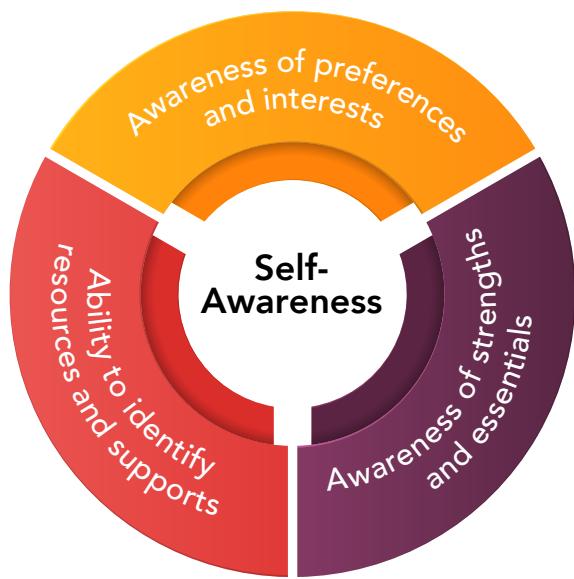


Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy: Caregiver Resource



Self-awareness is the ability to accurately recognize one's emotions, thoughts, and values and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset." (TN SPC Standards, 2017). Self-awareness is a learned skill that caregivers can encourage and support.



► Section 1: Overview of Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy

Awareness of personal qualities, interests, strengths, and essentials, as well as the ability to identify resources and supports, are critical skills for effective self-advocacy.

	TERM	DEFINITION
	Strengths	Actions and activities that a person does well
	Preferences	Things that make tasks and assignments more tolerable, enjoyable, and acceptable
	Interests	Subjects, activities, and interactions that brings about engagement and motivation for connecting with friends and family
	Essentials	Things a person requires to be available for social engagement and connecting with others

"For me, an important component of self-awareness is being aware of how I differ from others. People can misattribute my behaviors, and it's important to learn how my actions/reactions may be interpreted, especially when this leads to misunderstandings/conflicts so that I can advocate for myself in a way that helps them to understand, rather than assume and judge."

~Dave Caudel, TRIAD Advisory Committee Member

► Section 1: Overview of Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Which words should be used to describe things a person requires to be available for social engagement and connecting with others?

- » Using the term “essentials” instead of “needs” can reduce the risk of terms being interpreted differently by others. Sometimes people may dismiss needs as merely wants.

What is the difference between preferences and essentials?

- » Preferences are things that make tasks more tolerable, enjoyable, and acceptable. Preferences are **not required** but should be strongly considered.
Example: “I prefer talking with my friends face-to-face.”
- » Essentials are the things a person **must have** available to socially engage and connect.
Example: “I cannot communicate effectively in overly noisy/chaotic places.”

Why is self-awareness important?

Self-awareness can:

- » make your child more proactive and encourage a positive self-concept,
- » enhance self-confidence and overall well-being,
- » help your child better understand strengths and essentials related to activities, experiences, and situations that occur throughout the day, and
- » support self-determination and goal-directed decision-making.

There are many ways to support your child as they focus on becoming more **aware** of personal strengths, preferences, interests, and essentials. Improved self-awareness can help them better **understand** how personal characteristics relate to activities, experiences, and situations that occur throughout the day. It is important to check in with them regularly to make sure your actions are encouraging and supportive. Three activities are provided in the following pages.

“I enjoyed math, but it was a shock to me at the start of college to learn that I was actually ‘good’ at it — a teacher told me I did better than most students and I was surprised, as I didn’t consider myself ‘good’ at it until after his input.”

~Dave Caudel, TRIAD Advisory Committee Member

↳ Section 2: Promoting and Supporting Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy

Develop a resource describing personal strengths, preferences, interests, and essentials.

STRENGTHS: WHAT AM I GOOD AT?



Strengths are **actions** and **activities** that a person does well.

What are some things you do well at home? In the community? At school?

_____.

What are some things that come easy to you or some things that you are good at?

_____.

How do you feel when you do these types of things?

_____.

PREFERENCES: HOW DO I LIKE TO ____?



Preferences are the things that make tasks more **tolerable**, **enjoyable**, and **acceptable**.

What are things you enjoy doing? Why do you like these things?

_____.

What are some things you like about those activities you enjoy doing?

_____.

What is your favorite way to accomplish a task or work on something new [i.e., types of tasks (reading, listening, watching, acting it out), time of day (early, after lunch, etc.), type of environment (alone, with others, noisy, quiet, etc.)]?

_____.

↳ Section 2: Promoting and Supporting Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy

INTERESTS: WHAT DO I ENJOY?



Interests are subjects, activities, and interactions that bring about **engagement** and **motivation**.

Guiding Questions:

- What is important to you? Why?

