



Self-Advocacy Coaching

Build Students' Self-Advocacy Skills

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DESCRIPTION

This guide includes check-in and coaching session activities to help students better understand their learning needs, build confidence asking for support, and practice communicating their accommodations.

PREP TIME

5-10 minutes

ACTIVITY TIME

30-45 minutes

MATERIALS

Sentence starters;
Scenarios;
Self-advocacy
reflection sheet

Implementation Guidance

This guide includes simple activities designed to help you support student self-advocacy skills. These activities can be embedded into check-ins and advisory sessions. They do not all need to be used. You can select the ones that you think will work best for particular students. Depending on the activities you choose, you may need to complete them across several sessions.

Before selecting one of the strategies below, start with a brief conversation. Ask the student what they think it means to advocate for themselves. You may choose to share a definition: *“self-advocacy means understanding what you need to succeed in school and making that known. This can include speaking up for yourself in a respectful and confident way.”*

You might also emphasize three parts of self-advocacy:

1. **Know Yourself.** Know your strengths and challenges.
2. **Know Your Rights.** Know what your IEP/504 plan says
3. **Speak Up.** Know how and when to ask for what you need.

You might start with some **brief discussion prompts** to further introduce the concept of self-advocacy and its importance:

- Why is it important to ask for help or use your accommodations, if you need them?
- What feels easy or hard about asking a teacher for support?
- What would happen if you didn't speak up?

Skill-Building Strategies

Below are three different strategies you might use to support students in building their self-advocacy skills. This includes sentence starters, role-playing or discussion of different scenarios, and a self-advocacy reflection sheet.

Strategy	Instructions	Materials
Sentence Starters (5-10 minutes)	Share several sentence starters students can use when speaking with teachers. Go over each one together and discuss when it might be useful. Alternatively, you might ask students to highlight or start 2-3 starters that feel natural to them. Sample sentence starters include: - "Can I talk to you about an accommodation I have in my IEP/504 plan?" - "How should I ask for [accommodation] in your class?" - "I just wanted to remind you I get extended time on quizzes."	See the sentence starters for more examples.
Scenarios (15-20 minutes)	Give students realistic situations they may face. Let them role-play or discuss with you. Model by switching roles (student/teacher) to build comfort and empathy. Sample scenarios include: - A teacher forgets to give extended time on a quiz - A substitute doesn't know your accommodations Debrief After Each Scenario: - What would you say? - How would it feel? - What would you try next time?	See sample scenarios worksheet
Self-Advocacy Reflection Sheet (10 minutes)	Use this quick reflection sheet to help students internalize how they will make a plan to advocate for their learning needs. Have the student complete the reflection in whatever way makes the most sense—write, draw, type, or discuss while you take notes.	Self-Advocacy Reflection Sheet

TIPS

- Normalize self-advocacy. Help students see that asking for support is a strength, not a weakness.
- Introduce terms in simple, relatable ways, like “accommodation” (tools or changes that help you do your best in class) and “self-advocacy” (understanding what you need to be successful in school and making that known). Connect what’s written in their plan to what they experience in class.
- Some students may be ready to speak up now; others may need to build confidence over time. Meet them where they are.
- Return to these tools throughout the year, especially before schedule changes, IEP/504 meetings, or difficult academic periods.
- Involve parents or caregivers in helping their child develop self-advocacy skills at school and beyond. Below is a 1-page document you can send home or review with them in a meeting to help get them involved.

Sentence Starters

Below is a set of student-friendly sentence starters specifically designed to help high school students with IEPs/504 plans advocate for their accommodations confidently and respectfully.

When asking about an accommodation:

- "Hi [Teacher Name], I wanted to ask if I can use my [accommodation] for this assignment/test?"
- "I just wanted to check in because I have [accommodation] in my IEP/504 plan. Can I use that for this?"
- "I'm supposed to get [accommodation] according to my IEP/504 plan. Can we talk about how that works in your class?"
- "Is it okay if I use [accommodation] for this activity? It's part of my support plan."

When a teacher forgets to apply an accommodation:

- "I think we may have forgotten about my [accommodation] for this test. Can I still use it?"
- "I usually get [support] on tests, and I didn't get that today. Can we talk about it?"
- "I noticed my [accommodation] wasn't available. Can we figure out how to make sure it's there next time?"

When you're feeling nervous about asking:

- "This is a little hard for me to say, but I need to use my [accommodation] for this assignment."
- "I feel awkward bringing this up, but I have a plan that says I get [accommodation], and I think it would help here."
- "Sorry if this is a weird time but I just wanted to ask about using one of my accommodations."

When asking for clarification or help:

- "I'm having trouble with this. Can I get [support] like it says in my plan?"
- "Can we go over this together? I think I need some extra help understanding."
- "Would it be okay to meet during [office hours/lunch/etc.]? I think I need help with this."

For email or written communication:

- "Hi [Teacher Name], I wanted to follow up about my accommodations. I have [list or summary], and I wanted to talk about how they'll work in your class."
- "I'm reaching out to make sure you've received a copy of my IEP/504 Plan. Let me know if you'd like to talk about how I learn best."
- "I wanted to ask if [specific accommodation] can be used for [upcoming assignment/test]. Let me know what works best!"

