of the individual. It is a legal process that can cost upwards of \$5,000 after legal fees.