

# 1

## **Self-Advocacy**

**This section is about speaking out for yourself, letting other people know what your needs are and your goals for the future.**

**Examples of information to keep in this section might include:**

- ☐ **Person-Centered Planning information - about your goals and needs**
- ☐ **Identify your Strengths, Weaknesses, Talents and Skills – assets and strengths worksheet, barriers to assertiveness**
- ☐ **A script you write for sharing about your disability with an employer or college staff**
- ☐ **Selective service registration information**



# Students Give Advice on Transition

When young adults with disabilities were asked what they thought students should do to ensure a successful transition, they offered a variety of practical suggestions.

- ❖ Work on transition planning with your case manager. Write down your goals, plans, and what you like.
- ❖ Learn good communication skills so you can tell people what you want.
- ❖ Learn about resources like SSI (Supplemental Security Income), vocational rehabilitation, and adult services. Get information on all available options.
- ❖ Take a more active role in meetings. **Take more responsibility and ask more questions.**
- ❖ Join groups that can help, like local advocacy groups, church groups, and community education classes.
- ❖ Get more work experience, especially try to work part-time for pay.
- ❖ Take classes in independent living skills. Learn how to cook, shop, budget, and how to recognize and count money.
- ❖ Find out how to access community resources, services and emergency systems, and how to get help filling out forms.
- ❖ Learn self-determination skills, advocacy skills, and how to make decisions.
- ❖ Get a driver's license, if you can, or learn how to use other transportation systems.
- ❖ Be serious. Do your homework and budget your time. Learn to use a calendar or planner to write down your assignments and to help you plan time to study.
- ❖ Tell your teachers you have a disability.

- ❖ List your strengths and challenges. Find out what you're good at and put extra effort into areas that are strengths. Then set goals and go for them, but don't be disappointed if you can't do everything – no one can.
- ❖ Learn about accommodations that will help you, like using a spellchecker, asking people to show you how to do things instead of expecting you to read it from a book, using note-takers, asking for extended time for tests, using textbooks in alternate format, and having someone read and edit your papers. It will help you a lot if you learn what these accommodations are and how to ask for them before you leave high school.
- ❖ Visit schools you are interested in, talk to some instructors, and sit in on some courses before you decide which postsecondary school you want to attend.

# Tips for Teens: Use Your IEP Meetings to Learn How to Advocate for Yourself

*A PACER Center ACTION Information Sheet*

Self-advocacy is a key step in becoming an adult. It means looking out for yourself, telling people what you need, and knowing how to take responsibility. No one is born knowing these skills. Everyone has to learn them. Ready to begin learning? Here is some great information that can start you on your way.

## What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy means taking responsibility for telling people what you want and need in a straightforward way. It is knowing how to:

- Speak up for yourself
- Describe your strengths, disability, needs, and wishes
- Take responsibility for yourself
- Find out about your rights
- Get help or know who to ask if you have a question

## Where can I practice self-advocacy?

A great place to practice self-advocacy is in your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. With the support of your team members, you can learn ways to:

- Explain your disability to others
- Set goals for yourself
- Build teamwork skills
- Share with teachers what works and does not work for you
- Ask for accommodations
- Accept help from others
- Lead all or part of the IEP meeting

## But I don't like going to these meetings!

Understandable. But did you know there are still many ways you can be involved and learn self-advocacy skills? Which of these ideas might work for you?

- Come for just a few minutes, instead of attending the whole meeting.
- Write down your ideas, questions, and concerns before the meeting
- Practice or role-play ahead of time what you want to say in the meeting
- Introduce yourself
- Tell team members about your interests, strengths, and desires for the future
- Explain to the team what it is like to have your disability
- Help your special education teacher write the agenda

- Help the team develop IEP goal areas
- Ask for explanations if you do not understand something
- At the end of the meeting, review what the team decided
- If you choose not to attend the meeting, share your input with your parents or special education teacher before the meeting and review the meeting's events afterward

## **Be prepared!**

Most people are more comfortable at meetings if they have had some time to think about what they want to say. Before your IEP meeting, you could think about these questions:

- What do I want to learn or work on this year?
- What are my special concerns for the school year?
- How do I learn the best?
- What do I need to be successful?
- What would make learning easier for me?
- What positive information about myself can I share at this meeting?

## **What does the law say about my attending these meetings?**

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that you must automatically be invited to all of your IEP meetings once you are 16. (You don't have to go, but it's a good idea. After all, no one knows you better than you.) You may want to discuss attending your IEP meeting with your parents. Transition is about planning for your future. You will look at your skills in three areas:

- Employment
- Postsecondary education
- Independent living

All this planning and self-advocacy will serve you well. When you turn 18, you will be considered an adult – and will make lots of decisions on your own. You will be signing your own IEP. This is why it is a great idea to practice self-advocacy as much as possible before turning 18.

