



COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS A-Z™

Self-Advocacy

1. What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy skills are needed by all students regardless of setting or age. Self-advocacy involves having a clear understanding of your needs and rights and knowing how to access services to meet those needs. If well-meaning adults, including teachers, interpreters, and parents tend to intervene to meet those needs, then the student may be missing out on opportunities to learn critical skills. Lack of independence and self-advocacy skills often leads to the unwanted traits of learned-helplessness, including a lack of self-confidence and poor problem-solving skills. Being able to appropriately and confidently advocate for one's needs is crucial for deaf and hard of hearing students.

2. Issues at the forefront:

Independence and self-advocacy skills include the ability to manage the communication dynamics in the classroom or among peers, time management and study skills, taking care of assistive technology needs, and taking an active role in the planning of one's own educational program and services. An example of advocating for communication needs might involve talking to the teacher about the use of an FM system and explaining the effect of background noise on comprehension. Rather than doing this FOR a student, parents and professionals should be equipping the student to do this independently.

3. What should every parent know:

- Building self-advocacy skills needs to begin in preschool and con-

tinue beyond graduation.

- Parents may need to take the initiative to ensure that self-advocacy issues are being addressed during educational planning.
- Be proactive by assessing a student's strengths and needs.
- Set goals based on the child's specific learning needs and include these in the child's Individualized Education Plan.
- Students are empowered when they are given responsibilities and held accountable for their actions.
- Allowing the student steadily increasing input and choice when planning programs and services gives them ownership of their education.

4. Where can I find more information?

The Informal Inventory of Independence and Self-Advocacy Skills for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students is available free of charge through the Hands & Voices website. (www.handsandvoices.org) This documentation tool can be used by the student, parents, and the other educational team members to guide discussion to determine the student's areas of strength, as well as skill and knowledge deficits related to Independence and Self-Advocacy. Based on the findings of the inventory, specific goals for the student should be written into their IEP. The Action Plan portion of the inventory ensures that not only the student, but all of those who are a part of the student's life, will take steps to promote the student's independence. The majority of this inventory applies to all students, regardless of communication mode. The last section addresses issues related specifically to the use of an oral or sign language interpreter.

THE AUTHORS

Laura Scheele, M.Ed.

Laura Scheele is a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing in a public school inclusion program as well as a part time community interpreter.

George Clark, M.Ed., CI, NAD IV

George Clark is a nationally certified interpreter, mentor, and an adjunct university instructor, in addition to serving as project coordinator for a statewide grant providing outreach and training to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and interpreters throughout Indiana.

Communication Considerations A to Z™ is a series from Hands & Voices that's designed to help families and the professionals working with them access information and further resources to assist them in raising and educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We've recruited some of the best in the business to share their insights on the many diverse considerations that play into communication modes & methods, and so many other variables that are part of informed decision making. We hope you find the time to read them all!