

A New Way of Thinking

**A guide for students with disabilities
to develop self-advocacy skills.**

A New Way of Thinking

Developed by
Steve Gilles and Pam Jenson

Teacher Insights
Tessa Nelson

A New Way of Thinking is a guide for educators and students with disabilities. The purpose of the guide is to assist students to develop self-accepting attitudes, combat negative thinking, and rediscover themselves.

This guide will help students better understand their disability, think positively about themselves, make choices related to their interests, gain self-advocacy, and develop self-determination skills—all of which help create effective Transition Planning.



Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
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Madison, Wisconsin

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Credits

We would like to thank the following people and organizations for their ideas and input into this project. Much information for this guide was created by the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network.

Michael Stoehr, Educational Consultant, The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTaN), Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network: Secondary Transition Toolkit (developed by youth for youth) <http://pyln.org/Files/PYLN2ndTransitionToolkit.pdf>

Daniel G. Amen MD, Resources ANTS, “Change Your Brain Change Your Life,” <http://www.amenclinics.com/>, 888-564-2700

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Introduction

This guide was created to provide teachers with a tool to assist students with disabilities to: learn about themselves, including how to accept themselves and their disability; understand how to combat Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) and change what students think about themselves; learn how to have a voice through self-advocacy and personal empowerment; and to create a vision for their future goals.

We asked Wisconsin youth in high schools and colleges how they felt about themselves and their disabilities when they were in middle and high school. These are the results we received:

1. I'm stupid
2. I'm not normal
3. I won't have friends because of my disability
4. I'll never be popular and no one will ever like me
5. Everyone is looking at me because of my disability
6. I will never go to college
7. My teachers do not understand me
8. Life is not fair, it's hard
9. I will never amount to anything
10. I am not as important as my peers
11. I wish I was smart
12. Everyone thinks I'm dumb anyways, why try
13. I can't do anything right, I'm stupid
14. I read too slow to be smart
15. There is no point
16. I am a loser
17. I am a disappointment
18. I am not meant for school
19. Life sucks, why me
20. Just let me be

Many of the surveyed students reported they still have high anxieties and continue to have these feelings in their lives past high school. We realized there needs to be a new way of thinking. Youth reported if we can get students with disabilities in middle school to understand their disability and abilities while their transition is beginning, then change can begin. This is why the guide has been developed. Middle school students and teachers must begin to understand the importance of transition by age 14 (or younger).

We hope you will find the guide easy to use. Remember, this is only a guide. Please change it to meet the needs of your students, school, and community! Our hope is also that you will share your thoughts and ideas with us to continually build a document usable for all middle school educators.

We appreciate your time and effort to continually make transition a priority in your students' lives!



Chapter 1

Guess What, You Have a Disability!

1

Learning Points

- Definition of disability
- Types of disabilities
- Who am I – Identify and describe the student's disability
- What does my disability mean to me?
- Who do I talk to about my disability?

Materials needed

- Handouts for all activities
- Computer access
- Personal Learning Present Level of Educational Performance (PLOEP) copy

Activities

- 1.1 – What's your disability?
- 1.2 – Getting to know yourself
- 1.3 – Research your disability
- 1.4 – Reflect on your disability
- 1.5 – Interview



Accepting my Disability: Jeremiah's Story

Hey, everyone. My name is Jeremiah Swisher. In life, I've always wanted to be "normal." "Normal" is what is defined as being the majority. When I was in middle school, I never really "fit in." The other students I hung around with were other students that had a disability. I have high functioning autism. I know what it's like to be disadvantaged and "fit in" with the minority group—it stinks. But, I realized I had two choices: accept who I am having high functioning autism or be someone I'm not. I could have acted "normal," but I decided I'd rather live my life as who I am. If people in middle school didn't like me for who I was, then I just asked them to accept me so I could fit into the regular community.

In society not everyone is going to accept you for being you. However, it's important to accept people's differences. There have been many times I wished I could have fit in to the "regular" crowd. However, I wasn't willing to adapt my personality or who I am. It has taken me a while throughout life, but I have learned to accept my disability as I like being unique and different. If life were the same, everything would get quite boring.

My parents told me from day one that I had autism. I had always felt different, but just didn't realize to what extent until I was in about second grade. I knew I was struggling with my work and thought to myself that I would never get better. But, with the help of my parents, I started becoming determined to get my school work done. My parents would often times sit with me at the kitchen table as I would struggle through my school work. Then one day in eighth grade, I said enough is enough. I decided I needed to do things myself. I started doing homework on my own. First the homework took three hours and eventually, when I knew what I was doing, it only took me about one hour. From then on, I decided it was time to take charge of my life!

What I have learned in life is to show my determination and to not let my disability limit my potential. You can be anything you want to be if you just believe in yourself and accept yourself for who you are. Although we may have many differences due to having a disability, we really do have some extraordinary gifts. One of my gifts is I'm really great at numbers and doing public speaking engagements. My suggestion to you is that you find your weaknesses and try to make them your strong points. As for your strong points, keep what you are doing best as it's good to stand out from the crowd.

Being happy with who you are, is what really matters. What has helped me over the years is being determined to meet my goals. I never gave up striving for success throughout my life. I also had family, teachers, and other support that always had my back. Whenever I needed advice, I always had them to go to, to help uplift me. Find the people in your life that can do the same. Then the biggest idea that helped me is that when the world appears dim, never give up and strive for the best to your fullest potential. The only person that really can limit you is yourself.

Discussion Points: Jeremiah's Story

1. What do you think Jeremiah is telling you in sharing his story?
2. What can you do to accept your disability and appreciate who you are?
3. What did you learn from Jeremiah's story?

Accepting my Disability: Kelly's Story

For much of my life, my invisible disability was invisible even to me. Nowadays, a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is almost commonplace, but when I was in elementary school, it was practically unheard of in my small hometown. As I recall my childhood education from the perspective of being an adult, I can remember the numerous times that I felt slow and unintelligent. It wasn't until high school that I finally was given a test that measured my I.Q. My score was quite high, but my "processing speed" was lower. It finally made sense to me—I understood the information that my brain was processing, just at a different pace. With this new breakthrough, I no longer felt the embarrassment and guilt that can accompany situations like asking a teacher for additional time on a test, or asking someone to repeat what they have just said. With the accommodation of understanding and patience from my teachers, I excelled at school, even making the Honor Roll throughout high school and the Dean's List in college. Ever since I was diagnosed with ADD, and later with anxiety disorder, I've strived to never make excuses for my disability. I've accepted it, and request others to do the same. I have learned to not only "cope" with having ADD, but to embrace it and succeed in learning, despite my disability.

On the surface I may appear to be absent minded, but if you search a little deeper, you'll discover a mind that is awake and devoted to the arts and philosophy and math and music and all of the things that I plan on continuing to learn about for the rest of my life. A person that seeks to gain as much knowledge and wisdom as possible in her lifetime sure sounds different from a little girl who can't finish a math quiz by the end of class. Now, how's that for a Learning Disability?

Nowadays, my disabilities are so normal to me. I am actually surprised when someone points it out. Living as an adult with a disability is no easier than doing so as a student—I still struggle to pay attention and suffer the occasional panic attack—but experience has taught me that I am capable of accommodating my shortcomings and achieving my goals. Graduating from college with honors was an example of a goal I recently realized. Being a person with a disability has given me the strength, perspective, and character it takes to overcome the obstacles that may block my life's path, and to become the person I strive to be. You may interpret this feeling I have towards my disability as pride, and you would be correct. I'm thankful for the blessing of my disability, because it makes me stronger each day. These days, things keep getting better. I am happy to have recently married someone who knows and accepts me, just as I've learned to accept myself.

Discussion Points: Kelly's Story

1. Kelly set goals to attend college and then graduated with honors despite her disability. What goals do you have despite your disability?
2. Through experience, Kelly learned she was capable of accommodating her shortcomings to achieve her goals. How can you accommodate shortcomings you may have to reach your goals?
3. What has being a person with a disability given Kelly? What can it give you as a person with a disability?



Definition of Disability

For purposes of this guide we used the Integrative Model of Disability, adapted from the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network. People with disabilities may have some limitation or illness that may not allow them to fully participate in certain areas of daily living (such as problems with walking, writing, reading, or anxiety). However, many of the barriers that people with disabilities face are due to inaccessible environments and negative beliefs that exist about people with disabilities.

You might have heard the saying that no two snowflakes are alike. The same thing can be said about a person with a disability. People with disabilities have many different characteristics. Each person may need different accommodations (or help), even if they have the same disability.

Most disabilities fall into one of five groups; some disabilities may have characteristics of several groups:

1. *Physical Disability*: People with this type of disability may have difficulties with moving or mobility. They may use assistive devices, such as wheelchairs or walkers. Example: muscular dystrophy
2. *Sensory Disability*: People with this type of disability may have difficulty hearing or seeing, or both. Individuals with visual impairments may use braille, canes, or large print to assist them. People who are hard of hearing or deaf may use hearing aids or cochlear implants and/or use sign language. (Example: deaf or blind)
3. *Cognitive Disability*: People with this type of disability may have difficulty learning, communicating, and remembering information. They may also have trouble with problem-solving, paying attention, or understanding reading, math, or visual information. They may use daily planners, more time on tests, or quiet areas to study. (Example: Down Syndrome)
4. *Psychiatric and Emotional Disability*: People with these types of disabilities may have difficulty with emotions, feelings, and behaviors. Often these individuals are diagnosed with Depressive Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Psychotic Disorder, and/or Mood Disorder. People with this type of disability may use medications, coping skills, or counseling. (Examples: Manic Depression and/or Anxiety Disorder)
5. *Health-Related Disability*: People with this type of disability might have a physical condition that affects their overall health. They may have limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems. (Examples: a heart condition, Rheumatic Fever, Asthma, Hemophilia, or Leukemia)

Teacher Resources for Special Education Eligibility

For additional information about special education and determining eligibility, contact the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for the listings of impairment areas and a checklist to assist in determining eligibility. Please see:

Wisconsin Administrative Code

PK-12 Impairments

http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_eligibility

Checklists are available in the following disability areas (Microsoft Word™ and Spanish versions):

Autism	Other Health Impaired
Cognitive Disabilities	Speech/Language Impairments
Hearing Impairments	Specific Learning Disabilities – Initial Evaluation
Visual Impairments	Specific Learning Disabilities – Reevaluation
Emotional Behavioral Disabilities	Significant Developmental Delay
Orthopedic Impairment	Traumatic Brain Injury

Department staff conducted workshops and developed evaluation guides for the disability areas listed below to assist districts in implementing the eligibility criteria. These guides and other resource materials are available on the DPI Website.

