



Explore-Work.com Trainer's Guide:

Self-Advocacy

Learning about self-advocacy promotes student independence and ability to get their needs met. Students need a plan for reaching their goals. They need to know what their rights and responsibilities are and how to get information as they navigate the world as adults. Requesting accommodations, making decisions, and learning to be resilient are important life skills. Students need to practice these skills and need a support system to help them do so.

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Learning Goals

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of self-awareness
- Understand individual disability related needs
- Understand the rights and responsibilities related to disability disclosure
- Understand rights and responsibilities related to accommodation requests.
- Learn to evaluate options and make decisions related to life goals.

facts → feelings → behavior change

Things to Know	Things to Feel	Things to Do
<p><i>(E.g., facts, terminology, skills...)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how to communicate effectively to get needs met in any setting. • Self-awareness related to disability related needs. • Understand that with rights come responsibilities. • Understand how and when to disclose disability. • Understand how to request accommodations. • Understand what it means to be more independent. • Understand how to evaluate options and made decisions. 	<p><i>(E.g., perceived credibility and relevance of the new knowledge, my appropriate role, perceived peer approval for taking action, self-efficacy...)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered to be more independent. • Aware of what accommodations I need. • Confident I know how to request disability related accommodations. • I know what rights and responsibilities I have in relation to my disability. • I can take more responsibility for my own life. 	<p><i>(E.g., intentions to change behavior, incremental changes, talking to others about new behavior, establishing habits/routines...)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice using communication skills to get needs met. • Practice using independent living skills. • Learn new skills to help me be more successful and independent. • Get an interview for a job or volunteer position.

Course Lessons and Activities

Course Introduction for Students: Let's learn about self-advocacy! What is self-advocacy? It means that you can stand up for yourself, ask questions, and talk about what you want and need. Self-advocacy means believing in yourself and having the determination to meet your goals and be more independent. It takes time and practice to become a great self-advocate.

In this training, you can learn more about self-advocacy and practice your skills. The more you practice, the easier it will be when you're an adult. Don't forget to ask your VR counselor, school counselor, family, or anyone you trust for support when you need it. You don't have to do everything on your own.

A Note about Time Estimates: The time estimates are just that. Lesson time expectations should be adapted to best meet the need of the learner.

Lesson 1: Self-Advocacy Introduction

Lesson activities | **Time Estimate: 30 minutes or more**

- My Journal: Self-Advocacy Now
- Video: Self-Advocacy
- Making Decisions: A Road Map

Lesson 2: Your Disability

Lesson activities | **Time Estimate: 30 minutes or more**

- Talking About Your Disability: Disclosure
- Accommodations

Lesson 3: Self-Advocacy Practice and Challenges

Lesson activities | **Time Estimate: 30 minutes or more**

- Learning to Navigate the World Around You
- Whiz Quiz: Self-Advocacy
- My Journal: Self-Advocacy Challenge

Lesson 4: Self-Determination

Lesson activities | **Time Estimate: 15 minutes or more**

- Action Steps: Putting It All Into Practice
- My Journal: Self-Advocacy Self-Assessment End

Lesson 1: Self-Advocacy Introduction

Lesson Introduction

Self-Advocacy is learning how to speak up for yourself to share your needs and achieve your goals.

Self-advocacy also means:

- making your own decisions about your own life,
- learning about self-determination and how to find information so that you can achieve your goals,
- knowing your rights and responsibilities,
- understanding how to navigate your world to find help in solving problems, listening and learning, reaching out to others when you need support or guidance.

Activities

- My Journal: Self-Advocacy Now
- Video: Self-Advocacy
- Making Decisions: A Road Map

Activity: My Journal: Self-Advocacy Now | [Link to My Journal Activity](#)

Let's get started. Are you an expert on yourself? Share your thoughts by completing this journal activity.

Trainers Note: Email Addresses

An email address is required throughout this training to enable feedback to the learner. Emails may contain custom messages, additional resources, or next steps based on the student's response. The student can choose to share emails received with teacher, counselor, or training facilitator to offer opportunities for further conversation and exploration.

