Agenda

The 3 “Selfs”: Self-Advocacy, Self-Determination, and Self-Compassion

I. Defining Self-Advocacy
   A. The Benefits of Self-Advocacy
   B. Examples of Self-Advocacy in Real Life

II. Self-Determination
   A. Understanding the Components
   B. Application and goal setting

III. Self-Compassion
   A. Defining Self-Compassion
   B. Self-Compassion Versus Self-Esteem

IV. An Integrative Model of Self-Advocacy
What does self-advocacy look like?

Self-advocacy is an “essential skill” for children, adults, and families with disabilities.

This is a developed ability - it requires supports, both formal (e.g. IEP or SST) and informal (e.g. community mentors, coaches, friends)

Key Components (per Stuntzner & Hartley, 2015):

1) Having an accurate understanding of my disability
2) Knowing my own strengths and challenges
3) Being aware of needed supports and accommodations
4) Understanding how and when to ask for what I need in relation to my disability
5) Effectively communicating what I need in relation to my disability

The Importance of Self-Advocacy

Self-Advocacy helps people with disabilities:

- Cope with the very real experiences of discrimination and bias in the world and push through or fight against them → RESILIENCE!
- Makes it possible to make sense of these experiences without internalizing them
- Understand when accommodations and supports are needed, and how to ask for them
- Determine how to best approach disability-related challenges
- Navigate tricky or problematic social interactions or misunderstandings related to the disability and address them in real time
- Allows people to self-determine their personal narrative
**Self-Determination: Creating Our Own Narrative, Finding Our Own Story**

Defined as:

- Living one’s life consistent with **one’s own values**, preferences, strengths, and needs

- Primary **causal agent** in one’s life

- Ability to **consider options and make choices** (home, work, school, leisure)

Students with self-determination skills have a stronger chance of being successful adults (Wehmeyer & Shwartz, 1997).
Classroom and Assignment Accommodations Checklist

- Reduced Shortened Assignments
- Audiobook available
- Extended time to complete assignments
- Prompts to turn in homework assignments when due
- Frequent check ins during class
- Cues and prompts for attention

Self-Determination Skills

1. Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy
2. Self-Regulation
3. Goal Setting
4. Decision Making and Problem Solving
5. Choice Making
Self-Determination through the Ages

Real world experience is most effective in teaching self-determination:

- Making mistakes
- Open discussion of disability
- Failing, learning, and trying again
- Addressed through the IEP

Self-Determination Application

Promote Choice Making

- Identify strengths, interests, and learning styles;
- Provide choices about clothing, social activities, family events, and methods of learning new information;
- Hold high expectations for youth;
- Teach youth about their disability;
- Involve children and youth in self-determination/self advocacy; opportunities in school, home, and community;
- Prepare children and youth for school meetings;
- 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.


**Promote Self Advocacy**

- Encourage communication and self-representation;
- Praise all efforts of assertiveness and problem solving;
- Develop opportunities at home and in school for self-advocacy;
- Provide opportunities for leadership roles at home and in school;
- Encourage self-advocates to speak in class;
- Teach about appropriate accommodation needs;
- Practice ways to disclose disability and accommodation needs;
- Create opportunities to speak about the disability in school, home, church, business and community.

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**Defining Self-Compassion**

Self-Kindness  
Mindfulness  
Common Humanity

Self-Judgment  
Over-Identification  
Isolation
A Word About Self-Esteem Versus Self-Compassion

Those with high self esteem:

- Less accurate in evaluations of self
- More likely to face consequences when they don't succeed
- More risk-taking behaviors
- Higher levels of narcissism
- Less personal responsibility-taking following mistakes
Self-Compassion: A Natural Fit for the Self-Advocacy Model

Self-Compassion is a skill that can be taught to anyone, and an active practice!

It allows us to be:
- Kinder and less self-critical
- Open to critical feedback without defensiveness
- Understanding of our role in conflict and challenges
- Forgiving toward ourselves and others
- Aware of the things we share with others, and less likely to feel isolated and alone

Linked to development and maintenance of self-care strategies (Kemper, et al, 2015)
Protects against internalization of stigma and negative attitudes about high/special needs children (Wong, et. al, 2016)

Stuntzner & Hartley’s Integrated Model (2015)

A) Learn as much about my disability as possible
   - This means naming it and understanding the impact for themselves
A) Identify own strengths, weaknesses, and level of resilience/coping skills
   - How do you cope? What are your go-to self-care and soothing strategies? (Insight from family and close friends can be helpful here!)
A) Identify skills that have worked in the past, and can be used to advocate for self
   - Again- insight from friends, community supports and family can be helpful here.
A) Think about areas where self-advocacy is hard or not happening
   - Where is it hard to ask for what I need?
A) Identify barriers
   - What gets in the way of asking for what I need? When do I feel stuck and helpless or hopeless?
F) Generate strategies to overcome barriers and develop self-advocating skills
   ● What can I do to change things in the above situations? (Insight from supports is often critical here!)

G) Gather resources/supports/services
   ● Find community resources, informal and formal. Plug in. Find mentors and coaches—people who “get it”.

H) Practice self-advocating (informally)
   ● Practice through role play, conversation, etc.

I) Think about and process own reactions to rejection, failure, challenges
   ● Therapy, coaching, and supportive online and in-person communities are helpful here.

J) Assess and reassess own self-advocacy skills; incorporate use of self-compassion to reduce shame, self-criticism, and over-identification with struggles
   ● Use of self-compassion meditations, visualizations, and skills and work with a coach or therapist may help here

K) Celebrate successes and share the skills I’ve learned with others as a mentor
References


Resources

[www.arnoldadvocacy.com](http://www.arnoldadvocacy.com)

[www.marincollaborativeassessment.com](http://www.marincollaborativeassessment.com)

[www.professionalsempoweringparents.com](http://www.professionalsempoweringparents.com)

[http://www.matrixparents.org](http://www.matrixparents.org)