Autism	Other Health Impaired
Cognitive Disabilities	Speech/Language Impairments
Hearing Impairments	Specific Learning Disabilities – Initial Evaluation
Visual Impairments	Specific Learning Disabilities – Reevaluation
Emotional Behavioral Disabilities	Significant Developmental Delay
Orthopedic Impairment	Traumatic Brain Injury

The local school district's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team conducts evaluations of students to determine eligibility for special education. The IEP team must determine whether the student meets the educational impairment criteria and, as a result, needs special education services.

ACTIVITY 1.1 – Getting to Know Your Disability

Please answer the following questions based on the information you have learned to this point..

What is your disability?

What group does your disability fall into?

If none, create your own group.

What negative beliefs do you think people have
about people with disabilities?

How can this change?

Guess What ... You Have a Disability

Part of accepting yourself means knowing that you have a disability and understanding what it means to you in your life! The next worksheet will help you to understand what your disability is. Many people with disabilities notice that they have barriers they need to overcome, unlike their friends without disabilities. Knowing that you are different can make you uncomfortable about yourself, and possibly get in the way of your success. By understanding your disability, you will be able to make better choices for yourself in school and for the future!

Teacher Preparation for Activity 1.2

Directions for worksheet: The questions are to help students get to know themselves and their disabilities. Give each student a copy of their PLOEP, and review it with them before they begin this activity.

Activity 1.2 – Getting to Know Yourself

It is important to accept your disability and understand how it impacts your life. Answering these questions should help you get a better understanding of yourself and the role your disability plays in your life and future.

1. What is your disability?
2. What barriers do you have because of your disability?
3. Describe your strengths.
4. What are your weaknesses?
5. How do you learn best? (Do you learn by seeing, hearing, or actually doing something?)
6. What kind of accommodations do you get at school?
7. What area do you think you still need to improve on? (Examples: time management, organization, social skills, behavior skills)

Talking Point

Becoming aware that you have a disability can be scary. However, you do not want to ignore the fact that you have a disability. Naturally, you are going to have questions about what your disability is, and what it means for your life. Make sure to ask any questions you have. This will take some of the guesswork out of your mind. Remember, no question is a dumb question unless it is not asked!

Teacher Preparation for Activities 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5

Students will be researching, then reflecting about their disability, and conducting interviews.

Activity 1.5 – Interview

Interview at least two people who know you and your disability.

Ideas:

- Family (parents or guardian)
- Teachers or counselors you trust
- Your doctor

Questions to ask:

- 1) What is the name of my disability?
- 2) How would you define my disability?
- 3) What challenges do you think or see I have?
- 4) What accommodations do you think I need?
- 5) Do you have anything else you would like to share about my disability?

Now share the information you found when you did research on your disability with the interviewee.

Things to Never Forget

Your disability is not a bad thing!

Your disability is a part of you, but it does not define who you are as a person. You need to fully understand what your disability means to you and how it affects your life. If you let it get you down, you will never be able to make your dreams come true.

Everyone has things they are good and bad at in life. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. It is important to understand what you are good at, and what you aren't good at so that you can do things that allow your talents to show. Find out what you are really good at and like to do and go for it!

Keep a positive attitude!

There are going to be times in life that you get frustrated with your disability. It is important to know that this is a part of life and with a little patience, you will find the light at the end of the tunnel. Do not let your disability get in the way of the dreams that you have set for yourself.

Summary

Many students have negative thoughts and feelings about their disability. By becoming more aware of and accepting of themselves, and their disability and supports, students will be empowered to think differently about themselves and their future.

Teacher Insights

What it looks like in the classroom

Chapter 1 opens up the students to self-discovery and awareness. The utilization of inventories in the chapter is a helpful starting point. Along with the inventories, Activity 1.3 gives students the opportunity to dig a little deeper. The activity takes place in both the classroom and computer lab over a four to five day period. The first day is spent in the classroom discussing instructions and expectations, while the following days are spent researching in the computer lab. After completing the research process, the last day is spent discussing findings and results. Closing the chapter with the involvement of a parent or close adult allows the students to communicate with someone about their disabilities.

What the students learn

The students learn a vast amount of knowledge about their specific disabilities. They feel empowered to research and study a topic that is intertwined with their identities. Many students only hear information about their diagnoses through the lenses of parents, medical professionals, therapists, or other educational professionals. On another note, students also have the opportunity in Chapter 1 to discover a celebrity or character from history who shares the same diagnosis. Recognizing that “famous people” share their disabilities gives the student a sense of future success and hope.

What the teacher learns

Chapter one is a foundational step for the students. Prior to Activity 1.1, many students will associate embarrassment and deficiency with their disabilities. After completing the chapter, the hope is that they can overcome obstacles and find success by looking at examples of others. Apart from learning how much the students will take away, you will also learn a few things about the lesson components. Because the students so thoroughly enjoy researching, it may be difficult to stick to the prompts in Activity 1.3. The goal is to encourage students to discover a missing piece to their puzzles, while also keeping the activities on track.

WI State Teaching Standards addressed

Standard #4 – Teachers know how to teach.

Standard #7 – Teachers are able to plan different kind of lessons.

Standard #10 – Teachers are connected with other teachers and members of the community.

Evidence

See artifact on the following page.



Activity 1.3 - Research your disability

Research your disability on the Internet or at your school library or local public library to answer the following questions.

1) What is the name of my disability?

ADHD

Mood Disorders

OPD - Depression

- Bipolar

2) What is the definition of my disability?

INSTANTS FOR

ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY

3) Who else has my same disability (famous or not)?

4) What accommodations do you need to assist you with these challenges?

Hint: When searching the Internet, type 'accommodations for students with ____' (fill in the blank with your disability).

5) List 3 other facts you learned about your disability.

HOW LONG

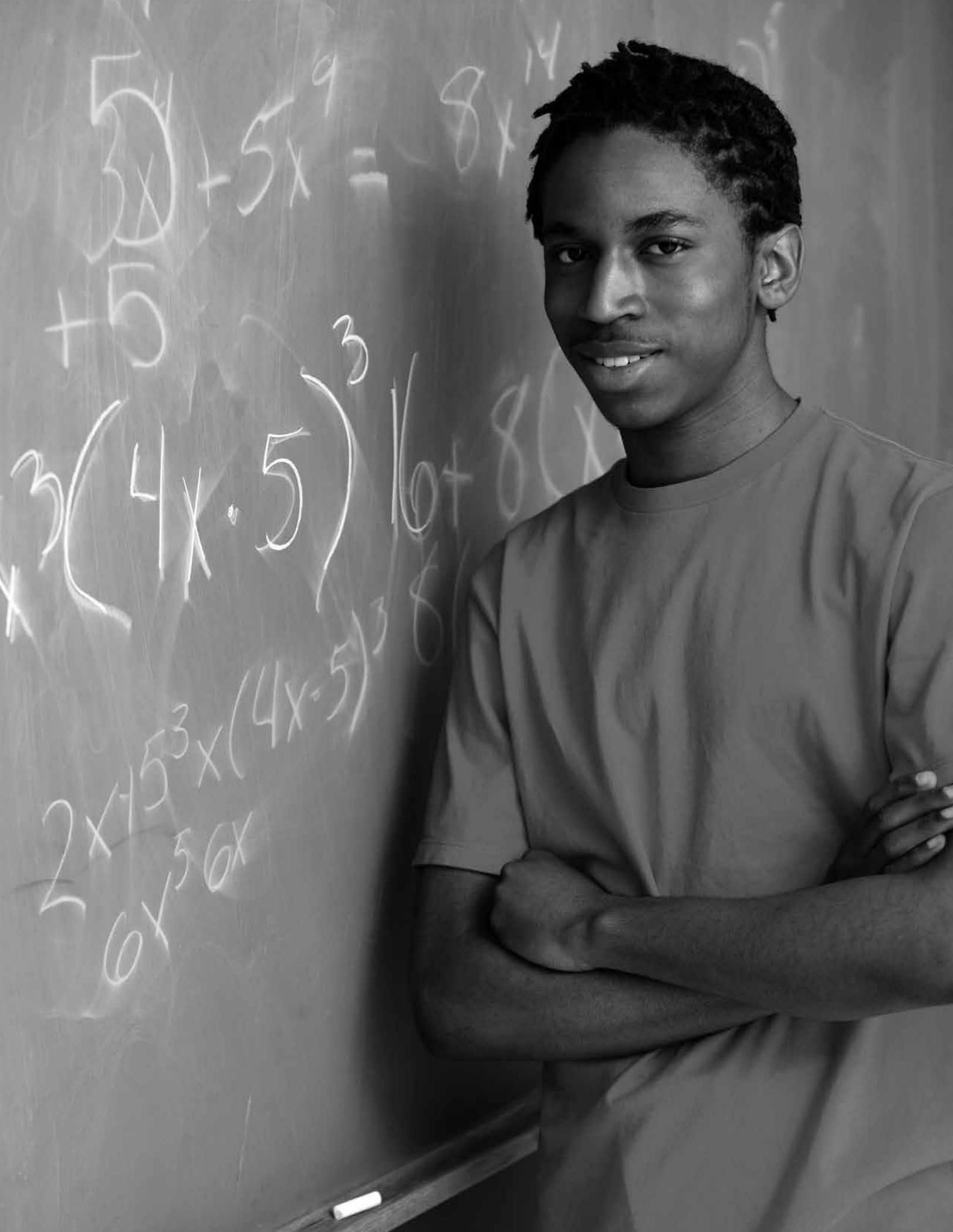
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$$5x + 5x = 8x + 14$$

$$5x + 5x = 8x + 14$$

$$5x + 5x = 8x + 14$$

$$+ 5$$

$$3(4x - 5)^3$$

$$16 + 8x$$

$$2x + 5^3x(4x - 5)$$

$$6x + 50x$$

Chapter 2

Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)

2

Learning Points

- ANT principles
- ANT species
- ANT therapy–Combat Your Negative Thoughts through Feeding Good Thoughts to Your Anteater

Materials Needed

- Handouts for all activities
- ANTs song (download)
- ANTs song lyrics for each student
- Cardboard boxes-brick size
- Amen Clinic brain system handout

Activities

- 2.1 – Brain handout
- 2.2 – Getting rid of the ANTs (with ANTs song)
- 2.3 – Never give up
- 2.4 – What do you do?