Name [first] *

Email *

1. I am an expert on my disability. I know the name of it and how to describe it.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

2. I can describe my strengths, needs, and wishes.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

3. I take part in my IEP meetings and help develop my goals.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

4. I know how to ask for accommodations when I need them.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

5. I can speak up politely when I disagree.*

- Not yet.

- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

6. I can talk to my doctor about my health care.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

7. I'm comfortable talking about myself and know I can share only what I'm comfortable with.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

Share Your Results:

Would you like to share your results with someone else? Your teacher, counselor, parent or friend?

- Yes – Enter Email Below.
- No thanks.

Learner Email Response:

The learner will get an email response upon submission of the journal activity. The email will have the following information:

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy Pre-assessment: Taking Charge

Hi [learner's name],

Nice work completing the self-advocacy pre-assessment. Below is a copy of your responses.

[all responses are included here]

Video Transcript:

RYAN CROMWELL: Being a self-advocate, for me, is to speak up for yourself, and to speak your mind.

MELANIE HECKER: It means to be able to speak up for yourself and your needs. It means to be able to accomplish what you need to live in this world and the community despite having a disability, mental health challenge, foster care involvement or anything else that can put you at a disadvantage.

XAVIER SKEETER: You need to speak up for yourself and not be shy.

SUSAN STEFFEK: The qualities you need to have are knowing how to speak up for yourself, but for other people, but also getting to know them as well.

ALEXANDER SIMPSON: What it means to be a self-advocate, to me it means being able to get help when you need it. Even if it's something small, like say, "I'm hungry." Being able to ask for something to eat. That's one way of a being a self-advocate.

RYAN CROMWELL: I advocate for myself and school and work by talking to bosses and teachers.

MELANIE HECKER: I go out of my way to put my needs out there, talk to my professors if I need to, build up my speaking and writing skills, take the initiative to look for proper career paths, and just taking the initiative for what I need in general.

SUSAN STEFFEK: I am a part of a Rensselaer County Youth Advisory Council that I am currently the President of. I also volunteer in other places where there's youth, like St. Catherine's Community Hospice, places like that.

ALEXANDER SIMPSON: Basically, I'm part of a program, and I have my own apartment, and I have someone check up on me. So when they come, I basically tell them, "I need help with this, or I don't know how to cook this – can you teach me?" All that sort of stuff.

RYAN CROMWELL: Don't be afraid to speak for yourselves. Speak up, and don't let anybody bring you down. Just keep yourself motivated and speak your mind.

ALEXANDER SIMPSON: You need to be, in a way, determined or enthusiastic about what you're trying to do.

MELANIE HECKER: Never give up! Never stop fighting for what you believe in.

SUSAN STEFFEK: You are strong, you are beautiful, and you are important.

Activity: Making Decisions: A Road Map | [Link to Making Decisions Activity](#)

Being a better self-advocate means being able to make decisions about yourself. As a teenager, it may feel like the adults around you get to make all of the decisions. As you get older, you will have more responsibilities in making your own decisions. Your personal choices will shape your life and help you achieve your goals. So how do you get some practice making decisions?

Try using these five decision-making steps when focusing on building self-advocacy skills – from Autism Speaks:

- What is the decision you need to make?
- What decisions could you make?
- Evaluate each choice. What are the pluses and minuses of each choice?
- Pick the best choice. Describe which choice is best for you.
- Did you make the best choice for you?

Get some practice by downloading and trying out our Decision-Making Guide.

Decision-Making Guide (Use this guide to help make decisions):

Think about a decision you need to make. Whatever it is, think it through so you can make the best decision for you. If you don't want to write about your decision, you can draw your thoughts or use some other method that works for you.