Self-Advocacy Scenarios

Below is a set of realistic, high school-level scenarios that can be used during brief check-ins. These are designed to reflect common classroom situations where a student might need to speak up about their accommodations. Choose a scenario(s) that aligns with student accommodations or modify one to better align with students' learning needs. You can have a casual conversation or if the student is up for it, you can role-play the scenarios.

1. Forgotten Extended Time

You start taking a quiz in class and realize the teacher hasn't given you the extended time that is in your IEP/504 plan.

Reflection Questions:

- How would you bring this up to your teacher in a respectful way?
- What are some words or phrases that would feel natural to use?
- How would you handle it if your teacher seemed surprised or forgot?

2. Overwhelmed by Class Discussion

You get anxious when called on without warning, and your IEP/504 plan says you shouldn't be cold-called in class.

Reflection Questions:

- How can you talk to your teacher privately about this?
- Why is it important to advocate for this type of support?
- What might you say if you're feeling nervous about the teacher's response?

3. Missing Notes or Visuals

You need written instructions or visual aids to follow the lesson, but the teacher only gave verbal directions today.

Reflection Questions:

- How would you ask for written directions or notes?
- What makes it hard to ask at the moment?
- How can you remind yourself that this is something you're entitled to?

4. Needing a Quiet Test Space

You're supposed to take tests in a quiet room, but your teacher says there's no space available today.

Reflection Questions:

- What could you say to advocate for an alternative plan?

- How can you stay calm if the teacher doesn't have an immediate solution?
- Who else can you go to if the accommodation can't be provided right away?

5. Struggling with Group Work

Your IEP/504 plan allows you to work independently when group work feels overwhelming, but a big group project was just assigned.

Reflection Questions:

- What are some ways you can express this need respectfully?
- How can you handle the situation if your peers are part of the group?
- What could you ask the teacher to help you feel more supported?

6. Asking for Help After Falling Behind

You've missed assignments and are feeling overwhelmed. Your IEP/504 plan includes support like reteaching or extended deadlines.

Reflection Questions:

- How might you start a conversation with your teacher about catching up?
- What would help you feel more comfortable asking for help?
- What can you say to show that you're trying, not making excuses?

7. Clarifying an Accommodation with a Sub

A substitute teacher is leading the class and doesn't know about your accommodations.

Reflection Questions:

- How could you explain your accommodations to someone new?
- What makes this situation feel different or harder than talking to your usual teacher?

Self-Advocacy Reflection Sheet

What I Know About Myself as a Learner

1. One thing I am good at in school is: _____

2. One thing I find challenging about school is: _____

3. One accommodation or support that really helps me is: _____

How I Advocate for Myself

1. Have you ever talked to a teacher about your IEP or 504 plan?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
2. If yes, what did you say or ask for? _____

3. If not, what makes it hard to ask for help or bring it up? _____

Practice Advocacy

1. What's one sentence you could use to ask for the support you need?
"I just wanted to let you know that I _____
_____, and it helps me when _____
_____."
2. What is one situation where you might need to speak up? _____

3. How would you handle it? _____

Advocacy Goals

1. One goal I have for advocating for myself is: _____

2. One person I can talk to if I need help speaking up is: _____

3. Is there anything else you want to share about how you learn or what support you need this year? _____

Growing Independence: A Guide to Self-Advocacy for Parents and Caregivers

In high school, we are helping your student learn a very important life skill: **self-advocacy**. We want to team up with you! Together, we can help them practice these skills at school and at home.

What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy means knowing what you need, knowing what you are good at, and asking for help. It is how you speak up for yourself.

Why is it Important Right Now?

High school is a big step toward becoming an adult. Learning to speak up now builds strong confidence. It gives your child the tools they need for college, jobs, and everyday life. It teaches them how to set boundaries and ask for what they need to do their best.

What We Are Practicing at School

We are teaching students to take charge of their learning. We practice how to talk directly to their teachers to:

- Talk about the special supports (accommodations) they get in class.
- Ask questions to understand their grades.
- Ask if they can fix mistakes on an assignment for a better grade.
- Ask for more time on a project if they really need it.

How You Can Help at Home

When your student has a problem at school, it is normal to want to step in and fix it. You might want to email the teacher yourself. Instead of doing it for them, **we invite you to coach them through it.**

If your student needs to fix a problem at school, try these steps:

- **Stop and Plan:** Instead of writing the email for them, sit down and ask, "*What do you think needs to be said?*"
- **Write it Together:** Help them plan out an email. Or, help them make a list of what to say in person.

- **Practice:** Act out the conversation at home. Let them practice the first sentence out loud so they feel ready and brave.

Practicing in the Real World

Speaking up is not just for school. Here are a few easy ways your student can practice speaking up in everyday life:

- **Make Appointments:** Have them call to set up their own haircut or doctor visit.
- **Take the Lead:** At a restaurant, let them order their own food or ask for a water refill. At a store, have them ask a worker where to find an item.
- **Fix Small Problems:** If a restaurant or drive-thru gets their order wrong, have them go to the counter to ask for the correct item.



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We collaborate with schools, youth-serving organizations, programs, and communities to conduct applied research, co-design solutions, and build the relational infrastructure every young person needs to thrive. Through professional learning experiences, surveys, measurement tools, and support for continuous improvement, we help partners turn knowledge into action and create the conditions where young people can truly learn, grow, contribute, and thrive.

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