

Self-advocacy tipsheet – Intermediate grades



Contributor Bayan Yammout is an educator with experience teaching students with physical, intellectual, self-regulation, and communication needs. The developer of a program to amplify student voices and empower students through self-advocacy and leadership skills, you can read more about Bayan on our School Inclusion Hub.

What is self-advocacy?

We like this definition by [Nancy Suzanne James](#): “Know yourself. Know what you need. Know how to get it.” Nancy wrote, “Knowledge is the key to self-advocacy. Like anything else, the more you know, the better you understand, and the easier it is to explain.

Why is self-advocacy important?

Self-advocacy skills contribute positively to the development of the six learning skills and work habits: responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative, and self-regulation. ([Growing Success](#))

Self-advocacy skills help learners build confidence and self-esteem. They amplify the learner’s voice, promote social inclusion, and help students achieve better academic performance.

Teaching self-advocacy skills

Self-advocacy skills must be taught explicitly and practiced in different settings:

- At school: In the classroom, hallway, washroom, therapy sessions, physical education and art classes, library, on the playground, during extra-curricular activities
- In the community: At stores, restaurants, when visiting friends/relatives
- At home: With family members and caregivers

Promoting self-advocacy skills involves all staff connected with the student (e.g., homeroom teachers, rotary teachers, support staff, school administrators, bus drivers, therapists), as well as the student’s family and caregivers.

Tip: Educators can model self-advocacy skills by being strong self-advocates themselves!

Self-advocacy goals

The intermediate/senior learner will:

- Understand the meaning and the importance of self-advocacy.
- Build resilience, manage stress, and develop a growth mindset.
- Develop awareness of personal learning styles, strengths, and areas of growth (academic, physical, sensory, social, emotional) and related, required accommodations, adaptive tools, and assistive technology.
- Identify services available for them at school and in the community and know how to connect with them.
- Know their rights as youth and how to express their concerns at school team and transition meetings.
- Request information, assistance, and accommodations when needed, regardless of the setting and the people involved.
- Recognize ableism and promote inclusion and disability awareness at school and in the community.

Topics to consider when teaching self-advocacy

Topics	Examples
Who am I?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a visual representation of self, for example, This Is Me poster.• Highlight my unique experiences including my intersecting culture identity. My disability is only one part of my identity. Check out resources at Joyful Learning.• Find and connect with friends with common interests.• Find common traits or characteristics I have in common with my role model, then reflect on how I could use these traits to help me accomplish goals in school and life.
Create a portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a portfolio that identifies tools, opportunities, strategies, and self-knowledge needed to achieve personal goals (social, emotional, physical, educational, etc.).• Share the portfolio with staff for consideration to enhance understanding of individual educational needs and program planning.

Growth mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore growth mindset versus fixed mindset. ● What is resilience? ● See failure as a stepping stone to success. ● Use positive affirmations and learn about their benefits.
Self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mindfulness ● Breathing techniques ● Focus on 'what is' instead of 'what if.' ● Develop stress management strategies that work for me.
My rights. I have a voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My voice is important, my ideas matter. ● Identify a trusted adult at the school and know how to contact them. ● Participate in meetings (e.g., parent-teacher interviews, school support and transition meetings). ● Prepare for the meeting by recording my questions and concerns. ● Role-play with a trusted adult to practice amplifying my voice. ● Create a self-advocacy letter or a self-advocacy card. ● Find the appropriate service in the organization when further action is required to meet my needs. ● Identify key classroom or Individual Education Plan (IEP) accommodations that may help me achieve success within an educational setting. ● Ask to have an accommodation removed from my IEP when it is no longer relevant.
Be active in my community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore volunteer and job opportunities in my community. ● Identify extracurricular, social, and/or fitness opportunities available within my community (e.g., babysitting course). Collaborate to resolve barriers that may impact my participation. ● Make a list to communicate accommodations that will help me to participate in an interview, do a job, or join an activity. ● Compare a variety of career and/or post-secondary learning options and identify those most suited to me based on my personal interests, competencies, and aspirations. (Tuttle & Silva, 2017) ● Share ways to modify a sport or a game to make it accessible.

Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join school clubs, requesting accommodations to ensure full participation if needed. • Identify physical, social and environmental barriers that may impact my participation. Brainstorm solutions. • Amplify my voice by sharing my ideas with others. • Share my lived experience, including my unique cultural experiences. • Identify my interests and hobbies and make connections with other learners with similar interests. • Sign up to volunteer at school.
Disability awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify good/bad representations of people with disabilities in media. • Learn how to include people with disabilities different than my own. • Understand that people are curious and prepare a script to use when asked questions about my disability. Role play in advance to practice. • Recognize that it is my choice to answer questions about my body. • Learn about popular people with disabilities and how they reached their goals (e.g., actors, scientists, politicians, artists). Take initiative to promote disability awareness and point out ableism. Find resources on our School Inclusion Hub. Watch videos such as ReelEducation.
My personal equipment. My safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know what helps me learn and feel comfortable, safe, and independent. • Learn how features in Assistive Technology help me access the curriculum and complete assignments. • Identify adults who could help me maintain or update my personal equipment (e.g., physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, nurse) and know how to contact them. • Flag and resolve safety concerns with me.

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