A PEATC

Do You Know…

Transition Guide: Self Advocacy

Fact Sheet for Virginia Parents

What Is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy **means speaking up for yourself** and taking an active role in decisions that affect your life. It's about understanding your strengths and needs, asking questions, finding information, knowing your rights, and asking for help when needed. It's also about **learning how to solve problems, communicate clearly, and build supportive relationships.**

Everyone practices self-advocacy—whether it's asking parents for a phone, choosing what's for dinner, or negotiating a raise at work. For some people, though, developing these skills takes extra support and practice.

For children with disabilities, learning to advocate for themselves is especially important. These skills help them **succeed in school, at work, and in life**. Parents and teachers can start building self-advocacy skills early—ideally in childhood—but it's never too late to start.

Building Self-Advocacy Skills: Questions to Consider

Use these questions to think about how your child is developing self-advocacy skills:

- Do they know about disability rights laws like the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, and **Section 504**, and how these laws apply to them?
- Can they explain what **supports or accommodations** they use and how these help them?
- Do they **communicate their needs** and ask questions when they need more information?
- Do they understand what's in their **IEP** or **transition plan**, and were they involved in creating it?
- Do they feel **confident expressing themselves** and making decisions about their life?
- Are they able to **stand up for themselves** when something isn't right?

If you answered "no" to some of these questions, that's okay! These are all skills that can be learned and practiced over time.

Why Self-Advocacy Matters

Strong self-advocacy skills can help your child:

- Solve problems at home, in school, and in the community.
- Get better services and supports from teachers, doctors, and others.
- Access the education, housing, and community resources they need.
- Feel proud, confident, and in control of their own life.

Helping Your Child Learn to Advocate

Here are ways to help your child build confidence and speak up for themselves:

- Talk about what they're **good at** and where they might **need support.**
- Make a **list of people and programs** that help them reach their goals.
- Teach them about **their disability** and how it affects them.
- Share information about **laws or policies** that protect their rights.
- Encourage them to **ask for help** and to work with others to solve problems.
- Give them chances to **practice**—at school, at home, and in the community.
- Invite them to attend their **IEP or transition meetings** and share their ideas.
- Encourage them to meet and learn from other self-advocates through trainings, community events, or programs at **Centers for Independent Living** or similar organizations.

Ways to Communicate Strengths, Concerns, and Needs

There are many ways for your child to express themselves—find what works best for them:

- Talking in person or on the phone.
- Writing a letter, email, or text.
- Using speech-to-text tools or assistive technology devices.
- Communicating through pictures, photos, or videos.

Regularly remind your child:

You know yourself best!

Your opinions are important!

You are a self-advocate!

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES:

I'm Determined
SABE – Nothing About Us Without Us
Self-Advocacy Resources - The Arc
10 Self Advocacy Tips for Young People with Disabilities - Video

PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

For more information about us, please contact:
www.peatc.org | **703-923-0010** | **partners@peatc.org**

Hablamos Español. Free and confidential assistance available in 300+ languages.

This content was developed with a grant from the US Department of Education, **#H235F250002**. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume the endorsement of the Federal Government Project Officer. PEATC is not a legal services agency and cannot provide legal advice or representation. Any information contained herein is not intended to be legal advice and should not be used as a substitute for legal advice.