Learning good self-advocacy skills is cool. It will help you while you are in school and when you become an adult. Knowing and exercising your rights are important steps in becoming a strong self-advocate.

©2010 PACER Center/ACTion Sheet: PHP-c149, PACER Center - [www.PACER.org](http://www.PACER.org)

# Self-Advocacy Checklist

How easy is it for me to...	I can do this.	I need to work on this.	I really need help with this.
Understand my disability			
Talk about my disability			
Know what I am good at			
Learn from others			
Tell other people what I need			
Share my ideas with others			
Plan for my future			
Set goals for myself			
Know what kind of jobs I would like			
Speak up in my IEP meetings and transition planning meetings			
Ask for help from others			
Know which people I can trust to ask for help			

<b>How easy is it for me to...</b>	<b>I can do this.</b>	<b>I need to work on this.</b>	<b>I really need help with this.</b>
Know my rights and what laws protect people with disabilities			
Know who to call to learn about my rights and laws that protect people with disabilities			
Do things in my community			
Find out about colleges and support services			
Make my own choices and decisions			
Get information I need to make good decisions			
Meet new people and make friends			
Plan things to do with my friends			
Learn new things on my own			
Tell my friends what I think and how I feel			
Tell my family what I think			

Adapted from *My Future My Plan: A Transition Planning Resource for Life After High School*, 2003 State of the Art, Inc., [www.myfuturemyplan.com](http://www.myfuturemyplan.com)



## **Assets and Strengths** - A List of Questions

1. Some of the things I do well are...
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. A time when I felt really proud of myself was when ...
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. My best friend would describe me as a person who is ...
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. One thing that my teachers/bosses/parents have always liked about me is that I ...
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. One thing I am very interested in is ...
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. One of my skills that I hope to use in my work is...

# Assess Your Skills and Interests

## Think about your interests

- What do you like to do?
- What kind of school, religious, social, or sports activities do you like?
- Make a list of 10 activities you have enjoyed doing in the past four years.
- Evaluate those interests. Think about what you like about these activities. What challenges did the activities offer? What skills do you need to develop more to continue in those activities?

## Consider your skills

- Evaluate school, volunteer, work, or leisure experiences.
- Make a list of your school activities (clubs, organizations to which you belonged).
- Make a list of any volunteer work you have done (either through social, civic, or religious organizations).

From: Mapping Your Future® 2011. For more information and many resources for students, parents, and school staff, visit their website at:

<http://mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/skills.htm>

# What is Self-Determination?

**Self-Determination means having choice and control over your life.**

**It means being able to make your own decisions and taking responsibility.**



## **You have the right to choose how you live your life.**

That means:

Choosing where you live and who lives with you

Choosing where you work

- doing a job that you want to do
- learning the skills you need to be able do that job

Choosing what you do for fun

- meeting friends when and where you want to
- spending your free time the way you want to

## **You have the right to make decisions about your life.**

That means having **control** over:

- who supports you
- who your friends are
- what services you need

## **Taking control means taking RESPONSIBILITY.**

You need to understand the possible consequences of a decision you make and that you will be responsible for the results of your decision

You need to take responsibility to advocate for yourself

- that means speaking out for your rights
- getting the information you need to make decisions
- asking others to respect the decisions you make for yourself

Family and friends share responsibility to...

- help you get the information you need to make decisions
- support you in making decisions
- provide support when you ask for it

Your staff is responsible to work with you and should respect your choices and the way you wish to receive services and support

### **Dreaming is the first step in achieving your goals.**

Your dream is your personal vision for how you want your life to be.

Sharing your dreams is part of a self-directed life and person-centered planning can be a good place to do this.

### **Plan Wisely: Careful planning can help you get what you need.**

Preparing for planning meetings will help you participate as an equal member of the group: (This could be IEP meetings and transition planning meetings.)

- get the information you need to make choices/decisions
- practice what you are going to say
- tell people what you want and what your goals are
- learn about what you will need to be able to reach those goals and make your dreams come true

Person-Centered Planning is all about **YOU**:

- invite people who will support your goals and dreams
- invite people who can help you to do the things you want to do and provide support along the way

### **Living a Self Determined Life can give you A Sense of Belonging.**

There are many ways to be part of your community:

- volunteer to help with neighborhood or community projects
- join clubs or groups that meet about things that interest you
- vote and speak out for changes to laws and policies in your community, state and country

There are many different kinds of relationships:

The important thing is that you decide who you want to spend time with.

