

Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy: Educator 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).



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

Students' awareness of their strengths, preferences, 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 bring about engagement and motivation for learning.
	Essentials	Things a person requires to be available for engagement and learning.

"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 engagement and learning?

- » 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 quieter places.”
- » Essentials are the things a person **must have** available to engage and learn.
Example: “I cannot function effectively in overly noisy/chaotic places.”

How does self-awareness support student outcomes?

Practicing self-awareness can:

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

There are many ways to support students as they focus on becoming more **aware** of personal strengths, preferences, interests, and essentials. Improved self-awareness can help students better **understand** how personal characteristics relate to activities, experiences, and situations that occur throughout the day. 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.

Guiding Questions:

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

- What are some things that come easy to me or some things that I'm good at?

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

PREFERENCES: HOW DO I LIKE TO LEARN?



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

Guiding Questions:

- What are things you enjoy doing?

- Why do you like these things?

- How do you like to learn (i.e., types of tasks — reading, listening, watching, doing; 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 LIKE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?



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

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 WORK?



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

Guiding Questions:

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

- 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 educators modeling how their personal preferences and strengths relate to different activities, experiences, or situations. These educators also provide opportunities for students to practice thinking through how their preferences and strengths relate to different activities and situations.

	Academic/Cognitive
Preferences	<p>Small Group Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models. “We are going to practice putting our spelling words in alphabetical order. I like it when things are in order, so I really like practicing ABC order. What do you know about your likes?”<input type="checkbox"/> Students model and practice. “I like practicing ___?”
	Social
Preferences	<p>Lunch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models. “We are heading to lunch. I like lunch because ___. What do you like about lunch?”<input type="checkbox"/> Students model and practice “I like lunch because ___.”
	Sensory
Strengths	<p>Recess</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models. “We are going out to recess next. I like recess because I can swing without ever feeling dizzy. What do you like about recess?”<input type="checkbox"/> Students model and practice. “I like recess because I get to ___.”

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

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

	Academic/Cognitive
Essentials	<p>Large Group Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models. “You are going to spend the next 10 minutes listening as I share information about the lesson. Typing helps me listen, so I would plan to type notes while I listened to the teacher. What do you know about yourself?” <input type="checkbox"/> Students model and practice. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provides multiple types of formats for the students to respond (e.g., writing in their journal, holding that thought to themselves, signaling they want to share with a peer or the teacher, etc.)
	Social
Interests	<p>Transitioning to Recess/Leisure Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models. “It’s time for recess/leisure. I enjoy reading, so I am taking a book outside with me. What do you know about yourself that you need to consider as we prepare to have some free time?” <input type="checkbox"/> Students model and practice. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provides multiple types of formats for the students to respond (e.g., writing in their journal, holding that thought to themselves, signaling they want to share with a peer or the teacher, etc.)
	Sensory
Essentials	<p>Pep Rally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models. “Our class will be heading to the gym for a pep rally this morning. Loud noises, like cheering and shouting, can make my ears hurt and give me a headache, so I’m going to wear headphones during the pep rally. What do you know about yourself that would help you to consider before going to the pep rally?” <input type="checkbox"/> Students model and practice. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provides multiple types of formats for the students to respond (e.g., writing in their journal, holding that thought to themselves, signaling they want to share with a peer or the teacher, 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?	<p>Did my response help me reach my desired outcome or goal?</p> <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 are my next steps for thinking about this situation?
Academic Strengths & Interests	I answered the teacher's question when she called on another student.	Yes, if it's something I'm interested in and good at.	I wanted my teacher and the other kids to think I'm smart and listen to me.	Ask a teacher to help me think about what the teacher and kids might have thought when this happened.
Sensory & Academic Essentials & Interests	I asked the teacher if I could swap seats, so I was further away, and my back was to the laptop cart.	No, I would have sat as close to the laptops as I could and think about them the whole class.	I wanted to set myself up with my essentials so I could pay attention to what was happening during the class.	Continue to sit away from and with my back to the laptops.

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

Here is a tool to guide students through the process of reflecting on their emotional responses across different situations. Please use these questions to support students 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 students by identifying resources and supports:
[Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process: Educator Resource](#)

➤ Section 3: Reflection/Application

What are some ways you currently support your student's self-awareness throughout the school day?

When could you incorporate guided self-reflection to support self-advocacy throughout the day?

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

REFERENCES

I'm Determined, Virginia Department of Education. (2021, July 19). One-pager. *I'm Determined*. Retrieved September 27, 2022, from www.imdetermined.org/resource/one-pager/

Cantley, P., Little, K., & Martin, J. E. (2010). *ME! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy*. Retrieved from www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy

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