



# Self-Advocacy & Empowerment

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## Agenda

The 3 “Selves”: 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## Self-Advocacy Phrases




I need quiet.




I need space.




I need a timer.



I need help.



I can do it by myself.



I need headphones.

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## 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 & Schwartz, 1997).

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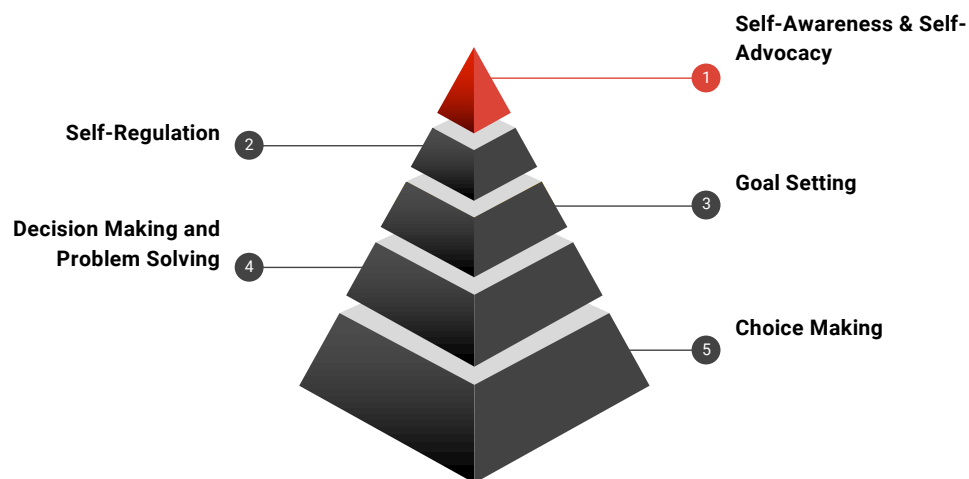
### Classroom and Assignment Accommodations Checklist

- ☐ 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

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## Self-Determination Skills



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## 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



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## 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.

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## 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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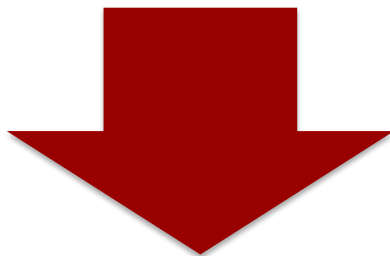
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## Defining Self-Compassion



Self-Kindness  
Mindfulness  
Common Humanity



Self-Judgment  
Over-Identification  
Isolation

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## 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

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## 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)

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## 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?

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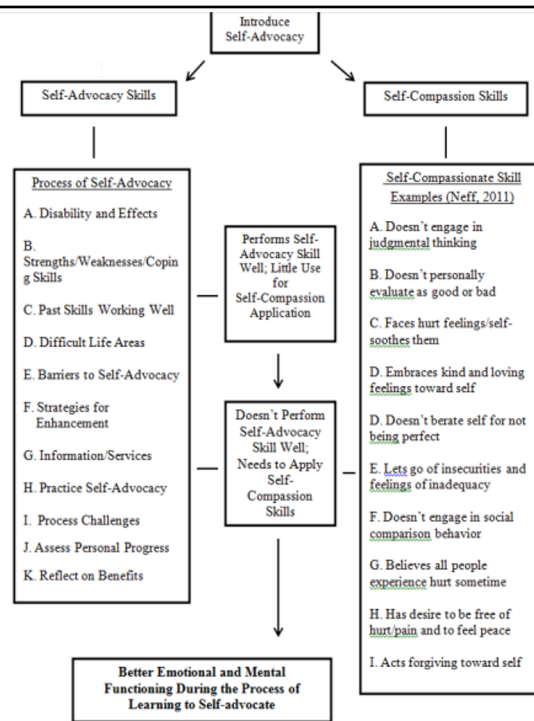
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- F) skills Generate strategies to overcome barriers and develop self-advocating skills
- What can I do to change things in the above situations? (Insight from supports is often critical here!)
- G) Gather resources/supports/services
- Find community 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

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## References

Kemper, K. J., Mo, X., & Khayat, R. (2015). Are mindfulness and self-compassion associated with sleep and resilience in health professionals?. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 21(8), 496-503.

Stuntzner, S., & Hartley, M. T. (2015). Balancing self-compassion with self-advocacy: A new approach for persons with disabilities. *Annals of Psychotherapy & Integrative Health*, 12-28.

Wehmeyer, M., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-determination and positive adult outcomes: A follow- up study of youth with mental retardation or learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63(2), 245-255.

Wong, C. C., Mak, W. W., & Liao, K. Y. H. (2016). Self-Compassion: a Potential Buffer Against Affiliate Stigma Experienced by Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Mindfulness*, 7(6), 1385-1395.

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## 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>

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