Introduction

This chapter has been written in collaboration with Daniel G. Amen, MD. Dr. Amen is a world-renowned, award-winning, New York Times Bestselling psychiatrist, who has dedicated his work to changing lives all over the world. Information from this chapter was provided through the Amen Clinics with permission.

Over the past several years, education systems have witnessed students being labeled with a disability. While educators continually work with students to assure them that their disability is only one piece of who they are, the simple truth is that students are not, in many cases, feeling positive about this label they have been given. In this chapter, we will provide you with a method to rid the ANTs students carry with them every day. ANTs, yes, Automatic Negative Thoughts. They are everywhere! Students cannot truly accept their disability until they are able to rid themselves of the ANTs that often hover over them on a daily basis. Our goal in this chapter is to get students to think positively about themselves and their disability. The purpose is to get students thinking in a practical way that allows them to connect with themselves. Brain boosting skills will be discussed and students will learn the different ANT species of negative thoughts, as well as exercises and skills they can utilize to combat negative thinking.

It has been said, “You are what you think.” Do you believe this?

If you believe this, what are you thinking? Ask students to answer.

Here is what some high school and college students said about their disability when asked. (Cited from survey in introduction)

These are the thoughts that hold students back!

- I’m stupid
- I’m not normal
- I won’t have friends because of my disability
- I’ll never be popular and no one will ever like me
- Everyone is looking at me because of my disability
- I will never go to college
- My teachers do not understand me
- Life is not fair, it’s hard
- I will never amount to anything
- Just let me be
- I am not as important as my peers
- I wish I was smart
- Everyone thinks I’m dumb anyways, why try
- I can’t do anything right, I’m stupid

- I read too slow to be smart
- There is no point
- I am a loser
- I am a disappointment
- I am not meant for school

Ask the students to share their thoughts and responses:

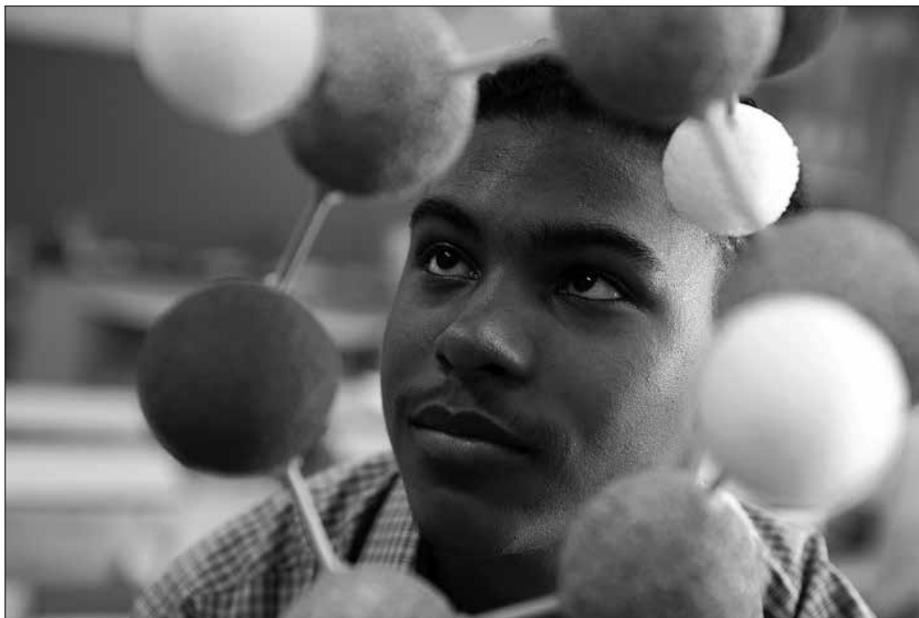
When you have these thoughts, what happens? How do they make you feel? Generally your muscles get tense, your heart beats faster, your hands start to sweat and you feel a little out of control. This is how your body reacts to negative thoughts.

What are ANTs? ANTs are Automatic Negative Thoughts.

Teacher Prep for Activity 2.1

Review the “Know Your Brain” handout with your students just to give them an overview of how their brain works and what parts of their brain control their thoughts. This is helpful when trying to understand why they have the thoughts they do. Give a few examples of poor judgment and ask them, “What part of the brain controls judgment.” Use other examples as you see fit.

For more information: www.amenclinics.com

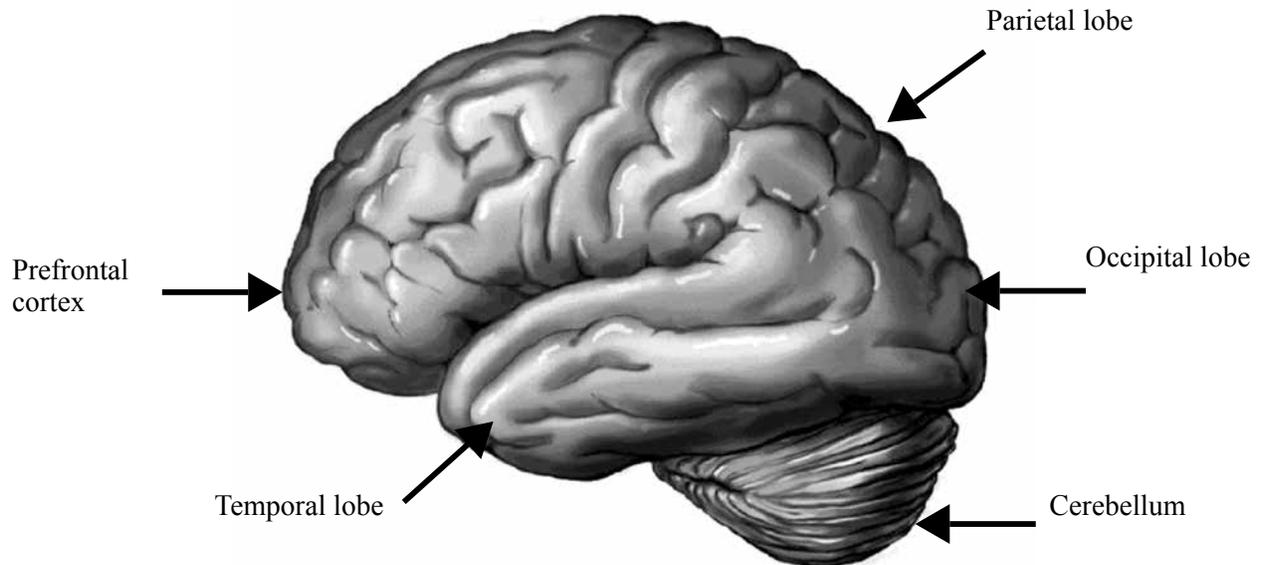


Activity 2.1 - Know Your Brain

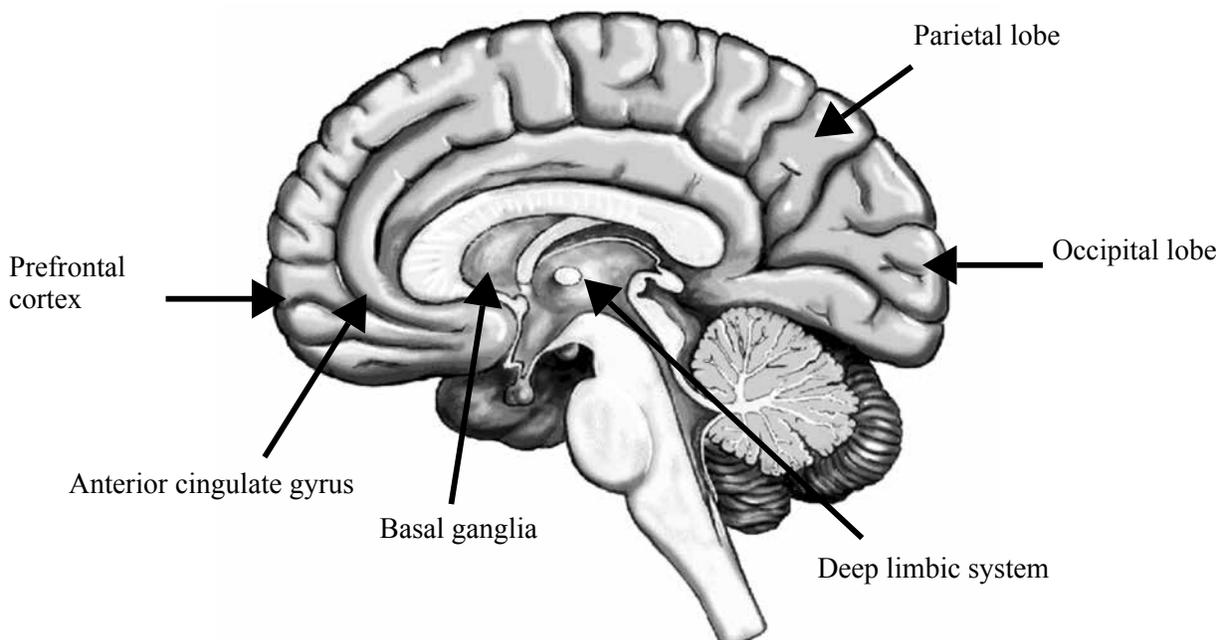
One Size Does Not Fit Everyone — Targeted Interventions Just for You

One prescription does not fit everyone. This is why so many programs designed to improve student, teacher, or administrator performance don't work. All of us need individualized or personalized prescriptions based on our own brain types and needs. First, it is important to become familiar with the brain systems that play a major role in your ability to be the best teacher, administrator, or student you can be.

Outside View of the Brain

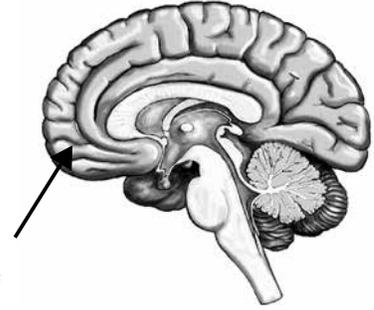


Inside View of the Brain



Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)

Think of the PFC as the CEO of your brain. Situated at the front third of your brain, it acts like a supervisor for the rest of your brain and body. It is the brain's brake that helps you think about what you say and do before you say or do it. It is involved with attention, judgment, planning, impulse control, follow through, and empathy.



- The PFC helps teachers plan lessons effectively and finish projects on time.
- The PFC makes you think twice before you say something hurtful to a student, parent, or coworker.
- The PFC helps students pay attention to teachers and helps teachers listen to students.
- The PFC helps students arrive to class on time and complete homework assignments on time.