What is the decision you need to make? _____

Rate the Choices:

	Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3
Positives			
Negatives			

My Decision: _____

Lesson 2: Your Disability

Lesson Introduction

We are all different and alike. We all have things we are good at and things we want to improve. Your disability is a part of you, but does not define who you are as a person. By understanding your disability, you will be able to talk about how it impacts the way you live, learn, and work. This will make it easier to get the things you want and need to achieve your goals.

This training has really focused on finding out your strengths and talents and using this information to plan for your future! Don't let your disability get in the way of the dreams that you have for yourself.

Activities:

- Talking About Your Disability: Disclosure
- Accommodations

Activity: Talking About Your Disability: Disclosure | [Link to Disability Disclosure Activity](#)

Introduction

What does it mean to have a disability? A disability means having some limitation or illness that may cause barriers to fully participating in certain areas of daily living at your home, school, work, or community.

Many of the barriers you may face may be caused by inaccessible environments or negative beliefs about people with disabilities. Every person with a disability is unique. Each person may need different accommodations (or support), even if they have the same disability.

Talking about your disability is called disclosure.

If you need reasonable accommodations from your employer or school so you can work and learn like others, it's your responsibility to ask for accommodations. This means you would need to talk about, or disclose, your disability.

Disclosure Protections and Responsibilities

Many things are different when you leave school and go out into the world to get a job. At school, your individualized education program (IEP), as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides your teachers information about your disability and the accommodations you need to learn.

When you apply for or get a job, the IDEA no longer protects you. Instead, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act protects you from disability-related discrimination and requirements for meaningful access.

The law states qualified job seekers and employees with disabilities be provided with reasonable accommodations. To benefit from the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, you must disclose your disability. An employer is only required to provide work-related accommodations if you disclose your disability to the appropriate individuals.

How, when, and if you disclose your disability is up to you.

Digging Deeper

There are advantages and disadvantages to disclosing your disability. Here are just a few of each to think about. Be sure to talk with your school or rehabilitation counselor about what talking about your disability with schools, employers, and in your community means to you!

Advantages:

- You get reasonable accommodations
- It protects you from discrimination under the ADA
- You don't have to keep a secret!
- And more – talk with your counselor!

Disadvantages:

- You might worry that you won't be liked and accepted
- Some people might treat you differently
- Talking about disability can be difficult and embarrassing
- And more – talk with your counselor!

Resources:

“Youth, Disclosure, and the Workplace Why, When, What, and How”

<https://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/ydw.htm>

Activity: Accommodations | [Link to Accommodations Activity](#)

Accommodations are an alteration of something. In this case it may be of a lesson, tests or work environment. The purpose of the accommodation is to help you in succeed at the skills you are working on.

One important thing to remember is that everyone learns differently. An accommodation is not given to you because you can't learn, but simply because you learn differently! (Example: A person who has difficulty seeing is given glasses.) That example is an accommodation and it is no different than an accommodation you may need!

While you are in school, is a great time to find out what accommodations you use. If you are not sure, ask your school or VR counselor or your parents / guardian. This is a great topic to bring up at your IEP meeting. You can download and use our Accommodations Guide to help you ask questions and keep track of information about your accommodations.

My Accommodations Guide

Make a list of your current accommodations. If you are not sure, ask your school or VR counselor. This is a good question to ask at your IEP meeting.

Accommodations I currently use are:

- Large print books and materials
- A note taker or note-taking device
- Adjusted school or work hours
- Assistive technology (apps)
- Adapted assignments, tests or tasks
- Adapted physical education activities
- Breaks for health/rest, medication
- Adjusted classroom or work environment
- Memory and organization aids – paper or digital
- Alternative testing
- Interpreter
- Extra set of textbooks for home or online textbooks
- Extra time between classes
- Adapted locker lock

What other accommodations might be helpful at a job?

Lesson 3: Self-Advocacy Practice and Challenges

Lesson Introduction

Rights and Responsibilities

If you have a disability, it doesn't mean you don't have rights. Your rights include:

- being respected and treated as a human being.
- the same rights as other people in your community.
- the right to have opportunities to pursue your learning and working goals and potential.
- the right to be involved in making decisions about your life.

