

What is Self-Determination?



Self-determination means that a person, with or without assistance:

- has the **ability** and **opportunity** to make choices and decisions;
- has the **ability** and **opportunity** to have control over services, supports, and other assistance;
- has the **opportunity** to participate in and contribute to their communities;
- has the **support**, including financial, to advocate, develop leadership skills, become trained as a self-advocate, and participate in policymaking.



There are several skills that students can learn and practice that will help them to move towards self-determination. These include:

Goal Setting – Determine a goal and make sure others are aware and supportive of that goal.

Choice/Decision-making – When given choices, figure out the option that makes the most sense and is the one that you most want to do.

Problem Solving – Know how to deal with barriers when working towards goals.

Self-Monitoring – Know what you have done and what needs to happen when in order to reach a goal.

Self-Instruction – Teach yourself new skills and practice existing skills.

Self-Evaluation – Recognize what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong.

Self-Awareness and Self-Conceptualization – Recognize your needs, abilities, and your worth as a person and as part of a team.

Self-Delivered Reinforcement – Recognize when you have succeeded and reward yourself for a job well done.

Self-Recruited Feedback – Make sure that others know how you are doing so that they might provide advice or recognize you for a job well done.



Here are just a few examples of small steps that you can do to work on skills related to self-determination.

GOAL SETTING AND SELF-MONITORING –

1. Think about the big “dream” goals that you have. Don’t be afraid to dream big. Talk with others about what you want and find out what realistically needs to happen to get there.
2. Work with a family member or friend to think about the smaller steps. Think about who can help you with each step and how they can help.
3. Make a list of the things that need to happen to reach each step along the way to the big goal.
4. Come up with amount of time that makes sense to reach each of these smaller goals. Use things that can help you to keep track of your progress (self-monitoring) towards a goal, like a checklist or calendar.
5. Make sure to let others see your progress (self-recruited feedback) and reward yourself when you reach each of the smaller steps.



CHOICE– AND DECISION–MAKING –

1. Start small. Come up with just two fun activities that can be completed in that day.
2. Make cards for each choice. Use pictures for choices if that is helpful.
3. Follow through on the option that is chosen and talk about what worked and what was difficult.
4. Slowly move to adding more choices and more difficult choices over time.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. Lay out the problem and different solution paths on a board or large paper in a way that you can see each solution or path.
2. Talk about each of the possible paths and how they might help solve the problem.
3. With someone’s help, choose a solution that would most effectively address the problem.
4. Try the solution and talk about what worked well. Stay positive. We all make mistakes sometimes and get better with practice.
5. Continue to practice problem-solving (steps 1-3) with less help from someone else. Start small and then move to bigger problems.
6. Pat yourself on the back when you have come up with a good solution to a problem. This is self-reinforcement.

