



INFORMATION EXPRESS

FACT SHEET

Spotlight on: 

Self-advocacy for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

This Fact Sheet is derived from a full article on this topic which can be accessed through www.handsandvoices.org. Click on the "What Parents Need to Know" Series link.

The deaf or hard of hearing (d/hh) student of today benefits from the civil rights movement that has made its presence known in issues of gender, race, and disabilities. Far-reaching effects still continue, with a spotlight now on practices of transition for young people with a variety of disabilities as they transition from the structure of school into the realm of making their own choices. Self-determination, as the movement is now known, and self advocacy that is a part of that whole idea, is not often included in state's written standards of education. Parents and teachers may find training in these life skills difficult to locate, though several programs throughout the country now have curricula addressing this crucial set of skills. (self advocacy homepage: www.uncc.edu/sdsp)

What is self-advocacy?

One definition stands out in the literature: "The realization of strengths and weaknesses, the ability to formulate personal goals, being assertive, and making deci-

sions." (Martin, J., et al., 1993) What a powerful concept that is! What parent doesn't hope and work towards the outcome that their child will be able to:

- ❖ describe his/her own skills and needs
- ❖ set his own goals and a create a plan to reach them
- ❖ know the how, who, and when to ask for assistance
- ❖ Make decisions and then take the responsibility to deal with the consequences of those decisions.

Understanding Hearing Loss: A Place to start

... A dad is preparing dinner while his 4 year old son vies for full visual attention from him. Dad can explain (and will again, for years to come) that he can hear the child without looking at him.

... A 4th grader rises from her chair in class to shut the curtains when she can't see the teacher in the glare of the sunlight.

... A 17 year old senior shares his own goals for the year at his final

IEP meeting, having asked ahead of time to put the IEP on transparencies and use an overhead projector.

When a child understands his own hearing loss, it makes comprehending needed accommodations much easier. Starting early, a child can grasp simple concepts like:

- ❖ "I 'hear' better when I can see you talking."
- ❖ "I can explain to you what my hearing aid does for me."

As a child's cognitive abilities mature, this changes to:

- ❖ "I need to sit closer if I want to get the most out of this."
- ❖ "It helps me to tell the substitute that I need directions in writing."
- ❖ "My cochlear implant processor isn't working correctly. I need to get an appointment and let the interpreters know before 1st period."
- ❖ "I really get the best scores in classes with CART (computer assisted Real Time Captioning) ; that's what I want for my college lectures."

An outline for a lifetime course in advocacy training:

What does a young d/hh person need to know in order to be a self advocate?

- ❖ Deaf/hh students must understand the laws that support their right to an education and society: IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 of the Rehab. Act.
- ❖ In the early grades, students should have opportunities to make choices from limited options, and a chance to live with those choices. They should be exposed to not just academic instruction, but real time problem solving.
- ❖ Modeling of self-advocacy by the parent
- ❖ “Thinking out loud” begins to create a Theory of Mind for these kids, enriching their intellectual capacity and understanding. (Theory of Mind: <http://spot.colorado.edu/~schick/ToM/ToM.htm>)
- ❖ A young person who knows their own strengths and interests has many advantages over one who

is still unsure when they reach the end of a high school education.

- ❖ In the middle school years, a child is ready for more complex tasks of managing a schedule and evaluating his/her own performance.
- ❖ Personal and academic goals can be set and a plan to achieve them. A parent or teacher’s role as coach remains critical at this stage.
- ❖ In the late middle school/high school years, students should be encouraged to make their own decisions that affect them, such as extracurricular activities, outside jobs, academic goals, schedules, how to organize their “stuff”, and their own daily routines.
- ❖ From 14 years of age onward, the IEP process dictates that the student be invited and transition needs begin to be addressed. Inclusion of the student in the IEP, as the consumer of special education, can certainly be started earlier. This process is a powerful tool in which to model and teach life skills such as goal

setting, relationship building, effective communication, and directing their own learning.

- ❖ In the years leading up to graduation, a student also needs to learn the basics of the Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA), especially in regard to access in secondary education or employment, based on their own communication mode and individual needs.

Can self-advocacy skills be part of IEP goals? Yes. When these skills are modeled, facilitated, and nurtured, students have a higher degree of satisfaction and achievement in the school setting (Pocock, A., et al. 2002) Sounds like a lot of work? It is. High expectations communicated often and with support, set the stage for achievement of these skills that will last a child a lifetime.

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The “What Parents Need to Know” Series

The “What Parents Need to Know” Series includes full articles and two-page synopsis of the following topics:

- ❖ **Socialization and the Child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing**
- ❖ **Self-Advocacy for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students**
- ❖ **School Placement Considerations for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Student**
- ❖ **From High School to Post-Secondary Education: The Transition Process**

For more information, contact: Colorado Families for Hands & Voices at: www.handsandvoices.org, or PO Box 371926, Denver, CO 80237

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