Building your self-advocacy skills means growing your knowledge and awareness of your rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability. You will need to know how to access services and what services are available. You will need to know how to ask for help or express concern if you feel you have received unfair treatment because of your disability.

Practicing Your Self-Advocacy Skills

Learning how to be a great self-advocate takes practice. The following activities will let you practice and share what you have learned about self-advocacy.

Activity: Learning to Navigate the World Around You | [Link to Learning to Navigate Activity](#)

Being able to understand the resources and supports available to you at home, work, school and your community around you is important. Being able to ask for what you need and achieve your goals, means sometimes taking the lead to express yourself, ask questions, and share your ideas.

To tell people what you want, you need to know what's out there. What are your options? What do you have to do to get the things you want? You make choices and decisions about your future including things like work, colleges, your health, where to live, and places you can go to get what you need. You need to find out your options and make informed choices.

Self- Advocacy does not mean making all the choices alone or having to know everything. It means knowing who to ask for help and being able to ask for what you need.

Learning self-advocacy skills takes practice. You can get better over time.

Try a Challenge

Choose one of the challenges below to practice your self-advocacy skills.

Name [first] *

Email *

Learning self-advocacy skills takes practice. What areas do you need some ideas for and practice in? You can check as many as you'd like.* You will receive an emailed, customized list of ideas for each area you check. There will also be a challenge for you to try.

- In your IEP meeting
- In your neighborhood
- At home
- At work

Share Your Results:

Would you like to share your results with someone else? Your teacher, counselor, parent or friend?

- Yes – Enter Email Below.
- No thanks.

Learner Email Responses:

The learner will get an email response upon submission of this form based on their selection. The emails will have the following information:

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy: IEP Meeting Custom Plan

Hi [learner's name],

Being able to ask for what you need and achieve your goals sometimes means taking the lead to express yourself, ask questions, and share your ideas. Understanding the resources and supports available to you at home, work, school and your community is important.

Learning self-advocacy skills takes practice. You will get better over time.

Here are some ideas to use in your IEP meeting. Use this checklist to practice being more independent and asking for what you need.

IEP Meetings:

- Write down questions or concerns you have before the meeting. For example:
 - What do you want to work on this year?
 - What are your concerns for the school year?
- Practice what you want to say.
- Introduce yourself to the team if not everyone knows you.
- Talk about your interests and strengths.
- Explain your disability to the team.
- Bring up any concerns you have about your disability and how it impacts you.
- Let the team know what your goals are for the future.
- Lead all or part of the meeting.
- Help the team develop your IEP goal areas.
- Ask for explanations of anything you don't understand.

Other things you may want to bring up at the meeting:

- What you need to be successful.
- Ideas for things that would make learning easier for you.
- Things you wish your teachers or other school staff understood about you.

What other ideas do you have?

Challenge:

Ask your IEP team or school counselor to help you create a list of accommodations you've received in school in the past. Talk with them about:

- Would any of these accommodations be helpful at a job or for post-secondary education?
- Do they know of any other accommodations that could be helpful?
- What resources in your community can they provide that will help you better understand your rights and responsibilities related to your disability?

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy: Neighborhood Custom Plan

Hi [learner's name],

Being able to ask for what you need and achieve your goals, means sometimes taking the lead to express yourself, ask questions, and share your ideas. Understanding the resources and supports available to you at home, work, school, and your community is important.

Learning self-advocacy skills takes practice. You will get better over time.

Here are some ideas to use when getting to know your neighborhood. Use this checklist to practice being more independent and asking for what you need. By doing these things, you will have the opportunity to interact with people, practice talking about your disability, and expressing yourself.

Neighborhood:

- Learn your way around. You can use an app to navigate to where things are.
- Find out what public transportation is in your area and how to use it.
- Check out the local community center and the activities they offer.
- Visit your local library for community news, to use the internet, or find out if they offer any classes you are interested in.
- Find a job center in your area and talk to them about how to find a job.
- If you have a Boy's and Girl's Club near you, find out if they offer any activities you are interested in.
- Learn about volunteer opportunities in your area.