_____.

- Something you are really interested in is:

_____.

- Something you're not afraid of trying is:

_____.

ESSENTIALS: WHAT DO I NEED TO DO MY BEST?



Essentials are the things a person **requires** to be available for engagement and connection.

Guiding Questions:

- What are some things that are difficult for you at home? In the community?
At school?

_____.

- Something you must work hard at is:

_____.

- Something you wish you could do better is:

_____.

↳ Section 2: Promoting and Supporting Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy

Incorporate opportunities to model and practice describing how personal qualities and interests relate to activities, experiences, and situations.

Below are some examples of caregivers modeling how their personal preferences and strengths relate to different activities, experiences, or situations. These examples also provide opportunities for self-advocates to practice thinking through how their preferences and strengths relate to different activities and situations.

Academic/Cognitive	
Preferences	<p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver models. "We are going to work on your project together. I like putting together models, so I will likely enjoy this activity. What do you know about your likes?"<input type="checkbox"/> Child models and practices. "I like practicing ____?"
Social	
Preferences	<p>Lunch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver models. "We are heading out to lunch with family. I like lunch with family because ____. What do you like about lunch?"<input type="checkbox"/> Child models and practices. "I like lunch because ____."
Interests	
Strengths	<p>Leisure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver models. "We are going bowling. I like bowling because I am good at addition. While bowling, I can add up numbers quickly to keep score. What do you like about bowling?"<input type="checkbox"/> Child models and practices. "I like bowling because I can ____."

↳ Section 2: Promoting and Supporting Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy

Below are some examples of caregivers modeling how their personal interests and essentials relate to different activities, experiences, or situations. Caregivers also provide opportunities for the child to practice thinking through how their interests and essentials relate to different activities and situations.

Academic/Cognitive	
Essentials	<p>Cooking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver models. "We are going to make a birthday cake together. Gathering all the ingredients before I start helps me bake. What helps you when you are trying to get something done?"<input type="checkbox"/> Child models and practices.<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver provides multiple types of formats for the child to respond: (e.g. writing in their journal, individual reflection, sharing it with the caregiver, asking for ideas/ suggestions, etc.)
Social	
Interests	<p>Running Errands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver models. "We need to run some errands. We may get stuck waiting, so I am bringing a book. What do you know about yourself that you need to consider as we prepare to run some errands?"<input type="checkbox"/> Child models and practices.<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver provides multiple types of formats for the child to respond: (e.g. writing in their journal, individual reflection, sharing it with the caregiver, asking for ideas/ suggestions, etc.)
Sensory	
Essentials	<p>Sporting Event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver models. "We are going to the game. Loud noises, like cheering and shouting, can make my ears hurt and give me a headache, so I'm going to wear headphones. What do you know about yourself that would help you to consider before going to the game?"<input type="checkbox"/> Child models and practices.<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver provides multiple types of formats for the child to respond: (e.g., writing in their journal, individual reflection, sharing it with the caregiver, asking for ideas/ suggestions, etc.)

↳ Section 2: Promoting and Supporting Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy

Support opportunities to reflect on how different situations impact emotions and develop a deeper understanding of how responses differ across situations.

EXAMPLES	How did I respond to a certain situation?	Is that how I typically respond in this situation and similar situations?	What did I want to happen in this situation?	Did my response help me reach my desired outcome or goal?
Academic/Cognitive Strengths & Interests	I interrupted the tour guide to share information about the exhibit.	Yes, if it's something I'm interested in and good at.	I wanted to share something I know about the exhibit, without interrupting the tour guide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> If yes, how can I support myself to continue to respond this way?<input type="checkbox"/> If no, how can I move away from this response and learn a different response to use in the future?<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know. What additional information do I need to help me answer this question?
Social and Sensory Preferences	I listened to music and sat in a different location by myself during lunch.	No, I would have sat with the group and felt very uncomfortable.	I wanted to be able to feel relaxed and eat my lunch without all the sights and smells of all the food.	Wait for the tour guide to finish talking and ask if I can share an additional piece of information with the group.

↳ Section 2: Promoting and Supporting Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy

Here is a tool to guide your child through the process of reflecting on their emotional responses across different situations. Please use these questions to support your child building self-awareness in different situations and contexts.

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS SELF-REFLECTION TOOL

- How did I respond to a certain situation?**

- Is that how I typically respond in this situation and similar situations?**

- What did I want to happen in this situation?**

- Did my response help me reach my desired outcome or goal?**

Please see additional resources for ideas to support your child by identifying resources and supports: [Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process: Caregiver Resource](#)

↳ Section 3: Reflection/Application

- What are some ways you are supporting your child's self-awareness at home and in the community?**

- When could you incorporate guided self-reflection to support self-advocacy at home or in the community?**

To learn more about supporting your child's self-awareness and self-advocacy skills, please visit:
triad.vumc.org/autism-mental-health

REFERENCES

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