



TEACHING SELF MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Self-management skills involve monitoring and assessing one's own behavior. Learning to self-manage enables students to rely less on parents and teachers and more on themselves to direct their behaviors. Research suggests that the ability to independently manage one's own activities can lead to better academic outcomes, job retention, and more! But, how does one combine all of these different strategies and skills to teach self-management? Carolyn Hughes and Erik Carter suggest a method to teach students self-management in *The New Transition Handbook: Strategies High School Teachers Use that Work!* Their method involves seven steps.

Step 1: The first step is to identify the problem. The teacher should take time to gather information about the problem. Often times, coworkers, peers, parents, other teachers, and even the student will share information about a perceived problem behavior.

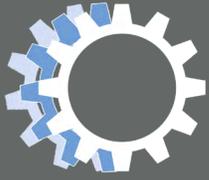
Let's consider a student, Ronald, who struggles with initiating work tasks independently. When Ronald arrives at work, he waits until his boss or coworker gives him a task with all accompanying materials and walks him through the steps of the tasks.

Step 2: The second step is to verify the problem. The teacher must spend time in the setting to observe and evaluate the student's behavior as compared to what others said about the behavior. One way to see if there is actually a problem is to observe a peer or coworker or someone else who is considered "successful" in the setting, and to gauge the differences. This might help the teacher determine whether this is really a problem that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Roberts, who is Ronald's exceptional education teacher, observes him arriving to his job site. He takes data to see in what ways and how often does Ronald not initiate tasks independently. Mr. Roberts also makes notes on what types of behavior "successful" coworkers exhibit when arriving to work and initiating tasks.

Step 3: The third step of the process is to determine acceptable levels of behavior. That is determining what the student's behavior should look like in the setting, and to what extent it should resemble the behavior of peers or coworkers in the same setting. When possible, students can be part of thinking through what constitutes a desired level of performance.

After collecting data, Mr. Roberts now must determine what would be considered an acceptable behavior for Ronald to exhibit. In other words, he must determine to what extent Ronald's behavior could and should change to emulate the appropriate behavior of coworkers at the same job. To do this, Mr. Roberts must decide what Ronald must do to initiate tasks independently.



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Step 4: The fourth step is to identify natural supports in the environment. This means using visuals, pictures, schedules, or just a list of questions or prompts that can be hung or placed discretely within an environment to help remind the student to begin, end or continue doing an activity.

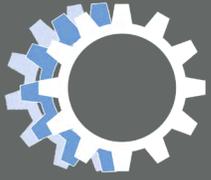
Ronald always greets his boss in the morning before beginning any tasks. Knowing that Ronald always sees his boss first, it would be easy to use a natural support of placing a small visual by the boss's door. This visual will remind Ronald to ask for any tasks from his boss and to begin his regular tasks immediately.

Step 5: The fifth step is selecting a self-management strategy. The self-management strategies can range from self-instruction (also referred to as self-talk in which students talk themselves through activities or tasks), picture prompts (a picture that reminds students of something or provides them with an answer), self-monitoring, self-reinforcement, and more. To effectively select a strategy, consider the type of setting the student will be in and what their peers or coworkers would find acceptable as a used strategy. So, if a student is in a job that requires moving around a lot, having picture prompts posted might not be effective because they will rarely be in the same spot to do the task. Or, if the work environment is very loud, using self-instruction might not be problematic as it is already noisy. Teachers and parents should also try to honor the student's preference when it comes to selecting a self-management strategy.

Mr. Roberts knows that Ronald has the same series of tasks every day. Knowing that Ronald always completes the same tasks, it would be easy to create a self-evaluation checklist of daily tasks for Ronald. This checklist would give him a way to initiate tasks without having to wait for directions from his boss or coworkers.

Step 6: The sixth step is to actually teach the self-management skill to the student. To teach the skill, the teacher should identify all components of the target behavior and which self-management strategy they will be trying to teach the student. Next, the teacher should teach the skill through direct instruction by using modeling, prompting, and by giving feedback to the student. Finally, the teacher should begin to fade their assistance as the student begins to grasp the skill and the target behavior to ensure the student can do all of this independently.

Mr. Roberts has considered the components of the target behavior of starting tasks immediately. Mr. Roberts determines that creating a checklist of the daily activities of wiping off tables. Next, Mr. Roberts teaches Ronald to self-evaluate his behavior. To evaluate his behavior, Ronald will learn to start with the first item of the checklist which states he should retrieve supplies for cleaning tables. He will complete the step and check off the step as he completes it. He then will be trained to complete the next step of wiping off tables. This will continue to include each task he must complete. When he finishes the checklist he will return to the boss' office where the visual will remind him to ask for any additional tasks. To train Ronald to accurately self-evaluate himself, Mr. Roberts observes Ronald. Mr. Roberts and Ronald record his behavior. At the end of each work day, Mr. Roberts and Ronald briefly compare charts. Mr. Roberts makes sure he gives Ronald specific feedback and encourages his progress. As Ronald exhibits that he can accurately record his behavior, Mr. Roberts' monitoring of Ronald will fade out. The hope is that Ronald can use the picture prompt and checklist to independently self-manage his behavior at work.



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Step 7: The last step is evaluating the student's performance. Even after the student is able to self-manage, the educator should still periodically observe the student to ensure that his performance has maintained over time. The teacher should also determine if the student's behavior is similar to the behavior of peers and coworkers, and (if appropriate) they should ask others if the student's behavior is acceptable in the environment.

It has been one month since Mr. Roberts trained Ronald to self-manage his behavior. With the use of the picture prompt and checklist there has been a decrease in reliance on coworkers and his boss to help him initiate tasks. Mr. Roberts should periodically observe Ronald on the job to make sure the behavior has maintained, and to make sure the student is still recording behavior accurately. At this point, Mr. Roberts can also touch base with Ronald's boss and a few of his coworkers to get their feedback on the system. Mr. Roberts should remember to set a reward for Ronald if he achieves the set criterion for the target behavior of initiating tasks independently.