- family
- boyfriend or girlfriend
- friends
- co-workers

### **Everyone should be treated with Dignity and Respect.**

Respect and Dignity are:

- respecting people's space
- being polite to others
- being a good listener
- speaking directly to people
- expecting others to treat us with courtesy
- taking good care of ourselves

# What does it mean to turn 18?

By law, when a person reaches the age of 18 they become an adult. They have the right to make decisions about themselves and their life. They are also responsible for the results of those decisions and their actions.

It is important for you and your parents to talk about this at least one year before you turn 18. When you are an adult, you have the right to make decisions about your life including legal decisions about: your education, adult services, bank accounts, rental or housing agreements, medical care, contracts, and many other things.

Having these legal rights also means taking responsibility. Sometimes we make decisions that affect our lives – either in a positive way or a negative way. If you decide to spend your money on a trip instead of paying your rent, your landlord might make you move out. If you go to the doctor and decide not to do what he tells you to, it might affect your health or make you sick. If you have a credit card and buy things you can't afford, you will have to find a way to pay for those things or give them back.

These are the kinds of decisions adults have the right to make in their lives.

It is important to know what might happen when you make a decision and be able to take responsibility for that decision. You can ask people you trust to help you get the information you need to make good decisions.

Sometimes when young people become adults they need help to learn how to make legal decisions like managing their money, going to the doctor, and other things. Your parents or other family members might help you with these things. You might decide you want to have a joint bank account with your parents for awhile so you can learn how to manage your money. Or you can ask for help when you go to the doctor to decide what medical treatment would be best for you.

For additional information refer to *Turning 18 in Idaho: A Survival Guide for Teenagers* which can be found at: [http://isb.idaho.gov/pdf/lre/turning\\_18\\_guide.pdf](http://isb.idaho.gov/pdf/lre/turning_18_guide.pdf)

This brochure was developed by the Idaho Law Foundation and the University of Idaho College of Law to educate young adults about their rights and responsibilities under the law. *Turning 18 in Idaho* provides valuable information to help navigate the exciting transition from childhood to adulthood.

## Guardianship

A guardian is someone who makes decisions for a person. A guardian must be appointed in court. If someone believes a person with a disability does not understand the decisions they are making or believes the person is not making safe decisions, they can ask a judge to appoint them as a guardian for that person.

A court may appoint a full guardian for a person. A full guardian can make decisions for the other person about where the person will live, what medical treatment is best, what the person's money is used for, and what services the person will get. A court may also appoint a limited guardian. A limited guardian can only make decisions for

the other person that the court allows. A limited guardian is often a better choice because it allows the person to be more independent. Even if a guardian is appointed, a person still has many legal rights.

It is important to know that a guardian may not be needed at all if support can be provided to help the person make safe decisions. A guardianship can also be changed or ended by the court.

You can learn more about guardianships and ways to get the support you need on these websites:

Disability Rights Idaho –

<http://disabilityrightsidaho.org/>

click on Publications and then “Self-Advocacy Guide to Guardianships”

# Selective Service Registration

From the Selective Service Website: <http://www.sss.gov/FSwho.htm>

## WHO MUST REGISTER

**Almost all male U.S. citizens, and male aliens living in the U.S., who are 18 through 25, are required to register with Selective Service.** It's important to know that even though he is registered, a man will not automatically be inducted into the military. In a crisis requiring a draft, men would be called in sequence determined by random lottery number and year of birth. Then, they would be examined for mental, physical and moral fitness by the military before being deferred or exempted from military service or inducted into the Armed Forces. A [chart](#) of who must register is also available. (<http://www.sss.gov/PDFs/WhoMustRegisterChart.pdf>)

## MEN WITH DISABILITIES

Men with disabilities who live at home must register with Selective Service if they can reasonably leave their homes and move about independently. A friend or relative may help a disabled man fill out the registration form if he can't do it himself.

Men with disabilities that would disqualify them from military service still must register with Selective Service. Selective Service does not presently have authority to classify men, so even men with obvious handicaps must register now, and if needed, classifications would be determined later.

## NON-CITIZENS

Some non-citizens are required to register. Others are not. Noncitizens who are not required to register with Selective Service include men who are in the U.S. on student or visitor visas, and men who are part of a diplomatic or trade mission and their families. Almost all other male noncitizens are required to register, including illegal aliens, legal permanent residents, and refugees. The general rule is that if a male noncitizen takes up residency in the U.S. before his 26th birthday, he must register with Selective Service. For a more detailed list of which non-citizens must register, see [Who Must Register - Chart](#).

## DUAL NATIONALS

Dual nationals of the U.S. and another country are required to register, regardless of where they live, because they are U.S. nationals.