What other ideas do you have?

Challenge:

Try using public transportation to go somewhere in your community. You can take a friend or family member along, but you should figure out the details of the trip.

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy: At Home

Hi [learner's name],

Being able to ask for what you need and achieve your goals sometimes means taking the lead to express yourself, ask questions, and share your ideas. Understanding the resources and supports available to you at home, work, school, and your community is important.

Learning self-advocacy skills takes practice. You will get better over time.

Here are some ideas to try at home. Use this checklist to help you practice being more independent at home, as well as contributing more to the household.

At Home:

- Choose your own outfits.
- Take charge of your hygiene.
- Keep your room clean.
- Do your own laundry.
- Help with cooking meals.
- Help take care of pets.
- Do chores around the house.
- Participate in making decisions about family time - where to eat, places to go, activities, and more.
- Be responsible for completing your homework.

What other ideas do you have?

Challenge:

Decide how you would like to spend an upcoming Saturday afternoon. Communicate your idea to your parent or guardian. How do you advocate for doing this activity? Make your arguments about why this is important to you. Share your plan for doing the activity. Respect the opinion and thoughts of your parent or guardian.

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy: At Work Custom Plan

Hi [learner's name],

Being able to ask for what you need and achieve your goals sometimes means taking the lead to express yourself, ask questions, and share your ideas. Understanding the resources and supports available to you at home, work, school, and your community is important.

Learning self-advocacy skills takes practice. You will get better over time.

Here are some ideas to try at work. Use this checklist to practice being more independent and asking for what you need.

At Work:

- Understand your rights as an employee.
- Talk to your boss and co-workers about your disability (as much as you feel comfortable with).
- Ask for any accommodations you need to help you do your job.
- Speak up if you think of something that will make your job easier to accomplish.
- Practice your teamwork skills with your co-workers.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Let your boss know if something isn't working so you can come up with a plan together.

Challenge:

Ask your school or vocational rehabilitation counselor to role play to help you practice disclosing your disability. Your counselor can take on the role of the employer. You can take on the role of a person applying for a job. Switch roles! How does it feel?

Activity: Whiz Quiz: Self-Advocacy | [Link to Whiz Quiz Activity](#)

Now that you've learned more about your rights and responsibilities, let's test your knowledge with our Lightning Learning trivia quiz.

Name [first] *

Email *

Part of self-advocacy is learning to ask for accommodations at school or at work.*

- True
 False

My high school or rehabilitation counselor will let my employer or post-secondary school know what accommodations I need.*

- True
 False

If an application form asks for information about my disability, I have to provide it.*

- True
 False

Getting along with others is a valuable skill that will help me get and keep a job.*

- True
 False

When making important decisions, it's not necessary to think about all the options before deciding.*

- True
 False

The ADA protects my right to have access to transportation like everyone else in my community.*

- True
 False

Share Your Results:

Would you like to share your results with someone else? Your teacher, counselor, parent or friend?

- Yes – Enter Email Below.
 No thanks.

Learner Email Responses:

The learner will get an email response upon submission of this form based on their score. The emails will have the following information:

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy Skills: Lightning Learning Quiz - Score

Hi [learner's name],

Thank you for taking the Lightning Learning Quiz.

****If score is 0-2:***

You are a self-advocacy newbie.

Your score: [quiz score]

It's important to know how to advocate for yourself so keep working on it. The more you practice, the better you'll become.

****If score is 3-4:***

You are a self-advocacy beginner.

Your score: [quiz score]

Keep practicing to improve your skills even more!

****If score is 5-3:***

You are a self-advocacy expert. Way to go!

Your score: [quiz score]

Keep learning about advocating for yourself as you encounter different situations.

[all responses are included here]

Activity: My Journal: Self-Advocacy Challenge | [Link to My Journal Activity](#)

Share what you experienced with your Self-Advocacy Challenges!