When the PFC is low in activity, often due to low levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine or brain trauma, people often struggle with:

Impulse control problems	Short attention span
Distractibility	Decreased forethought
Lack of clear focus or goals	Decreased judgment
Procrastination	Disorganization
Impulsive overeating	Financial problems

Having low PFC activity may have some positive traits, such as:

Spontaneity	Creativity
Not rule bound	Uninhibited free spirit

Can be a great salesperson, as long as you have an assistant who keeps you organized

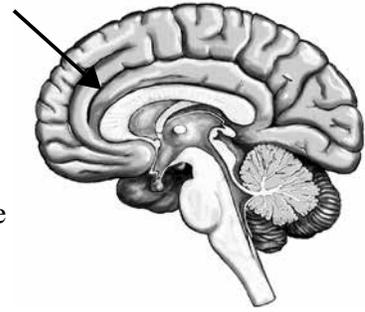
Some conditions associated with low PFC activity include:

ADHD	Some forms of depression
Brain trauma	

Common treatments used when the PFC is low:

Organizational help	Intense aerobic exercise
---------------------	--------------------------

Anterior Cingulate Gyrus (ACG)



The ACG is the brain's gear shifter. It runs lengthwise through the deep parts of the frontal lobes and allows us to shift our attention and be flexible and adaptable to change when needed.

- The ACG allows you to shift directions when the State hands down new curriculum requirements.
- A healthy ACG helps everyone at school go with the flow so you have less stress.
- The ACG helps teachers and students shift their attention from one class to the next throughout the school day.
- Your ACG helps you see options when faced with obstacles.

When the ACG is high in activity, often due to low levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin, people often struggle with:

Trouble shifting their attention	Get stuck on negative thoughts or actions
Tendency to worry	Hold grudges against loved ones/coworkers
Argumentative with family members	Oppose new ideas/strategies at work
Obsessive thoughts	Compulsive behaviors
Compulsive overeating	

Having high ACG activity may have some positive traits, such as:

Very focused	Able to stay on track
Goal oriented	Predictable
Very organized	Can be a great accountant or number-cruncher

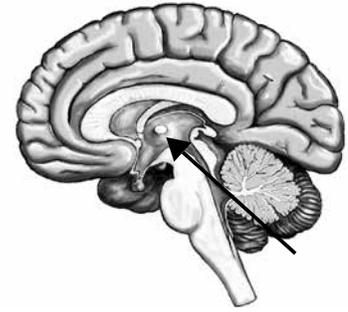
Some medical conditions associated with high ACG activity include:

Obsessive compulsive disorder	Anxiety disorders, get stuck on negative thoughts
PMS	Eating disorders, such as compulsive overeating
Chronic pain	Post-traumatic stress disorder

Common treatments used when the ACG is high:

Distraction, paradox, options	Intense aerobic exercise
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Deep Limbic System (DLS)



Lying near the center of the brain, the deep limbic system is involved in setting a person's emotional tone. When the activity in this area is normal, people tend to be more positive and hopeful.

- The DLS increases your motivation to succeed in school.
- A healthy DLS promotes stable moods that help keep classrooms calm.
- When the DLS works right, it makes it easier for teachers to bond with their students.

When the DLS is high in activity, often due to low levels of different neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine or norepinephrine, people often struggle with:

Negativity	Lowered motivation and drive
Decreased self-esteem	Mood disorders, such as depression
Sadness	Lack of energy
Trouble sleeping	Appetite changes
Guilt	Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
SAD overeating	

Having high DLS activity may have some positive traits, such as:

More in touch with feelings	Increased empathy for people who suffer
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Some medical conditions associated with high DLS activity include:

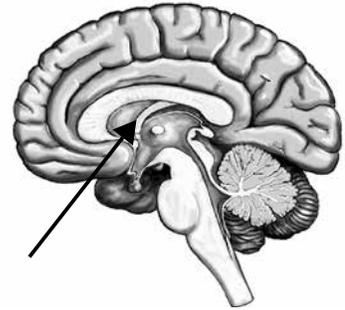
Depression	Dysthymia (chronic, mild depression)
Cyclic mood disorders	Pain syndromes

Common treatments used when the DLS is high:

Learning to kill the ANTs	Intense aerobic exercise
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Basal Ganglia (BG)

Surrounding the deep limbic system, the basal ganglia are involved with integrating thoughts, feelings, and movements. This part of the brain is also involved in setting a person's anxiety level. This area is also involved with feelings of pleasure and ecstasy. Cocaine works in this part of the brain. Cookies, cakes, and other treats also activate this area, according to a fascinating new book called *The End of Overeating* by Dr. David Kessler, the former commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



- With normal activity in this area, you can handle extra pressure at school without getting completely stressed out.
- When the basal ganglia are well-balanced, it helps keep you from worrying excessively about your homework.
- Teachers who have normal activity here are better able to keep calm in the classroom.
- Healthy basal ganglia can help keep you from bingeing on sweets or abusing alcohol or drugs to calm yourself down.

When the BG is high in activity, often due to low levels of the neurotransmitter GABA, people often struggle with:

Anxiety	Excessive stress
Panic	Conflict avoidance
Physical stress symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches	Muscle tension
Predicting the worst	Nervousness
	Anxious overeating

Having high BG activity may have some positive traits, such as:

Increased motivation	Ability/desire to work for long periods
Conscientious	Self-discipline

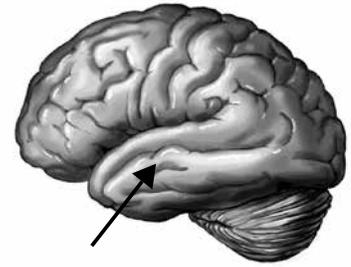
Some medical conditions associated with high BG activity include:

- Anxiety disorders
- Physical stress disorders, such as headaches or gastrointestinal problems

Common treatments used when the BG are too high:

Learning to kill the ANTs	Intense aerobic exercise
Body biofeedback	Hypnosis, meditation
Relaxing music	Assertiveness training
Limiting caffeine/alcohol	

Temporal Lobes (TLs)



The temporal lobes, located underneath your temples and behind your eyes, are involved with language, memory, mood stability, and temper issues. They are part of the brain's "What Pathway," because they help you recognize and name "what" things are. Temporal lobe problems can lead to angry outbursts and confrontations. Abnormal activity in this area can also make it difficult for you to learn new things or remember important things, like your wedding anniversary or when to take your supplements or medication — these can be detrimental to your relationships and health.

- The temporal lobes help you read social cues, such as understanding when it is or isn't a good time to approach the principal to discuss a promotion.
- When the temporal lobes work right, it keeps you from yelling and screaming at your students when you get frustrated.
- This area of the brain helps students with listening and reading.
- The temporal lobes help you remember all the things you need to do to stay healthy.

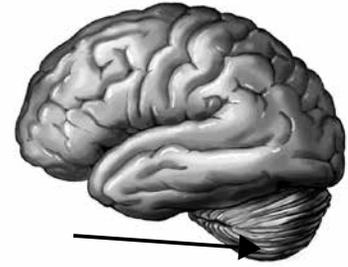
When the TLs are abnormal in activity, often due to low levels of the neurotransmitters GABA or acetylcholine, people often struggle with:

Memory problems	Mood instability
Irritability	Temper problems
Anxiety for no clear reason	Dark thoughts
Trouble finding words	Processing problems
Poor reading	Trouble reading social cues

Some medical conditions associated with abnormal TL activity include:

Head injury	Anxiety
Epilepsy	Dementia
Amnesia	

Cerebellum (CB)



The cerebellum, at the back bottom part of the brain, is called the little brain. Even though it represents only 10 percent of the brain's volume, it houses 50 percent of the brain's neurons. It is usually the most active part of the brain and is usually symmetrical in appearance. The cerebellum is involved with motor coordination, posture, and how we walk. It is also involved with processing speed, like clock speed on a computer. It is also involved with thought coordination, or how quickly you can make cognitive and emotional adjustments.

- A healthy cerebellum is one of the keys to being a good problem-solver.
- When working optimally, the cerebellum improves athletic performance.
- The cerebellum helps you think quickly, which facilitates test-taking.
- Relationships are generally smoother with good activity in the cerebellum.

When the CB is low in activity people often struggle with:

Poor physical coordination	Disorganization
Poor judgment	Slowed thinking
Impulsivity	Trouble learning

Common treatments used when the CB is low in activity:

Coordination exercises, such as dancing, table tennis	Video game <i>Dance Dance Revolution</i>
Brain Gym Exercises	Interactive Metronome

Talking Point

Below are additional teaching points regarding the power of human thoughts and the ANTs principles.

Now that you know a little bit more about your brain and common steps you can take to control it, the bottom line is still: if you want to feel good, think good thoughts!

Thoughts are real and they have a real impact on how you feel and how you behave.

What happens to your body when you have good thoughts? Your muscles relax, your heart beats slower, hands are dry, and you can breathe easily. This is much better for you and your health.

Let's begin with the power of Human Thoughts.

The following step by step thinking principles were used in Dr. Amen's psychotherapy practice to help patients heal their deep limbic systems.

Here are the 8 steps:

1. Realize your **thoughts are real** and they have real impact on how you feel and behave
2. Notice how **negative thoughts** affect your body
3. Notice how **positive thoughts** affect your body
4. Notice how **your body reacts** to every thought you have
5. Think of **bad thoughts as pollution**
6. Understand your **automatic thoughts don't always tell the truth**
7. **Talk back** to ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)
8. **Exterminate** the ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)

As we now go through the 10 ANT Principles, keep the power of human thoughts in mind.

Here are the 10 ANT Principles: (Write the Principles where the students can see them. Have them visible through this chapter).

#1. Your Thoughts Are Powerful – Every thought you have affects you and the way you think about yourself or situations around you.

#2. Thoughts Influence How We Feel – Your thoughts can be hopeful or you can allow them to be negative and upset you. It is your choice.

#3. Fight or Flight Response – You can fight your thoughts or you can run from them.

#4. Bad Thoughts Make Us Feel Bad

#5. Good Thoughts Make Us Feel Good

#6. How Do We Know – How do we know our feelings are good or bad? Is it by our reaction to them?

#7. Thoughts are Automatic – Thoughts just happen. This means they are not always right. (Example: “I did poorly on a test. I must be stupid.”) Is this true? NO! Maybe I didn’t study, maybe I was not feeling well, or maybe I do not test well—there could be all sorts of reasons.

