

**Helping our children to become their own advocates:**

Builds a sense of competency, which is vital to confidence

Helps them to attain independence

Provides tools they will need increasingly from middle school to adulthood

**Skills critical to self-advocacy:**

Self-knowledge,

Decision-making,

Communication.

**Resist the urge to take over to solve problems for your child**

Dr. Mary Fristad, author of "Raising a Moody Child," recommends first naming the problem; then allow the child to find his/her own answer. "The key ingredient for success is that parents not give the solution to their teenager or child. Rather, they can help the child find his own solution, asking a series of questions to help the child arrive at a particular conclusion."

**From Wrights law, a special ed resource at [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)**

Self-advocacy is the ability to understand and effectively communicate one's needs to other individuals. Learning to become an effective self-advocate, especially for individuals with a hidden handicap, is all about educating the people around you. There are three parts to becoming an effective self-advocate: knowing yourself, knowing your needs, and knowing how to get what you need.

**Know yourself.** Know to describe your disability, as well as your strengths and weaknesses. Students should be encouraged to take part in opportunities for demonstrating independence. Learning self-advocacy skills is a "win-win" proposition for students. Parents, professional staff and faculty win when students learn to negotiate effectively to have their needs met. Students benefit most from developing self-advocacy skills for the realities of college and beyond.

**Know what you need.** Know your skills, strengths, and weaknesses. Learn about your disability and how it affects your daily activities, communications, and social interactions. There are three areas worth investigating to determine what you need to improve your skills and/or compensate for your weaknesses: interventions, accommodations, and modifications. **Interventions** are evidence-based instruction to improve skills (reading, spelling, math, comprehension, speech, etc.). Intervention may also include psychological counseling and/or support groups. **Accommodations** are tools to help accomplish a goal that do not change the integrity of the task (books on tape, extra time for test, copies of handouts before a meeting, editor, use of a calculator, etc.). **Modifications** are alterations to assignments that do change the overall task; for example, writing a two-page report instead of a four-page report. It is important to keep in mind that nearly all employers and most educational institutions (colleges and universities)

do not provide modifications.

**Know how to get what you need.** Communication takes practice and can be emotionally draining. It's easy to get caught-up in feelings of guilt that you are asking for "special treatment" or that you don't need an accommodation because you excel in other areas.

**The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990** guarantees equal access and equal opportunities to individuals with physical and/or hidden disabilities that significantly interfere with one or more major life activities (communicating, reading, physical movement, etc.). Public and private institutions are required to provide "reasonable accommodations" to individuals with a documented disability, as long as these accommodations do not create an undue hardship for the company or university. Employers and universities are prohibited from discriminating against a person with a learning disability if they are "otherwise qualified."

Accommodations help to overcome the obstacles of the disability. If the disability does interfere with a work or educational activity, **it is the responsibility of the individual with the disability to share this information with their supervisor, human resources person, administrators, and/or professors.**

### **From the National Center for Learning Disabilities Self-Advocacy for College Students**

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6142>

By: Richard Goldhammer and Loring C. Brinckerhoff (1993)

Parents need to let go. They cannot be in charge of the adult life of their son or daughter. Realize that the most valuable lesson a student can learn is about the consequences of their actions. Above all, a student with a disability needs to become comfortable with asking for help from those most able to meet their needs.

**Myth: Obtaining the highest grades possible is the major yardstick of effective self-advocacy.** Higher grades do not mean that one has truly learned to self-advocate. Examples abound of students with disabilities who have mastered getting high grades but are left isolated and miserable in the process, ultimately hurting their development towards healthy, functional independence. If the bottom line is independence in the world of work, it may not be true that the better one's grades, the more successful the worker.

**Social skills coupled with competence in one's field are the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace.**

Suggested practices are:

Join a support group for students with learning disabilities on your campus, or start one!

Enjoy relaxing and growth-oriented activities

Seek a balance academically and socially

Get involved in an activity on campus for as much time as you feel you can afford. It's a great way to meet people and develop social skills.

Ask for help with personal difficulties you may be having by seeing a professional in the counseling center on campus.