

Promoting Self-Determination in Youth with Disabilities

Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Students who have self-determination skills have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence.

Promote Choice Making

- Provide choices about clothing, social activities, family events, and methods of learning new information;
- Speak directly to children and youth;
- Involve children and youth in educational, medical, and family decisions;
- Allow for mistakes and natural consequences;
- Listen often to children and youth.

Encourage Exploration of Possibilities

- Identify young adult mentors with similar disabilities;
- Talk about future jobs, hobbies, and family lifestyles;
- Involve children/youth in local volunteering

Promote Reasonable Risk Taking

- Make choice maps listing risks, benefits, and consequences of choice;
- Develop skills in problem solving;
- Develop skills in evaluating consequences.

Encourage Problem Solving

- Allow ownership of challenges and problems;
- Accept problems as part of healthy development;

Promote Self Advocacy

- Encourage communication/self-representation;
- Provide opportunities for leadership roles at home and in school;
- Teach about appropriate accommodation needs;
- Practice ways to disclose disability and accommodation needs;

Facilitate Development of Self-Esteem

- Create a sense of belonging within schools and communities;
- Identify caring adult mentors at home, school, church, or in the community;

Develop Goal Setting and Planning

- Teach children and youth family values, priorities, and goals;
- Make posters that reflect values and are age-appropriate;
- Make a road map to mark the short-term identifiers as they work toward a goal;
- Support children and youth in developing values and goals;
- Be flexible in supporting youth to reach their goals; some days they may need much motivation and help; other days they may want to try alone.

Help Youth Understand Their Disabilities

- Develop a process that is directed by youth for self-identity: Who are you? What do you want? What are your challenges and barriers? What supports do you need?
- Talk about the youth's disability and abilities;
- Involve children and youth in their IEP;
- Use good learning style inventories and transition assessments;
- Identify and utilize support systems for all people.

SOURCE: National Center for Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) see entire policy brief www.ncset.org

QUESTIONS - Talk to others, learn more, share ideas and solutions.

Center for Self-Determination www.self-determination.com