#8. Thoughts Lie – Our thoughts are just that, thoughts. Just because we have a thought doesn’t mean it is right. (Try to give an example of your own.) When you are not feeling good about yourself, many thoughts come into mind. When you stop and think about those thoughts, you will find many of them are not true; they are simply a lie.

#9. You Do Not Have to Believe Every Thought You Have – You decide what you believe and do not believe. Challenge your thoughts and determine what is right.

#10. You Can Learn How to Correct Your Thoughts and Feel Good – Notice your thoughts and talk back to them until they are positive. If you correct negative thoughts, you can take away their power!

Automatic Negative Thoughts

- Automatic negative thoughts infest your mind
- Like ants in your kitchen or at your picnic
- They ruin how you feel
- There are 9 different ANT species

Create a vision for the students - 1 or 2 ANTS are okay, 2 to 5 are annoying, but when you reach 5, 10, 15, and 20 it is a problem, just like at a picnic! Give a picnic example. You’re at the beach on a nice sunny day, enjoying the water and hanging out with your friends. You decide to sit down at a picnic table and enjoy a sandwich, some chips and a cookie with your friends. A couple of ants start crawling across the table. No big deal, you smash them. Then you notice 5 or 6 of them, and you think, this is annoying, and all of the sudden, you have a ton of them. You think, where are these coming from? You can’t keep up with smashing all of them, they’re all over your food, nothing feels right, and so you throw away your food. Now you’re hungry and those ants have ruined your sunny day at the beach with friends. I want you to keep this analogy in mind as we talk about the 9 different ANT species and how they affect your way of thinking.

Teacher Preparation – Give students a copy of ANT definitions

There are Nine ANT Species:

1. All or Nothing Thinking
2. Always Thinking
3. Focus on Negative
4. Fortune Telling
5. Mind Reading
6. Thinking with Feelings
7. Guilt Beating
8. Labeling
9. Blame

#1. All or Nothing Thinking – When you make something out to be all good or all bad.

These thoughts happen when you make something out to be all good or all bad. There is nothing in between. All thoughts are in black and white terms.

Examples:

I am the worst student in this school. If I get an A on the test, I am the best student; but if I do not, I am the worst student.)

I will not have friends.

Life is not fair.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down. Send all 9 species of ANT student ideas to pamjenson@cesa2.org)

#2. Always Thinking ANTs – Thinking with words like always, never, every time, or everyone.

These are examples of Always Thinking ANTs. We have to get to the point of becoming more self-confident and realize these are just thoughts and, as discussed earlier, thoughts can lie.

This is a very common ANT so watch out for it and make changes.

Examples:

I will never go to college.

You never listen to me.

I will never make the team.

I always fail at tests.

Every time I talk to Jenny, she walks away.

Everyone is making fun of me.

That teacher is always yelling at me.

Everyone is always trying to annoy me.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

These ANTs happen when you think something that happened will always happen over and over again.

#3. Focus on the Negative ANTs – Only seeing the negative aspects of situations, even when there are plenty of positives.

This is a RED ANT. What does that mean? The worst kind. It gets you into trouble. This occurs when your thoughts only see the bad in a situation and ignore any of the good parts. If we only see the negative side of situations, it will be difficult to see the positives.

Examples:

I know I passed my test, but I only got a C.

I hung out with friends last night, but it was only for an hour.

Just because she talked to me today, doesn't mean she likes me.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

Focusing on all of the negatives will give you negative thoughts. Looking for the positives, it will help you feel a whole lot better!

#4. Fortune Telling ANT – Predicting the worst, even though you don't really know what will happen.

Another, RED ANT. This is the ANT where you predict the worst possible outcome of any situation.

Examples:

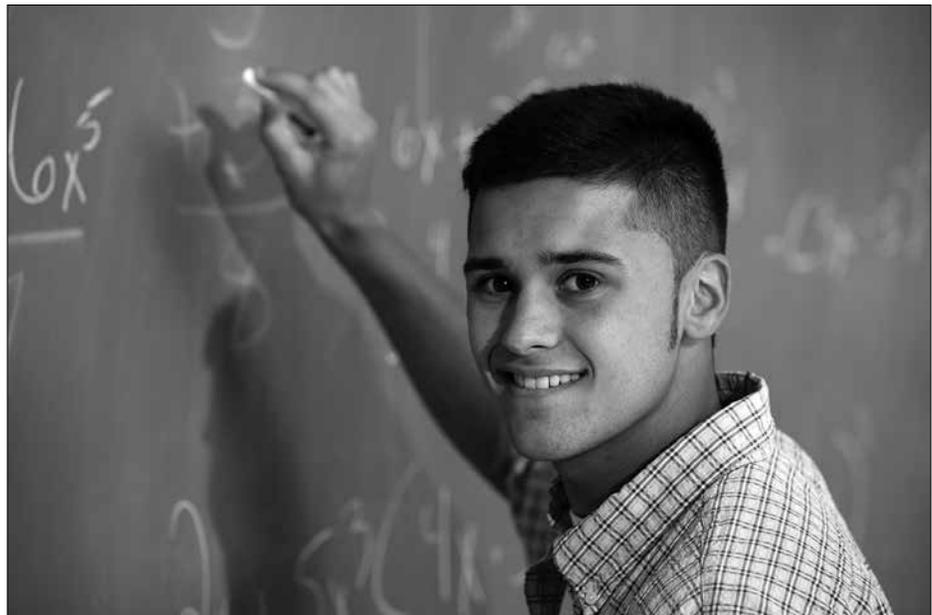
I will never graduate, so why bother!

Other kids will laugh at me and think I'm stupid if I give a speech.

I can't go to graduation; I will trip and fall on the stage.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

Red ants really hurt your chances of feeling good! When you predict that bad things will happen, they usually do. Imagine the positive things that will happen and the same will be true. You will have a positive outcome.



#5. Mind Reading ANT – Believing you know what someone is thinking even though they haven’t told you.

Again, a RED ANT. What does that mean? It’s a dangerous ANT!

This happens when you believe that you know what another person is thinking when they haven’t even told you. How many of us can read minds? (If someone says, “I can,” ask them to tell you what you are thinking right now, then come up with a clever response.) Explain that very few people, if any, have the talent of mind reading. Many people believe they know what another person is thinking, and they are often wrong!

Examples:

Everyone thinks I’m stupid because I’m in the special education room.

They were talking about me.

Henry is mad at me.

You don’t like me.

They think I look funny and will tease me.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

If you do not get control of this ant, you will consistently worry about what others are thinking, even when they are not thinking anything at all. And very possibly, not about you. Avoid trying to read people’s minds. You never know what is in the mind of another teenager!

#6. Thinking with your Feelings ANT – Assuming that how you feel about something is actually how it really is. Feelings can lie too.

Thinking with your feelings can often be very harmful. It happens when you believe your negative feelings without ever questioning them. If I am thinking it, it must be true.

Examples:

Everyone thinks I’m stupid because I have to go to the special education room.

I feel like you don’t like me.

I feel like a failure.

I feel like everyone is staring at me.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

Whenever you have a strong feeling, check it out and see if it has any truth.

#7. Guilt Beating ANT – Using excessive guilt to control behavior and think in words like should, must, ought, or have to.

Guilt often causes you to do those things you don't want to do. When you think in words like, should, must, ought, or have to, it often is because of guilt. Because of human nature, whenever we think that we "must" do something, we don't want to do it.

Examples:

You must try harder and quit being lazy!

I ought to be nice to my peers.

I have to do my homework.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

You should replace these thoughts with "I want to do this," "it fits my goal to do that," and "it would be helpful to do this." Replace your thought with, "I will try harder on my test to meet my goal of going to college."

#8. Labeling ANT – Calling yourself or someone else names or using negative terms to describe them.

Whenever you attach a negative label to yourself or to someone else, you impair your ability to take a clear look at the situation.

Examples:

I am a disappointment.

You're a jerk.

You're an idiot.

I'm dumb.

You're a criminal.

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

Negative labels are very harmful, because whenever you call yourself or someone else a label, you categorize that person in your mind with everyone else you think of in that way. You call someone a jerk. You think of all the other people you would put into the jerk category and now this person fits in there also without giving them another chance.

#9. **BLAME ANT - Blaming others for the problems in your life and believing you have no personal power or responsibility.**

You can ruin your life if you have a strong tendency to blame other people when things go wrong. If you take responsibility for your problems, you will feel better.

Example:

It wasn't my fault I failed again.

Have students fill in the blanks to the following phrases:

That wouldn't have happened if you had...

How was I supposed to know...?

It's your fault that...

(Ask students for more ideas and write them down.)

When something goes wrong in your life, you try to find someone else to blame even though you may know it is no one's fault but your own. This is also used to try get around problem-solving for yourself.

Whenever you blame someone else for the problems in your life, you become powerless to change anything. Stay away from blaming thoughts and take personal responsibility to change the problems you have.

Summary of ANT Species

Review with your students using the Definition of ANTs Handout. Keep this posted in your classroom as a visual.

- **All or Nothing Thinking** – thoughts are all good or all bad.
- **Always Thinking** – thinking in words like always, never, no one, every time, everyone, or everything.
- **Focus on Negative** – only seeing the bad in situations.
- **Fortune Telling** – predicting the worst possible outcome of a situation.
- **Mind Reading** – believing you know what someone is thinking without knowledge.
- **Thinking with Feelings** – believing negative feelings without questioning them.
- **Guilt Beating** – thinking in guilt words (should, must).
- **Labeling** – attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else.
- **Blame** – blaming someone else for your problems.

See ANTs definition handout next page.

Definitions of ANTs

- **All or Nothing Thinking** – thoughts are all good or all bad.
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- **Guilt Beating** – thinking in guilt words (should, must).
- **Labeling** – using a negative label to yourself or someone else.
- **Blame** – blaming someone else for your problems .

ANT Therapy

Find your internal Anteater and make it run!!!!

Dr. Amen discusses in his book that our overall state of mind has a certain tone or flavor based largely on the types of thoughts we think. When the deep limbic system is overactive, it sets the mind's filter on negative. People who are depressed have one dispiriting thought following another. The lens through which they see themselves and others is that the world has a dim grayness. They are suffering from *automatic negative thoughts* or ANTs.