Complete your Self-Advocacy Challenge Journal to share:

- The challenge you completed
- One thing you learned from the experience
- One thing you would do differently next time

Name [first] *

Email *

What challenges did you try?*

Describe what you learned from the experiences. What was easy? What was difficult? How did it make you feel to accomplish these challenges?*

What would you do differently next time?*

What are some other challenges you want to try next?*

Share Your Results:

Would you like to share your results with someone else? Your teacher, counselor, parent or friend?

- Yes – Enter Email Below.
- No thanks.

Learner Email Responses:

The learner will get an email response upon submission of this form based on their score. The emails will have the following information:

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy Journal

Hi [learner's name],

Great job completing the self-advocacy journal activity. Keep challenging yourself to become a better self-advocate.

Here is a copy of your responses:

[all responses are included here]

Lesson 4: Self-Determination

Lesson Introduction

Self-determination means having the knowledge about your strengths and limitations. Self-Determination is believing you can control your own life choices by knowing about yourself, setting goals, sharing goals, finding support you need, and making informed choices.

Self-determination is a mix of skills you will use throughout your life which include your personal beliefs and values and skills that empower you to make choices and take control of your life according to your own interests, needs, and abilities.

Activity: Action Steps: Putting It All into Practice | [Link to Action Steps Activity](#)

Now that you've learned about the possibilities for your future and are working toward your own goals, you might need a tool to help you stay on track.

Visit [Before Age 18](#) to get a list of action steps and things you can do to prepare for becoming an adult.

You can also complete the form below to get your customized checklist based on your age.

Name [first] *

Email *

You've learned about the possibilities for your future and are working toward your goals and being a self-advocate. Choose your age to get your own customized checklist. Or check all of them if you want to. The lists can help you stay on track for the future.*

- Age 14
- Age 15
- Age 16
- Age 17
- Age 18

Learner Email Response:

The learner will get an email response upon submission of this form. The email will have the following information:

Subject: Explore Work - Age 14 Action Steps

[Learned's name], here are your Age 14 action steps:

Here are some things you can do at Age 14 to help you prepare for becoming an adult (Yeah!). You don't have to do these in any particular order. Just dive in and get started!

- **Think about what you want to do after high school:** Talk with your parents, teachers, counselors, friends or anyone else you trust about your future. What are your interests and skills? Is there a job or career you have always been interested in?
- **Decide what goals are important to you:** Work with your teachers and family to come up with goals that you want to work on. They can be part of your IEP (Individualized Education Plan) or personal goals. Ask about education and training after high school.
- **Learn about your disability:** No matter what your goals are for after high school, it's very helpful to be able to describe your disability, know how it affects you, and be able to request reasonable accommodations.
- **Find out what benefits you get:** Benefits usually means the money you receive through Social Security. There are different types of programs that provide benefits with different names and different rules. The two common benefits for teens are Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Title II. There are different rules for each program and the rules change when you turn 18.
- **Get to know your doctor:** As you get older, you may find that the nurses and doctors will be talking to you, and less to your parents or guardians. They are trying to help you get more comfortable talking to them about your health care needs and concerns. Sometimes, your parent or guardian can be asked to leave so the two of you can talk privately.
- **Practice being more independent:** What can you do to help at home? Now is the time to do your chores without being told. If you don't have any chores yet, talk to your family about how you can help.
- **Get involved:** Why not join a school club, sport, or play. Or help out in your community. Maybe it's helping at an animal shelter or rescue group. Maybe it's helping at a preschool or library. Ask your family, friends, and teachers about their ideas. You can join on your own or find a friend to join you.

Check out the [Before Age 18](#) website for more action steps and activities to prepare for your future!

Subject: Explore Work - Age 15 Action Steps Checklist

[Learned's name], here is your age 15 action steps checklist:

Here are some things you can do at Age 15 to help you prepare for becoming an adult (Yeah!) You don't have to do these in any particular order. Just dive in and get started!