See also [Aliens and Dual Nationals - Liability for Service](#)  
(<http://www.sss.gov/fsaliens.htm>)

## HOSPITALIZED OR INCARCERATED MEN

Young men in hospitals, mental institutions or prisons do not have to register while they are committed. However, they must register within 30 days after being released if they have not yet reached their 26th birthday.

## FULL-TIME MILITARY EXEMPTED FROM REQUIREMENT\*

Young men serving in the military on full-time active duty do not have to register. Those

attending the service academies do not have to register. However, if a young man leaves the military before turning 26, he must register.

### **NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES\***

Members of the Reserve and National Guard not on full-time active duty must register.

### **CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS**

Men who would be classified as [Conscientious Objectors](#) if they were drafted must also register with Selective Service. If a draft begins and they are called, they would have the opportunity to file a claim for exemption from military service based upon their religious or moral objection to war.

### **HOW TO REGISTER**

The easiest and fastest way for a man to register is to [register online](#) (<https://www.sss.gov/RegVer/wfRegistration.aspx>) Or a man can fill out a registration form and send it to the Selective Service System. The form asks for the young man's full name, address, date of birth, and Social Security Number (if he has one). On a form that is sent in, his signature is also required. Here are some places to register:

#### **REGISTER ONLINE**

Young men may now register online with Selective Service: [www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov)

#### **AT THE POST OFFICE**

Selective Service "mail-back" registration forms are available at any U.S. Post Office. A man can fill it out, sign (leaving the space for his Social Security Number blank, if he has not yet obtained one\*), affix postage, and mail it to Selective Service, without the involvement of the postal clerk. Men living overseas may register at any U.S. Embassy or consular office.

\*Provide your Social Security Number to the Selective Service when you do obtain one.

#### **CHECK BOX**

Another way a young man can register is to check a box on the application form for Federal Student Financial Aid (FAFSA form). A man can check "Register Me" on Box #22 of that form, and the Department of Education will furnish Selective Service with the information to register the man.

#### **AT THEIR HIGH SCHOOL**

More than half the high schools in the nation have a staff member or teacher appointed as a [Selective Service Registrar](#). These individuals help register male high school students.



# Disability Disclosure

Every individual with a disability is faced with the same decision: “Should I or shouldn’t I share information about my disability?” Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to disclose (share) is entirely personal. It is a decision to make only after weighing the personal advantages and disadvantages of disclosure. Each person must choose whether to disclose his or her disability with an employer, college, or other situation. Things to consider are whether accommodations will be needed on the job, at college, or other setting and whether a disability is visible or hidden.

Learning to disclose your disability-related needs effectively and developing an accommodation plan are extremely valuable skills. Effective disclosure skills require that you share information regarding your disability-related needs and also provide creative, practical suggestions for accommodations. Open communication with your employer, professors, and disability services staff can help the process of reviewing how effective your accommodations are and making changes if they are not working.

Some reasons why you may choose to disclose your disability include:

- Getting information about available supports and services;
- Discussing specific needs in order to identify adjustments needed to the school or work environment;
- Discussing academic or work position requirements and practical components of your chosen course of study or job duties;
- Getting needed help with the transition from high school to college;
- At college, ensuring that disability support service professionals provide any needed training or awareness for faculty members and other staff to help you get the best accommodations;
- Ensure that faculty members know and implement the accommodations you need for success in their classes; and
- Ensure that you are provided the accommodations you need to be able to do your job successfully.

**Accommodations at college or in the workplace are only provided when an individual discloses his or her disability and requests accommodations.**

\*Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. Your disability is only important if it affects (or can potentially affect) your ability to perform the essential functions of a job. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about how your disability affects your ability to perform the essential functions of the job, what supports you need in order to provide a most favorable environment for your career, and your own accommodation ideas for each situation.

Though there is no one “right” time and place to practice disclosure (it will depend on your individual situation), being proactive is strongly encouraged. Being proactive puts

you in better control of your life. Preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability. Make sure you present information in a clear and concise way that is relevant to your job or school situation. It is not necessary to share very detailed medical or personal information. Get to the point and keep it positive. You might wish to present the following information during disclosure:

- General information about your disability;
- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability, including its impact on your job or academic performance;
- The types of job accommodations or academic accommodations that have worked for you in the past;
- The types of job accommodations you think you will need in the workplace or academic accommodations in the school setting; and
- How your disability and other life experiences can positively affect your work performance.

**Most important, keep the disclosure conversation focused on your abilities.**

Excerpt from *The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities*.

A complete copy of the workbook is on this website:

[http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources\\_&Publications/411.html](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&Publications/411.html)

Another great resource is *Disclosure Decisions To Get The Job* – a guide to help individuals choose whether to disclose their disability to an employer. The guide can be found on this website: <http://www.worksupport.com/research/viewContent.cfm/585> and a copy of the form is included later in this section.