Teacher Preparation for Activity 2.2

Play the ANTs song. Have the students listen to it carefully. Play it a couple of times. Now give them the lyrics to the song and have them complete the following:

- identify and underline the ANTs they see
- circle words or phrases that STOMP out the ANTs
- highlight the ANTs they have personally experienced
- record ANTs they are currently experiencing or have experienced recently on the Getting Rid of ANTs handout

- share their answers with the class once they are done

Say: Now it is time to combat your own ANTs. To combat these ANTs, we are going to write the thoughts we have, identify the ANT, and then figure out how to get rid of them.

If you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you will have great results for your future!

After this activity, have the students share their ANTs – the identity and how to get rid of them with the class.

Talking Point

Many times we put up walls so that we can avoid what has gotten us down. A wall is usually a solid structure that defines and sometimes protects an area. Most commonly, a wall delineates a building and supports its superstructure, separates space in buildings into rooms, or protects or delineates a space in the open air. There are three principal types of structural walls: building walls, exterior boundary walls, and retaining walls, according to Wikipedia. What does this mean for you? Do you want to keep the walls standing that hold your ANTs in, separate them into rooms and make it difficult to get rid of them, or do you want to knock those walls down and get rid of them. Start to be the confident positive person you are internally longing to be. This is your choice! Let's begin to build that wall. The faster we build it, the sooner we can knock it down!

Teacher Preparation – Get brick-size boxes for students and set up.

Activity 2.3 – Never Give Up Activity

Ask each student to write on a cardboard box one of their ANTs. Every day for the next week, have them write down an ANT or several ANTs they have had for the day. Begin to build a wall with these boxes. At the end of the session or week, use this quotation:

Michael Jordan said, "Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it. I say, if that doesn't work, KNOCK IT DOWN!"

Have the students knock down the wall to symbolize getting rid of the ANTs in their life and encourage positive thinking.

ACTIVITY 2.4

Read the poem *What Do You Do?* Give students a copy if you wish.

After reading the poem, ask students to share what meaning this poem has for them.

What Do You Do?

What do you do when life is a mess,
do you give up on everything you've
worked so hard to get?

What do you do when there's no one to
help, do you hide in a corner and cry to
yourself?

What do you do when your walls are
tumbling down, do you sit there and
watch as the pieces fall to the ground?

NO

When life is a mess, try harder than
before, hold your head high, and stand
for what's yours.

When you're all alone and there's no
one to help, stay calm and stand tall,
just believe in yourself.

And when it feels like all your walls
are tumbling down, just pick them
up piece by piece as they fall to the
ground.

By Johneshia Taylor-Beloit, WI

SUMMARY

Use the ANTs analogy throughout this curriculum and throughout the year. Educate other staff and have them “call your students out” on their automatic negative thoughts. You will see a difference in their reactions.

ANTs relate to learning to think positively, and so as to change the way we think to feel good and most importantly feel good about who you are as a person with a disability. By understanding ANTs, students can learn thinking skills that will help them to be more effective in their day to day lives and better accept themselves.

Thinking positively is the key to teaching positive students. The way we talk and interact with our students is the key to programming their minds with positive, uplifting, hopeful attitudes towards themselves and their future.

Remember: If you want to feel good, think good thoughts!



Teacher Insights

What it looks like in the classroom

The students will be very eager to start this chapter, particularly as Activity 2.3 involves a kinesthetic attribute. The chapter gives the students an extensive background on how the brain processes thoughts. Introducing ANTs and reviewing the different types of ANTs throughout the chapter solidifies the concept that the students own their feelings. Throughout the chapter, each student has the opportunity to break down the wall of negativity, both figuratively and literally.

What the students learn

When the students reflect on prevalent ANTs in their lives, they will realize how many ANTs they have in common with others. Many of the ANTs may involve peer relationships, family relationships, and thoughts surrounding their disabilities. The students will feel a bit more “at ease” knowing they face similar challenges and feelings as their peers. Along with that, they will learn strategies to combat the negativity that invades their thinking.

What the teacher learns

Watching the students identify and take ownership of their feelings is rewarding, particularly because it’s a skill that will serve them well on a daily basis. While completing the activities, remember how much power there is in symbolic actions. Although the students may be laughing and having a good time during various parts of this chapter, there is also an internal victory going on in each of them. Urge yourself to plan similar lessons for the future.

WI State Teaching Standards addressed

Standard #2 – Teachers know how children grow.

Standard #3 – Teachers understand that children learn differently.

Standard #5 – Teachers know how to manage a classroom.



Chapter 3: Assessment

3

What are Your Strengths, Preferences, and Interests?

Learning Points

- What is an assessment?
- What is the difference between formal and informal assessments?
- What are the different types of assessments?
- What is an accommodation?

Materials Needed

- Handouts for all activities
- U-Tube video clip from “Dirty Jobs”

Activities

- 3.1 – Transition assessment
- 3.2 – Understanding your strengths, preferences and interests
- 3.3 – Understanding weaknesses and supports
- 3.4 – Portfolio-Section 1

Introduction

So now that you know that you have a disability and what it consists of, you can begin to plan for your future and concentrate on your strengths, preferences, and interests. Meaningful assessment information is gained from assessment tools and may help you to better know and understand yourself.

What is assessment? Why should you care?

Transition assessment looks at every part of your life by seeing you as a student, a worker, a friend, a family member, and a person who lives in a neighborhood. It helps you look at what supports you may need to reach your goals in life. It helps you identify your strengths, preferences, and interests.

Assessment is all about learning about what you can do in life. It's a process that you go through to try to map out your future. Assessment is a very important part of your transition plan because it helps you:

- get concrete ideas about what you want to do
- plan what your next steps are
- learn about yourself
- challenge yourself to think about yourself
- assist in understanding your interests
- assist in knowing your strengths
- learn about your needs and accommodations that might help
- plan for your future goals in education and training, employment, and independent living

What is the difference between formal and informal assessments?

There are two types of assessment – formal and informal. Formal assessments are tests that are scored and help you understand where you stand compared to others. Informal assessments can be done by a variety of people like your teacher, counselor, family member, your boss, or yourself. Information can be collected through a survey, someone watching you, or having you experience work in different settings (school, volunteer, paid work). You can learn a lot about yourself by trying a lot of different things in different places.

What can you expect from a formal assessment?

Formal assessments involve taking a test; it's not just to get you out of class for the day. Sometimes when you are scheduled to take a formal assessment, you will be taking more than one test at a time. Whenever you participate in an assessment, it is important to understand why you're doing it and what it can do for you. Before you take it, ask the following questions:

- 1) What is this for?
- 2) How can it help me?
- 3) What is the test like?
- 4) How long will the test take?
- 5) Am I allowed accommodations?
- 6) How will I learn about the results of the test?

Before your scheduled assessment, make sure you get a good night's sleep and a good meal. Also find out how long you'll be there, how you're going to get to the testing site, and what accommodations you are going to be given. During the test, it is important for you to ask questions if you do not understand something.

Within a few weeks after the formal assessment, you should meet with someone you trust to review the results of the assessment. His information is to help you understand your strengths and needs and to come up with ideas to be used in your IEP and post school goals.

What is an accommodation?

Accommodations are an alteration of something. In this case it may be of a curriculum, test or work environment. The purpose of the accommodation is to assist you in succeeding 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 student who has difficulty seeing is given glasses.) That example is an accommodation and it is no different than an accommodation you may need!

What assessment accommodations can you get?

Accommodations are changes to a classroom or work site that enable you to learn, work, and show off your skills. Sometimes you need to ask for accommodations on assessments when you feel it will help you do your best. Accommodations can be things like asking for extra time on a test, using a calculator, having a reader or a note taker, having a job coach, or having an accessible work area. There are usually rules about how to get accommodations and you need to find out what they are by asking a parent, teacher, or job site supervisor.

Write on the board:

Why is it important that we have an assessment? Ideal answer: so that we know what we are good at, who can support us, develop a plan for transition, etc.

Write on the board:

Why is it important to have a transition plan? Ideal answer: someone else may help us plan our lives. (Show clips from World's Dirtiest Jobs.) Ask students if this is what they would like to do for a living once they graduate. If not, complete the following assessments. Explain this is to assist educators in helping them plan for their future so that they are happy and fulfilled as adults.

Activity 3.1: Transition assessment

Here are some questions to help you think about different parts of your life. These transition assessment questions can help you plan for your future and write your transition goals.

1) Home and family life

- a) What do you do for yourself?
- b) How do you help your family (chores, laundry, pets, etc.)?
- c) How much does your family help you?
- d) Are there things you could do on your own to be more independent? If so, what?

2) Staying healthy

- a) Do you exercise or play sports?
- b) What are your eating habits?
- c) Do you manage your own medications (if you take any)?
- d) Do you know how to set up your own doctors' appointments?

3) Fun stuff

- a) What sports do you play?
- b) What clubs are you involved in at school?
- c) What music do you like?

- d) What do you do in your spare time?
- e) What hobbies do you have?
- f) Do you do any volunteer work with any organization that interests you?
- g) Do you help out in your neighborhood (neighborhood clean-up, helping with elderly, etc.)?
- h) Are you involved in any church groups?

4) Relationships

- a) Do you have what you would call “close friends?”
- b) How do you get along with your family?
- c) Do you have a girlfriend or boyfriend?
- d) Are you able to talk to people about your problems?
- e) Are you able to communicate your feelings well?
- f) Do you get along well with adults?
- g) How do you communicate with these individuals in your life (talk, text, write, etc.)?

5) Planning for your future

- a) What are your goals in life?
- b) What type of job do you want to have?
- c) Do you need training for this job? If so, what type of training (on the job, educational training, etc.)?
- d) Do you plan to go on to postsecondary education?
If so, 2-year or 4-year college? Where? What will you major in?
- e) What do you do in school now to plan for your future?
(Planning for your future, continued)
- f) Do you know how to budget your money?
- g) Do you know how to use your time wisely?

6) Running your life

- a) Are you making your own decisions?
- b) Are you doing what you really want to do in life?
If not, what would you like to see change?
- c) Do you talk about your future with your family?
- d) How do you deal with disagreements about your future with other people?

Review your answers and determine where your strengths, preferences, and interests are. List them below.

Strengths

Preferences

Interests

Activity 3.2 – Understanding your Strengths, Preferences, and Interests

What is a strength? A strength is something you are naturally good at. It can also be called an ability. For those of us with disabilities, our strengths are often overlooked because people might focus on our disabilities, rather than our abilities. Sometimes we will have different strengths than most people, but these abilities are just as important.