- **Bring up your goals at your IEP meetings:** The IEP team at school can help you develop a plan for finishing high school. They also focus on what will happen after high school. This means that your IEP will include goals focused on employment, continuing education and community living. What are your goals?
- **Plan for graduation:** Getting a high school diploma is as important for you as it is for your friends without disabilities. After high school, having a diploma means you will be more likely to get a job or continue onto college. Talk to your counselor often to make sure you're on track
- **Get a part-time or summer job:** Check into babysitting or pet sitting. Maybe you can start doing small chores for your neighbors like moving lawns or shoveling snow. You can also start working part-time with a work permit. If you're not sure what you want to do, try a job shadow to learn more.
- **Social Security Benefits:** Social Security benefits can be complicated, but there are people who can help you figure them out. These people are called Benefits Specialists. Find a [Work Incentive Benefit Specialist](#) in your state.
- **Get to know your medications:** If you take prescription drugs, this is the time to learn what they are. It might be helpful to practice telling other people about them and why you take them.
- **Start a savings account:** As you start to earn your own money, it's a good time to learn more about managing your money. A savings account is a great place to start.
- **Try new school activities:** Your participation in school activities can change as you get older. Talk to your friends, teachers and school advisers about how you can be involved in activities that interest you. Remember, it's often easier to try new things with a friend. This is a good way to explore your interests and learn about yourself.
- **Consider learning to drive:** Talk with your family about this and start making a plan. You may need to do some research on how to learn to drive with your disability. One place to start: [Taking the wheel: Driving with disabilities](#)

- **Review previous steps:** Did you skip steps from the last list? Go back and take a look. There is still time to do them now.

Check out the [Before Age 18](#) website for more action steps and activities to prepare for your future!

Subject: Explore Work - Age 16 Action Steps Checklist

[Learned's name], here is your age 15 action steps checklist:

Here are some things you can do at Age 16 to help you prepare for becoming an adult (Yeah!) You don't have to do these in any particular order. Just dive in and get started!

- **Get ready to apply for college:** Most jobs require some education after high school. Whether its college, technical school, or another training program. Now is the time to find out what education you need to get the job you want. Make a plan for what you need to do to apply. Take a tour of schools that interest you, and meet with the disability services office.
- **Get some work experience:** When you turn 16, you can start working without a worker's permit. This may not be your dream job or your forever job, but getting work experience will help you get to the job of dreams in the future. You may want to conduct an informational interview before applying. You should also work on creating your resume.
- **Learn how to use public transportation:** If you are not going to be driving yourself, how are you going to get around in the community? Learn about the options available for you. Try not to rely on your family to take you where you need to go all the time.
- **Social Security Benefits:** You can work and still get Social Security Benefits. Social Security has rules that are called "Work Incentives". Remember, a Benefits Specialist can help you understand your benefits and how you can work and receive benefits. You need to ask what benefits you are currently getting. Find a [Work Incentives Benefits Specialist](#) in your area.
- **Think about who can help you:** Who are the people in your life that can help you reach your goals? Is it your parents? Your teacher or pastor? Your neighbor or friends? Having at least 1 person to talk to about your future can help you plan for what's ahead.
- **Review previous steps:** Did you skip steps from the last list? Go back and take a look. There's still time to do them now.

Check out the [Before Age 18](#) website for more action steps and activities to prepare for your future!

Subject: Explore Work - Age 17 Action Steps Checklist

[Learned's name], here is your age 15 action steps checklist:

Here are some things you can do at Age 17 to help you prepare for becoming an adult (Yeah!) You don't have to do these in any particular order. Just dive in and get started!

