

Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process: Student Workbook



Self-advocates are autistic students like you who can:

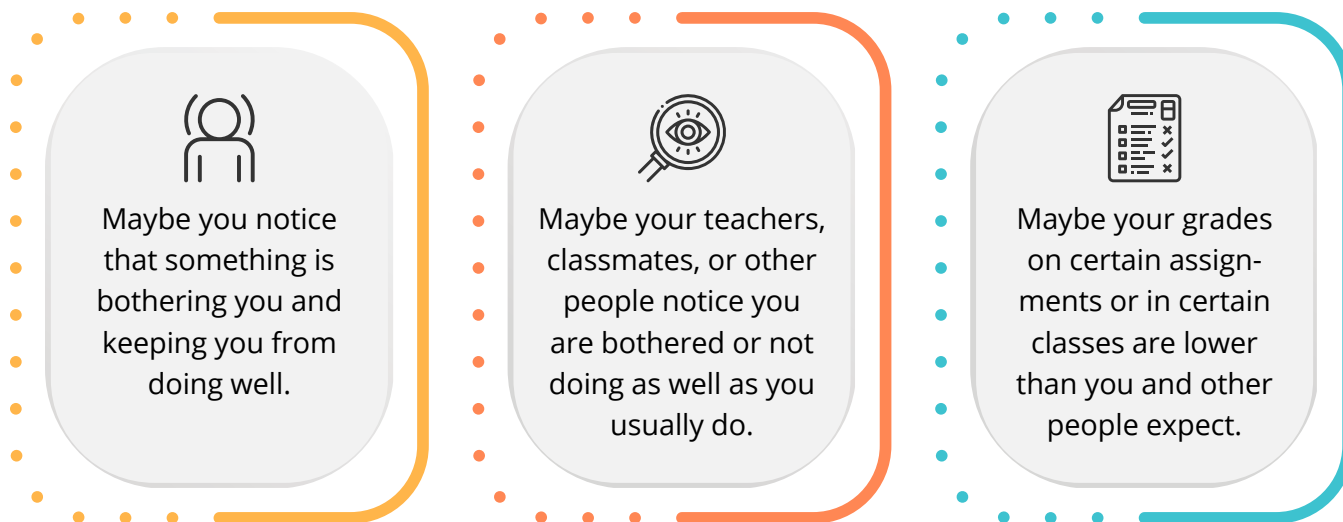
- talk about things they are great at, as well as things that are hard for them,
- find solutions for things that challenge them, and
- work with other students and teachers to make things better for themselves and for other autistic students.

This workbook will help you define obstacles, find solutions for yourself, and work with other people to make solutions happen. We call it the Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process. The 3 Steps include: (1) scan and name; (2) identify solutions; and (3) communicate.

This workbook is designed to help you understand how to self-advocate at school and in the community. Please use this workbook to guide your understanding and use of the Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process. If you need support using this workbook, please ask your teacher, parent, or caregiver for help.

↘ STEP ONE: SCAN AND NAME

The first step is to define an obstacle. An obstacle can be anything about a situation that makes it hard for you to do well, gets in the way of your goals, or makes it hard for you to feel comfortable. Obstacles might make you feel angry, sad, or overwhelmed.



Obstacles in school usually fall into one or more of the following categories: sensory; academic; communication. Scan each category to see if you experience obstacles in one or more of them. As you scan each category, think about different situations within the school day that can be uncomfortable for you or make it hard for you to do your work, participate in class, or interact with your teachers and peers. You might think about each class period and non-classroom time, such as hallway transitions, lunch, specials, and free time. Once you have scanned each category, you will be able to write down one obstacle that you want to solve using the Three-Step Self-Advocacy Process.

☰ **SENSORY**



Consider any physical aspects of the environment that could be obstacles for you: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, texture/feeling, and movement.

☰ ACADEMIC

Use these questions to identify any thinking or learning obstacles for you.



» How much time you need to respond to questions, prepare for tests/projects, or write things down?



» How many assignments and steps can you manage at one time?



» Do you like to learn with pictures, videos, and/or moving and creating with your hands?



» Do you like to learn by listening and seeing someone speak, having recordings you can hear later, and/or reading on your own in a quiet space?



» Do you like to study with memorization, repeated practice with similar questions, flashcards, repeated reading, repeatedly writing out things, and/or with extra tutoring?

☰ COMMUNICATION

Consider your preferred way of communicating with others.



Speaking
one-on-one



Raising hand to speak



Picture Exchange
Communication
System (PECS)



Speaking
in a group



Using signals or images
to make requests



Signing



Speaking in
front of a class



Augmentative and
Alternative
Communication (AAC)



Reading from
a script/paper

☰ SOCIAL

Use these questions to consider times when the social situation, social rules, social goals, and social cues may create obstacles for you.

What are some situations where your role is unclear?

What social interactions make you feel uncomfortable or confused?

What are your preferred ways of collaborating with your classmates on assignments?

Do you prefer to work alone, with a partner, or in groups?

After scanning the categories and thinking about situations within the school day that can be uncomfortable for you or make it hard for you to do your work, participate in class, or interact with your teachers and peers, write down the obstacle you would like to solve here:

My obstacle fits into _____ category/categories.

↘ STEP 2: IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS

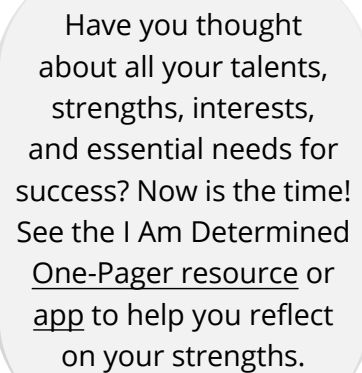
Now that you have named the obstacle, it is time to brainstorm solutions to the situation.