Perhaps some of you are already thinking about strengths that you know you have. But others of you might be wondering, “Do I even have any strengths?” Unfortunately we tend to find our weaknesses easier than our strengths. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and everyone has something positive to contribute to their community. People can have all different types of strengths. Some people may have physical strengths (like being good at sports), or mental strengths (like problem-solving or being good at math.) Other people have moral strengths, which makes them good at determining right and wrong. Below is a list that might help you figure out what your strengths are.

Most people think that they can only be smart in reading, writing, or arithmetic. The truth is that we can be smart and exhibit strengths in a number of ways. This has been confirmed by research done by Howard Gardner and colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. All of us have strengths in a variety of areas. Sometimes we just need to shift our focus to find them. This activity is meant to assist you in discovering your “hidden” strengths.

Verbal Intelligence (Word Strengths)

Enjoys writing stories	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is a good reader	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys word games	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is a good storyteller/joke teller	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has a good vocabulary	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys listening to stories and poems	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to write stories and poems	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has a good memory for words and details	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes rhymes or nonsense words	Yes	Somewhat	No
Communicates with others in a highly verbal way	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys spelling and learning new words	Yes	Somewhat	No

Visual Intelligence (Picture Strengths)

Enjoys looking at pictures, videos, movies, etc.	Yes	Somewhat	No
Daydreams more than peers	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has a good eye for detail and color	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is good at puzzles	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to draw and create art projects	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can read or create maps	Yes	Somewhat	No
Creates mental images to retain information	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can see objects from more than one perspective	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has a good sense of direction	Yes	Somewhat	No

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence (Number Strengths)

Asks a lot of questions about how things work	Yes	Somewhat	No
Finds math games interesting	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can see and repeat patterns easily	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys brain teasers	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to categorize information	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes working with geometric shapes	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can work math concepts in her/his head	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can estimate things involving numbers with ease	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys budgeting money	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is a logical thinker	Yes	Somewhat	No

Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence (Body Strengths)

Is very coordinated and has good balance	Yes	Somewhat	No
Moves a lot, fidgets, and taps when seated for long times	Yes	Somewhat	No
Must touch anything new or interesting	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys running, jumping, dancing, climbing, etc.	Yes	Somewhat	No
Loves to take things apart and put them back together	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can mimic movements of others	Yes	Somewhat	No
Uses dramatic body movements to express self	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes hands-on work	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys playing sports	Yes	Somewhat	No

Music Intelligence (Music Strength)

Can tell if music is off key or off beat	Yes	Somewhat	No
Remembers melodies of songs	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys playing a musical instrument or singing	Yes	Somewhat	No
Sensitive to environmental sounds (crickets, dripping water, etc.)	Yes	Somewhat	No
Taps rhythmically as he or she works or plays	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys listening to music	Yes	Somewhat	No
Hums a lot	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to compose music	Yes	Somewhat	No
Sings songs that she or he has learned	Yes	Somewhat	No

Interpersonal Intelligence (People Strengths)

Enjoys listening to others	Yes	Somewhat	No
Seems to be a natural leader	Yes	Somewhat	No
Shows good teamwork skills	Yes	Somewhat	No
Others want to be around this person	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys teaching others	Yes	Somewhat	No

Has two or more close friends	Yes	Somewhat	No
Can see things from the other person's view	Yes	Somewhat	No
Acts as a peace maker or mediator	Yes	Somewhat	No
Understands others' moods or feelings	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys working with others	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes giving others advice	Yes	Somewhat	No

Interpersonal Awareness (Self Strengths)

Enjoys playing or working alone	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has a high self-esteem	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has a good sense of self-direction	Yes	Somewhat	No
Does not mind being different from others	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is able to deal with success and failure effectively	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has an interest or talent that isn't shared with others	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is strong-willed	Yes	Somewhat	No
Reflects on and analyzes herself/himself	Yes	Somewhat	No
Is aware of inner feelings, dreams, and passions	Yes	Somewhat	No

Naturalistic Intelligence (Nature Strengths)

Loves to collect things from nature	Yes	Somewhat	No
Cares for pets and animals	Yes	Somewhat	No
Would rather be outside than inside	Yes	Somewhat	No
Appreciates the natural world (clouds, rocks, ocean)	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to garden and appreciates plants	Yes	Somewhat	No
Understands the environment	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to identify living and non-living things (trees, plants, etc.)	Yes	Somewhat	No
Understands repeating patterns in nature (seasons)	Yes	Somewhat	No
Seems more in tune with nature than peers	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes working or exploring the outdoors	Yes	Somewhat	No

Technology Intelligence (Computer Strengths)

Enjoys networking with others on the computer	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has good data entry skills	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes browsing the web	Yes	Somewhat	No
Enjoys learning new computer skills and programs	Yes	Somewhat	No
Has the ability to create a PowerPoint presentation	Yes	Somewhat	No
Likes to take apart and put together computers	Yes	Somewhat	No

Adapted from Howard Gardner and the Fulfill the Dream Curriculum

Add up the Yes responses in each area. What area has the largest number of Yeses? Explain how this meets your strengths, preferences, and interests. What type of job relates to your strengths?

Knowing Your Weaknesses

Okay, so now that we know what your strengths are, let's ask ourselves another question: what is a weakness? Perhaps there are certain things you aren't as good at. These things would be described as your weaknesses. However, there is something really cool about weaknesses—sometimes they can help you grow in ways you never would have guessed. For example, a person who uses a wheelchair because they have trouble walking may have improved upper body strength from propelling the wheelchair. This changes the person's disability in one area to an ability in another area. It is important to see the positive parts of every situation.

It is also very important to identify what supports you received in special education based on your disability and limitations. This will help you provide needed documentation of disability if you go on to postsecondary education or attempt to use adult service agencies like DVR and DHS. Go back and look over the Chapter 3 worksheets just completed to help you answer questions.

Remember: It is not how smart you are, it is how you are smart ~ Howard Gardner

Activity 3.3 – Understanding your Weaknesses and the Supports You Need

1. What skills might you need to improve?

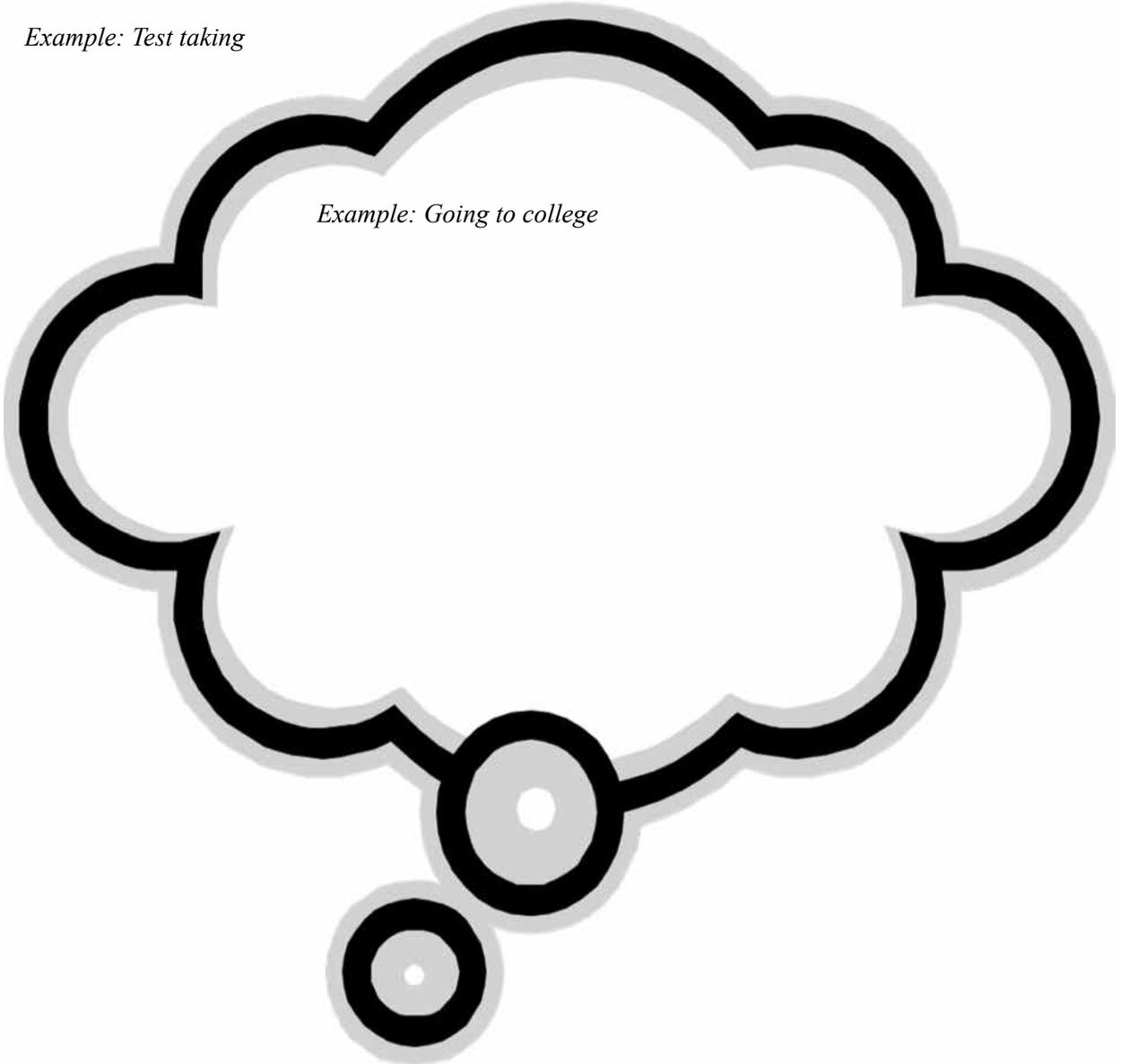
2. What accommodations and supports could you use to improve on your weaknesses?
(These accommodations could be part of your future documentation.)

Use the bubble handout on the next page. Write all of your hopes and dreams inside this bubble.

Around the bubble list needed supports and accommodations.

Example: Test taking

Example: Going to college



Summary

What does this all mean to you? Pulling it all together!

In this section you have learned a lot about what assessment is and how it can help you in your transition planning and lifelong career journey. Since assessment is always happening throughout your transition process, how do you keep track of it all? Here's an idea on how you can do this. Create a Portfolio!

Portfolios are a collection of assessment information about you. They can help you communicate what your dreams, goals, strengths, interests, preferences, and abilities are to people who can help you get to where you want to go. Portfolios can help you grow by learning about yourself and by putting your assessment information all in one place. You are in control of your portfolio and can include anything you feel that is important in telling your story.

