

# Transition to College and Self-Advocacy

Understanding Your Student's Perspective

## SELF-ADVOCACY IS NOT EASY...

...even for adults. Think about how hard it might be to ask your supervisor for a raise, or to tell your senior colleague that you will not be able to meet a client deadline because you need more time.



### What is *self-advocacy*?

An individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her interests, desires, needs, or rights. (Van Reusen et al., 1994)

### When do we ask students to self-advocate?

- At IEP meetings
- During college applications or interviews
- When asking for accommodations
- When talking to college professors and academic advisors
- At an internship

### There is a common thread connecting these instances...

There is an inherent imbalance of power when students try to advocate for themselves. Self-advocacy also asks students to speak from their area of weakness. Both of these factors can cause discomfort and influence how a student perceives self-advocacy.



**“Self-advocacy”** is a name designated to these specific neurological functions:

1

## Metacognitive Awareness

Having an awareness of, and the ability to actively monitor, one's own thinking and the knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses.

2

## Emotional Self-Regulation

Being able to manage and modulate one's emotions and having the emotional self-confidence and self-esteem to speak up.

Higher-order cognitive abilities continue to mature until one's early and sometimes late 20's. This means students transitioning to college are still thinking more with their emotions than with their cognitive skills. Learning is dependent on excitatory signals between neurons; repeated excitation creates neural connections. Therefore, it is important for students to continue to develop their skills for self-advocacy. The more they do so, the more neural connections they will develop, making it easier to self-advocate over time.

One potential challenge to emotional regulation is a student's perception of 'stereotype threat,' which happens when a person assumes the negative association of a particular group for themselves. Stress and anxiety have the ability to override emotional self-regulation and self-advocacy.

**Poor emotional self-regulation allows perceptions to become reality and acts as a barrier to effective self-advocacy.**

## The paradox of the teenage brain

The teenage brain is primed for learning, but it is not yet fully developed. When understanding your student and their anxieties, be aware that behavior that may seem irrational could be attributed to this paradox.



# SELF-ADVOCACY IS AN ADULT SKILL!

Self-advocacy is a new skill to many students, and it will take time for them to learn how to utilize it best.



Validate your student's position



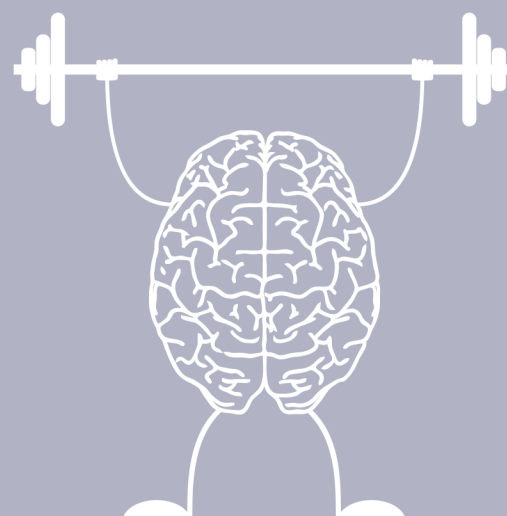
Invest in their self-esteem



Allow them multiple opportunities to self-advocate

***Encourage your student to make self-advocacy a greater priority when they are transitioning to college.***

The importance of teaching and encouraging your student to advocate for themselves cannot be stressed enough during the transition to college. The more practice students have with self-advocacy, the stronger their skills will become. Effective communication and self-advocacy skills will benefit a student long after their experience in college ends.



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