

Self-advocacy tipsheet – Primary/junior 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/change room, therapy sessions, gym, art, library, on the playground, during extra-curricular activities
- In the community: At the park, store, restaurant, 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 primary/junior learner will develop:

- knowledge of personal strengths and needs (academic, physical, sensory, social, emotional)
- an awareness of required accommodations (including, but not limited to, assistive technology, adapted tools, communication tools, self-regulation strategies)
- knowledge of their rights as children
- the ability to request information, assistance, and accommodations when needed, regardless of the setting and the people involved

Topics to consider when teaching self-advocacy

Topics	Examples
Emotions and coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zones of Regulation, mindfulness, positive self-talk
We are all different	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify similarities and differences among friends, including cultural identities and unique experiences. Check out resources at Joyful Learning.• Recognize that people around me might be curious and it is my choice to answer questions about my disability.• Roleplay how to introduce myself to new friends.
My strengths & interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify skills I am good at and skills I am working on.• Look for friends with common interests.• Create an All About Me booklet or This Is Me poster.
My brain: The control centre of my body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What happens when someone has cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, autism, seizures?• Focus on what makes sense to the students.• Point out strengths.• Explain how messages that go from the brain to the rest of the body are sometimes interrupted.• A disability is not an illness, it is not contagious.

Kids like me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include a variety of children's books and toys that represent children with disabilities in your classroom (see recommended booklist on our School Inclusion Hub). ● Share success stories of children with disabilities in the news (e.g., para-athletes, inventors, actors). ● Share videos featuring characters with disabilities, using sites such as ReelEducation.
My rights. I have a voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand the difference between needs and privileges. ● I have the right to accommodations when I need them. ● Accommodations are not privileges.
What is accessibility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify accessible symbols and features in the classroom, school, and community. ● Sort pictures of what is accessible/not accessible. ● Modify common recess games to include everyone.
My personal equipment. My safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Name personal equipment and understand why I need them. ● Learn how specific features in Assistive Technology (e.g., Voice to Text) help me with my school work. ● Identify adults who could help me with my personal equipment (e.g., trusted adult, educational assistant, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, nurse, teacher). ● Identify what keeps me safe (e.g., chest strap, puffer or Epipen, wheelchair anti-tippers, white cane, hand sanitizer, VNS magnet). ● Choose the adaptive tool that works best for me (e.g., a specific brush, adaptive scissors, spoon).

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