

Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process: Caregiver Resource



WHY SUPPORT SELF-ADVOCACY?

Self-advocacy is the act of knowing, understanding, and communicating one's own strengths, challenges, personal essentials, and rights. Self-advocacy allows individuals to make decisions in the service of pursuing their own goals in life. For a more detailed description of self-advocacy, please refer to TRIAD's "Supporting Autistic Self-Advocacy" resource for children in [Elementary School](#) and [Middle/High School](#).

This resource will share strategies for you to support your autistic child to effectively identify, communicate, and represent themselves alongside non-autistic peers, teachers, and systems.

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ADVOCACY

The Three-Step Self-Advocacy process, developed by Dr. Stephen Shore, teaches children how to identify obstacles and develop solutions to benefit themselves, relieve specific stressors, and/or advance their goals. The three steps include: (1) scan and name; (2) identify solutions; and (3) communicate.



These steps can be completed before an upcoming situation, in the moment, or afterwards to debrief and prepare for future situations. Children who have had the opportunity to reflect on their strengths, preferences, interests, and essentials will be better equipped to identify obstacles, plan for adjustments to their setting, and use their own strengths to benefit the situation.

For more information on supporting self-reflection for autistic youth, please refer to the [“Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy”](#) resource.

» STEP ONE: SCAN AND NAME

Children must first be able to recognize and define obstacles. Obstacles disrupt the child’s environment, limit their access to something or someone, impact their ability to perform, and/or make them feel uncomfortable.

- 🎯 The objective of this step is to support your child in identifying obstacles that negatively impact their ability to engage in a task or situation.

To help identify when something may present as an obstacle for your child, it may be helpful to consider data from the following three areas.

THREE AREAS	
Observers	» Family members, educators, peers, or other people actively involved in your child’s life observe changes in your child’s mood, behavior, or performance.
Student Self-reflection	» Your child expresses change in their mood, behavior, or performance.
Data	» Your child’s performance on a task is qualitatively or quantitatively different from their typical performance.

Consider using your own personal, relatable examples when trying to identify obstacles. Model talking about your spectrum of differences that impact your learning and performance.



EXAMPLES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Are you a visual learner? » Do you need calendar reminders for multi-step projects at work? » Do you like to work alone or in groups? » Do you know how to make a new friend at a work retreat?

When teaching children this step, it can be helpful to think about obstacles falling into one of these four categories. Check out this table for definitions of the four categories and some self-reflection questions to guide your child in thinking about the possible impact of these obstacles. For additional self-reflection guiding questions, please see the [“Three-Step Self-Advocacy Student Workbook.”](#)

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	QUESTIONS TO GUIDE SELF-REFLECTION
Sensory	Perception of the environment. Consider sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures/tactile events, and body motion.	» What about the sensory environment is making you uncomfortable or making it difficult for you to engage in the task or situation?
Academic/ Cognitive	A child’s thinking style or way of processing information.	» What is this task or situation requiring of you? What is frustrating or challenging about this task or situation?
Communication	A child’s speaking and nonspeaking ways of communicating.	» What is unclear or uncomfortable to you about communicating here?
Social	Social aspects of the environment, including social cues or rules and the child’s social interests and/or goals.	» What is unclear to you about the situation (e.g., your role, the social interaction)? What is uncomfortable about this social situation?




STEP TWO: IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS

Once children have defined the specific obstacle and how it impacts them, the next step invites children to brainstorm possible solutions or adjustments to the situation.

-  The objective of this step is to facilitate your child’s brainstorming and promote reflection on strengths/advantages and risks/problems of each solution. Consider asking the following questions: “What do I need to get this finished?” or “What is the first step to get started?”
-  Encourage your child to reflect on their own strengths and past experiences to generate solutions. Refer to the resource on “[Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy](#)” for additional guidance and examples for helping children identify their strengths, interests, preferences, and personal essentials.

STEP THREE: COMMUNICATE


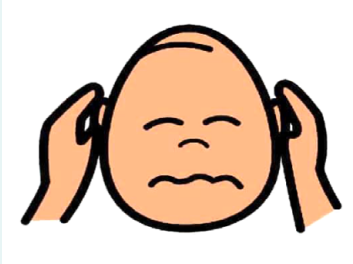
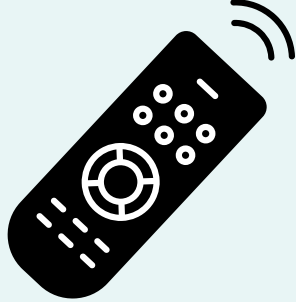
The last step is to support autistic children in sharing their concerns and ideas with others to move forward *and* promote greater understanding for the autistic child and those working with and around them.

-  The objective of this step is to support children in effectively advocating by communicating their concerns and solutions to address obstacles impacting their learning and engagement. Effective communication includes determining **when** and **how** to advocate in a way that matches the social context.
-  Autistic children will likely benefit from coaching on the timing of advocacy. Encourage children to think about when they would like to approach a specific person or peer. (*e.g., in school before class? during recess? at next IEP meeting? at next outing with friends?*).
-  Provide frequent practice opportunities to support your child’s use of the Three-Step Self-Advocacy process. Practice opportunities could include role-play between you and your child or your child and siblings, family members, or peers practicing all roles.

Consider using a communication script as a scaffold for those who may benefit from additional support. Below is an example of a communication script tool, followed by a completed example.

COMMUNICATION SCRIPT	EXAMPLE
<p>_____ (obstacle you have identified) is hard for me because _____ (why the obstacle is making learning or engagement difficult for you). To help me be successful and/or more comfortable, I would like to have _____ (solution(s), personal strengths, advantages).</p>	<p><u>Waiting for my mom to stop talking on the phone when I have a question</u> is hard for me because <u>I don't know when she'll be free to talk again and I don't want to forget my question</u>. To help me be successful, I would like to <u>write down my question so I don't forget</u>. I would also like a timer to <u>visually see how much longer my mom will be on the phone</u>.</p>

Some children may also benefit from a task analysis to break down the steps to communication. Here is an example of a task analysis tool, followed by a completed example:

TASK ANALYSIS TOOL WITH EXAMPLE		
Say the Obstacle	Problems the Obstacle Causes for You	Say the Solution(s)
The TV is <i>too loud</i> .	Noise hurts my ears. Can't focus on reading	Hand me the remote so I can turn down the volume.
	 <small>This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY 3.0</small>	

See these "[Communication Visual Aides](#)" for materials to support your child's communication with prepared words or pictures.

CONCLUSION

We hope this information is helpful for supporting children in the process of self-advocacy. Be sure to check out our other caregiver resources below and at: triad.vumc.org/autism-mental-health.

Autism Self-Advocacy Series for Caregivers:

- Supporting Autistic Self-Advocacy
- Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy
- Disclosing Their Diagnosis to Support Your Child's Self-Understanding
- Four-Step Disclosure Worksheet

REFERENCES

Shore, S. M., & Joyner, H. R. E. (2004). *Ask and tell: Self-advocacy and disclosure for people on the autism spectrum*. Autism Asperger Publishing, Co.

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