- **Make a plan for after graduation:** In your senior year of high school, the focus is on graduation and what you will do after graduation. What's your plan? Will you get a job or continue your education or other training? This is an exciting time that can be a little scary, too. Talk to your friends and family about how you feel and what your concerns are.
 - Not ready to graduate?: Consider staying in high school after senior year. If you and your family decide that graduation is not the best choice for you, that doesn't mean you will have nothing to do. You can continue to work on goals and learn skills through the high school until you turn 21. You might decide to learn a specific job or learn skills that will help you to live more independently.
- **Plan for needed supports:** Find out about resources and supports you may need. This includes deciding how to take care of yourself including where you will live, your health and dental needs, and managing your money so you can buy the things you need while paying the bills and rent. Talk with your family or trusted adults if you want or need ideas or help.
- **Apply for college:** If you're planning to go to college or on to other training after high school, your senior year is the time to start applying to schools you're interested in. Do you need to apply for financial aid? Are you eligible for scholarships? Watch for information sessions about these topics at your high school and in your community.
- **Try a different job:** It's time to think about trying a different kind of job. You can job shadow someone to find about a different field. Revise and update your resume too.
- **Consider an ABLE savings account:** An ABLE savings account is for people with disabilities and their families. The money put into the account won't be taxed so it can help with extra costs you might have, and you can still get your benefits. Click [here](#) for more information.

- **Review other steps:** Did you skip steps from last year? Go back and take a look. There's still time to do them now.

Check out the [Before Age 18](#) website for more action steps and activities to prepare for your future!

Subject: Explore Work - Age 18 Action Steps Checklist

[Learned's name], here is your age 18 action steps checklist:

Here are some things you can do at Age 18 to help you prepare for becoming an adult. You don't have to do these in any particular order. Just dive in and get started!

1. **Sign medical permission forms:** You finally turned 18 and are a "legal adult"! One big change is that your teachers, therapists, nurses, and doctors can no longer share information with anybody, including your parents or guardians, without signed permission from you. Don't be surprised if you are asked to sign a permission to release information at your school and medical clinics.
2. **Contact [Social Security](#) about your benefits:** If you are applying for Social Security benefits for the first time, contact Social Security to determine if you qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or Medical Assistance (MA).

If you've already been receiving benefits, you will go through the re-determination process to determine what your new benefits will be. This [video](#) gives you an idea what this is all about.

- **Register to vote:** You can vote! Learn the process for registering to vote and where to vote. Become an active participant in our government. You can visit the [Voter Registration](#) website to find out more.
- **If you are a male, you are required to register for the draft:** Young men are required to register with Selective Service (the draft) within 30 days of turning age 18. But, this does not mean that you're joining the military. Visit the [Selective Service System](#) website to get more information.
- **Education:** If you haven't already, apply to a college or training program. Take a tour where you'll attend and visit the Disability Services office. Ask questions, get comfortable with the environment, find out what to expect, and talk about your

specific accommodations. It's important to understand how you learn best so you can be a self-advocate.

- **Review previous steps:** Did you skip any steps from the last list? Go back and take a look. There's still time to do them now.

Check out the [Before Age 18](#) website for more action steps and activities to prepare for your future!

Activity: My Journal: Self-Advocacy Self-Assessment End | [Link to My Journal Activity](#)

Name [first] *

Email *

1. I am an expert on my disability. I know the name of it and how to describe it.*

- Not yet.
 Working on it.
 Absolutely!

2. I can describe my strengths, needs, and wishes.*

- Not yet.
 Working on it.
 Absolutely!

3. I take part in my IEP meetings and help develop my goals.*

- Not yet.
 Working on it.
 Absolutely!

4. I know how to ask for accommodations when I need them.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

5. I can speak up politely when I disagree.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

6. I can talk to my doctor about my health care.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

7. I'm comfortable talking about myself and know I can share only what I'm comfortable with.*

- Not yet.
- Working on it.
- Absolutely!

Share Your Results:

Would you like to share your results with someone else? Your teacher, counselor, parent or friend?

- Yes – Enter Email Below.
- No thanks.

Learner Email Response:

The learner will get an email response upon submission of this form. The email will have the following information:

Subject: Explore Work - Self-Advocacy Post-assessment: Taking Charge

Hi [learner's name],

Great job completing this self-assessment. See below for a copy of your responses.

[all responses are included here]