Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process: Educator 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.

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

This educator facilitation guide is designed to complement the "Three-Step Self-Advocacy Student Workbook." Please use these two resources together when teaching students.

HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENT SELF-ADVOCACY

The Three-Step Self-Advocacy process, developed by Dr. Stephen Shore, teaches students 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. Students 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 students, please refer to the "Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy" resource.

↘ STEP ONE: SCAN AND NAME

Students must first be able to recognize and define environmental obstacles that disrupt the work environment, limit access, and/or impact one's ability to perform.

🎯 The objective of this step is to support students in identifying environmental 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 student, it may be helpful to consider data from the following three areas:

THREE AREAS	
Observers	» Educators, peers, or other staff observe changes in the student's mood, behavior, or performance.
Student Self-reflection	» Student expresses change in their mood, behavior, or performance.
Data	» Student's performance on a task is qualitatively or quantitatively different from their typical performance.

When teaching students this step, it can be helpful to think about environmental obstacles falling into one of four categories. Check out this table for definitions of the four categories and some self-reflection questions to guide your students in thinking about the possible impact of these environmental obstacles on their learning. For additional student self-reflection guiding questions, please see the "Three-Step Self-Advocacy Student Workbook."

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	QUESTIONS TO GUIDE STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION
Sensory	Physical aspects of the environment that may bother or cause discomfort for some students. Sensory aspects include sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures/tactile events, and body motion.	» What about the sensory environment is making me uncomfortable or making it difficult for me to engage in the task or situation?
Academic/ Cognitive	A student's thinking style or way of processing information.	» What is this task or situation requiring of me? What is frustrating or challenging about this task or situation?
Communication	A student's speaking and nonspeaking ways of communicating.	» What is unclear or uncomfortable to me about communicating here?
Social	Social aspects of the environment, including social cues or rules and the student's social interests and/ or goals.	» What is unclear to me about the situation (e.g., my role, the social interaction)? What is uncomfortable about this social situation?

STEP TWO: IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS

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

The objective of this step is to facilitate student brainstorming and promote reflection on strengths/advantages and risks/problems of each solution.

Encourage students 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 students identify their strengths, interests, preferences, and personal essentials.

STEP THREE: COMMUNICATE

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

The objective of this step is to support students in effectively advocating by communicating their concerns and solutions to address environmental obstacles impacting their learning and engagement. Effective communication includes determining **when** and **how** to advocate in a way that matches the social context.

Autistic students will likely benefit from coaching on the timing of advocacy. Encourage students to think about when they would like to approach a specific teacher, staff member, or peers. (*e.g., before class? during lesson? at next IEP meeting?*).

Provide frequent practice opportunities to support students' use of the Three-Step Self-Advocacy process. Practice opportunities could include role-play between you and the student or the student and peers practicing all roles.

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

COMMUNICATION SCRIPT	EXAMPLE
_____ (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).	Coming to the front of the room to ask for a bathroom break is hard for me because it is hard for me to talk when I'm uncomfortable or in need of a break. To help me be successful, I would like to use a nonspeaking signal to leave my desk with your permission. I'd like to show you my drawings for the signal that could fit on my desk.

Some students 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)**
Class next door is *Too Loud*.	Noise hurts my ears. Can't focus on reading.	Headphones, please.
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CONCLUSION

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

Autism Self-Advocacy Series for Educators:
❑ Supporting Autistic Self-Advocacy
❑ Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy
❑ Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

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.