Thinking of the obstacle you named in the first step, consider the following questions:

- Which of my strengths could be useful for this situation?

- Have I seen this obstacle before, or have I seen something like it? What did I do then?

- What could be changed in this situation to help me be more successful or feel more comfortable?



Have you thought about all your talents, strengths, interests, and essential needs for success? Now is the time! See the [I Am Determined One-Pager resource](#) or [app](#) to help you reflect on your strengths.

- What is my solution?

Every solution has advantages (things that could go well) and disadvantages (things that could not go well).

- What are some advantages of your solution?

- What are some disadvantages or risks of your solution?

↘ STEP 3: COMMUNICATE

The last step is to share your obstacle and solution with other people. The goal of communicating is to make things better for yourself. Sometimes, communicating about your obstacles and solutions can even make things better for other autistic students.

To communicate your needs effectively, it can be helpful to include the following:

- the obstacle you have identified,
- why the obstacle is making learning or engagement difficult for you, and
- the solution(s) you have identified.

Including these three parts can help others understand and support you better. This information can help other people set up the classroom, the assignment, or the activity to make learning easier for you and other students.

Some students might find it helpful to write out a script for communicating. Here is a fill-in-the-blank example for writing a communication script:




Communication Script

_____ (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).

Another tool you may choose to use is this task analysis

Say the Obstacle	Problems the Obstacle Causes for You	Say the Solution(s)
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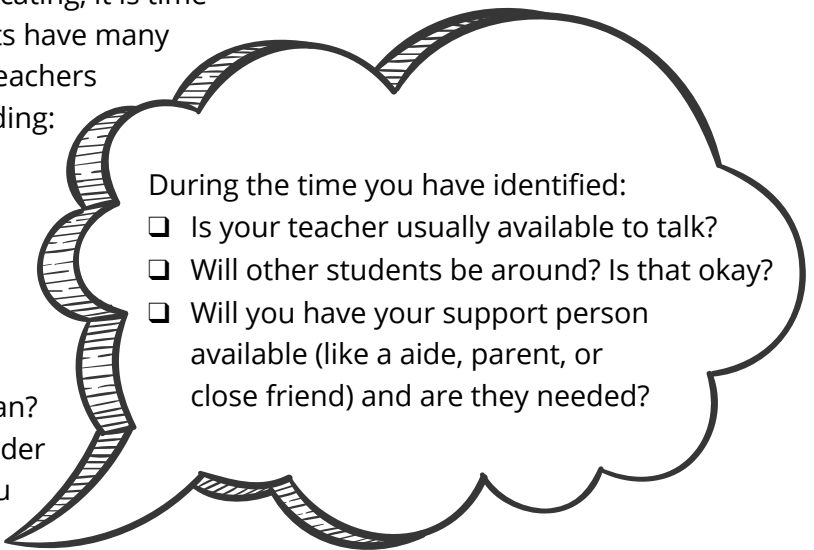
Here is an example of a completed task analysis, for a student struggling with loud noises:

Say the Obstacle	Problems the Obstacle Causes for You	Say the Solution(s)
Class next door is <i>too loud</i> .	Noise hurts my ears. Can't focus on reading.	Headphones, please.
 <p data-bbox="203 898 532 949">This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC</p>	 <p data-bbox="647 898 977 949">This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY 3.0</p>	 <p data-bbox="1086 898 1416 949">This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA-NC</p>

Now that you have your plan for communicating, it is time to choose when you will advocate. Students have many opportunities to communicate with their teachers throughout the day and school year, including:

- before or after class,
- during teacher planning periods,
- during resource time, or
- during school support team or IEP meetings.

When would you like to use your plan?
Identify a time, and then consider the following questions to help you decide if that is an okay time:



During the time you have identified:

- Is your teacher usually available to talk?
- Will other students be around? Is that okay?
- Will you have your support person available (like a aide, parent, or close friend) and are they needed?

Once you have identified a time to have the conversation, you could use a phrase like this:
"Excuse me, can I talk to you after class about some concerns I have about my success?"

What is my plan for *when* to advocate?

PRIVATE INFORMATION:

In addition to communicating about a obstacle and possible solutions, students can choose to share more personal information about themselves.

Some students do not find it helpful to share that they are autistic or sharing their autism feels uncomfortable or sensitive. These students choose to “partially disclose” or label only the specific obstacle when communicating.

Here are two examples of students partially disclosing obstacles:

- “It’s hard for me to tell when someone is interested in talking, so I don’t know how to find a partner during group time.”
- “I’m in OT for handwriting, and my hand still gets tired after writing a paragraph. I can’t read my own writing when I’m trying to keep up with notes. I have ideas on how I can type or record notes. Can we talk about them?”

The students in these two examples are autistic; however, they chose not to communicate their diagnosis of autism when advocating for themselves.

Other students find it helpful to share that they are autistic. They might find it important to explain or share with new people. These students may choose to “fully disclose” or share their diagnosis when communicating.

Here are two examples of students fully disclosing their autism:

- “I’m autistic, and movement is one of my tools for managing my energy. I can sit in the back of the room where my hand movements are less likely to distract others.”
- “I’m autistic, and part of my strength is in keeping rules and schedules. If you could help me write a detailed timeline for studying for this exam in my agenda, I can do the rest myself.”

The students in these two examples are autistic and chose to share that when advocating for themselves.

- What is my private disclosure choice?

CONCLUSION

We hope this information is helpful for your goals and choices for self-advocacy. Be sure to check out our other student resources for self-advocacy, specifically the [“Self-Awareness for Self-Advocacy Student Worksheet”](#) and the [“Four-Step Disclosure Worksheet for Caregivers.”](#)