Portfolios can be kept in an electronic form or in a binder. Sometimes people use PowerPoint to create their Portfolio. Pick the way that works best for you. Don't forget, you are in the driver's seat!



Activity 3.4 - Portfolios

Build your portfolio through your years in school. Here are some ideas to begin your portfolio. The portfolio is about you, so start with information about yourself!

Section 1: Who You Are

- A picture of you
- Your name, age, birth date, year in school, and any other background information
- What interests you have (create this through writing about yourself, pictures, projects, etc.)
- Samples of your work, areas you are strong in (Examples: homework assignments, stories, drawings, paintings, poems, audio clips, photos, etc.)
- Transition assessments and the results of your assessments from this chapter – strengths, preferences, interests, weaknesses, and accommodations to those areas of need
- All worksheets from this guide
- Anything else that tells the story of who you are and the goals you have
- Be creative!!!

Teacher Insights

What it looks like in the classroom

This chapter requires extra attentiveness on the part of the students, particularly because it is linguistically heavy. The assessments in Chapter 3 are rich in information, while also lengthy. Depending on your students, reading aloud and working as a class may be useful. Activity 3.3 dovetails nicely off of the assessments in Activity 3.1 and Activity 3.2. After assessing weaknesses in 3.3, some students will focus on academic goals (e.g., improving grades) while others will focus on social or emotional goals (e.g., improving anger management strategies). By the conclusion of Chapter 3, the goal is that students will understand both their strengths and weaknesses and know how to seek support when working toward their hopes and dreams.

What the students learn

The students may have difficulty determining what a weakness is and even more difficulty coming up with a reasonable accommodation. Of course, the terms “weakness” and “accommodation” are familiar; however, pairing them together will be a challenging concept. Therefore, not only will your students learn about themselves, they will learn a new advocacy skill to aide in their future successes.

What the teacher learns

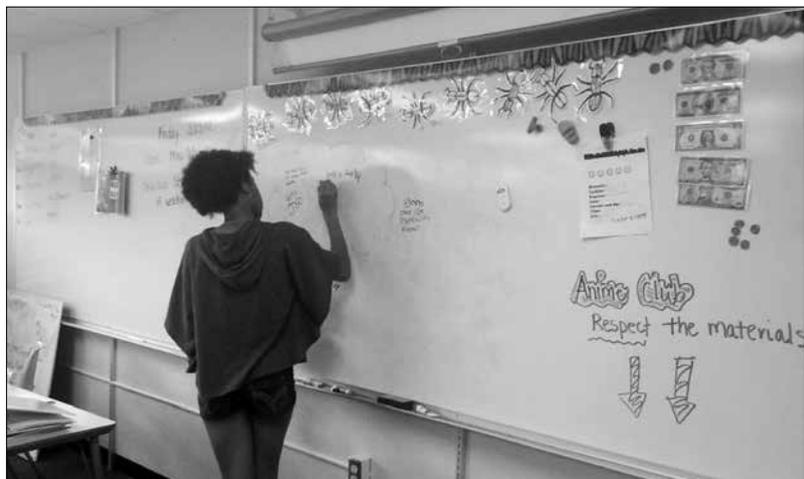
The correlations the students make between weaknesses and accommodations will get creative. You may spend a good portion of the lesson teaching what weaknesses are worthy of focus and what that focus should look like. You will also teach about various accommodations that are fair and acceptable, while ensuring that they correspond with weaknesses as best as possible. This lesson may involve more instruction than you anticipate; however, it is a healthy learning experience for the students.

WI State Teaching Standards addressed

Standard #1 – Teachers know the subjects they are teaching.

Standard #6 – Teachers communicate well.

Evidence



Chapter 4: Self-Advocacy

4

Finding Your Way!

Learning Points

- Speak up for yourself
- The 4 keys to being a good self-advocate
- Self-advocacy DOs and DON'Ts
- How to find supports
- Help in school – IEPs
- Transition planning in the IEP

Materials Needed

- Handouts for all activities
- Student portfolios

Activities

- 4.1 – List of supporters
- 4.2 – My disability is
- 4.3 – Postsecondary goals
- 4.4 – Review questions
- 4.5 – Portfolio-Section 2



Self-Advocacy: Cassie's Story

My name is Cassie Lokker, and I have been visually impaired since the time I was born; being visually impaired means I only have sight in my left eye and I cannot see well enough to read or see things at a distance without using telescopes or magnifiers. I have never really had a problem accepting the fact that I have a disability simply because I've never known anything different. I grew up using large print, telescopes, magnifiers, and products that talk and read to me, and that was normal for me. Although I knew I was different from everyone else, I never saw my disability as something that had to be dealt with or overcome.

My friends and family have always been very supportive of me as a person. I was always told that I could accomplish anything I put my mind to and that the sky was the limit. When I told my parents that I wanted to be an author or musician when I grew up, they supported me all the way, and today I can say that I have attained that goal. I have recorded a CD and published three books, and without the support of my friends and family, I don't know where I'd be today.

But even though I had the encouragement from friends and family, it was a long time before I really stepped out and started to work toward realizing my dreams. I had to learn to speak up and tell others that I needed help. I needed to attend classes in independent living and make an attempt at living on my own. I had to go out of my comfort zone and try new things. I needed to embrace the unknown and risk failure before I could succeed.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I attended a camp and forum for high school students with disabilities called the Wisconsin Youth Leadership Forum. During the week, I attended large group sessions where I learned about disability laws and legislation, resources, accommodations, and opportunities open to the disabled community. I interacted with my small group, counselor, and facilitator, and filled out a Personal Leadership Plan, which asked me to look five to ten years into my future and imagine where I would be or what I could accomplish. I sang at the talent show and had a great time at the dance, all the while making new friends and learning what it meant to be a leader despite the fact I had a disability.

I truly believe that being involved with the Youth Leadership Forum has empowered me to be a leader in my community and gave me the determination to stand up and make a difference in our world today. Without the training I received there and the support of my family and friends, I think I would still doubt whether I could really be able to reach for my goals and dreams. The lessons I have learned and the support from people I love has greatly impacted the person I am today.

Discussion Points: Cassie's Story

1. How did Cassie learn to advocate for herself?
2. What is the Youth Leadership Forum in Wisconsin? (find information at <http://wiyouthfirst.org/>)
3. What skills did Cassie learn from the Wisconsin Youth Leadership Forum?
4. What have you learned from Cassie's story?

Speak Up for Yourself

Introduction:

This chapter was created by youth with experience in self-advocacy. The purpose of this chapter is to give the youth you are working with an overview of what self-advocacy is and how to begin to advocate for themselves.

What is advocacy and how do you advocate for yourself?

Self-advocacy relates to self-determination as defined in the guide, “Opening Doors to Self-Determination Skills” - <http://dpi.state.wi.us/sped/pdf/tranopndrs-self-determination.pdf>. 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.

Self-advocacy is the process of speaking for yourself and using knowledge of your rights, wishes, needs, and strengths.

The common thread is knowing yourself and gaining empowerment through this knowledge. When working on self-determination and self-advocacy skills, you should think about the following:

- Knowing your strengths (in and out of school)
- Knowing the areas you need to work on (in and out of school)
- Knowing your interests (in and out of school)
- Knowing what kinds of support you might need and who could provide that support
- Making your own choices and decisions
- Knowing your rights and responsibilities
- Planning for your future

Advocacy is also defined as an action that produces change.
Americans' with Disabilities Act (ADA)

If you're a person with a disability, you can live an independent productive life, but you will find yourself in situations that may hinder your independence. Society's stereotypes are among the barriers you will face. However, you can do something about it. You can take a stand and let your voice be heard. You can be an agent of change, either as an individual or as part of a larger group.

The youth of today believe that one of the most important parts of becoming independent is learning how to advocate for what you want. If you advocate for yourself, you are speaking up for what you want, and not letting other people speak for you. Too many times young people allow other people (usually adults) to make decisions for them. While advice and assistance from adults is a good thing, your future is your decision!

Teacher Preparation – Hand out copies of 4 Keys, and DOs and DON'Ts

Say: Here are 4 key elements to becoming a good self-advocate.

The 4 Keys to Being a Good Self-Advocate

1) Research

In order to tell people what you want, you need to know what is out there. What are your options? What do you have to do to get the things you want? It is up to you to do your homework about things like colleges, accommodations, and places you can go to get the things you need (e.g., Division of Vocational Rehabilitation [DVR]). You need to investigate and learn the pros and cons of any decision so you are able to make an educated decision.

2) Communication

Learning how to communicate with people is key to advocating for your needs.

- Be polite. Manners go a long way. Do not yell, BUT DON'T LET PEOPLE WALK ALL OVER YOU. (Don't forget to smile!)
- Be confident. You need to know what you want to say! (You did research; know what you're talking about)
- Be heard. It is your life. Make your feelings known. People can't read your mind.

3) Compromise

While the decisions that are being made are about you, it is important to be open-minded about other people's advice and ideas. Make sure that you are realistic about your goals (example: if you are not a good athlete, wanting to be in the NBA is probably not a good career goal).

4) Teamwork

You have a great number of people you can count on for good advice. Know who the people are who you can count on. Let the professionals do their jobs, and let your parents be your parents. Let your friends be your friends. They all have an important role in your transition process. Listen to their advice but always understand...ITS ALL ABOUT YOU!

Self-advocacy DOs and DON'Ts

Advocacy is not always easy; in fact, it rarely is. Advocacy takes time, knowledge, and dedication. Often when we have to advocate, we may be in positions where we are upset, angry, and "caught in the heat of the moment." Although these moments may seem the right time to advocate, it is often better to wait and become more informed before advocating. Below is a list of things that should and should not be done when advocating. Advocacy is a skill that takes practice. The more you practice advocacy, the better you will get.

DOs	DONTs
Be polite	Yell or demand
Ask questions	Be shy
Know your information	Come to a meeting unprepared
Keep a record of important papers, phone numbers and names Be organized	Lose your records, phone numbers, names of people who helped and hindered you
Send thank you notes and show your appreciation	Be ungrateful for people's time and effort
Give your contact information, and also remember to get theirs too!	Don't network
Be confident	Be a push-over or arrogant (overconfident)

Talking Point

How to Find Supports

There are some important things to remember when trying to locate supportive people to aid you throughout your transition process. The first thing to remember is that almost anyone can be a source of support: parents, teachers, friends, rehabilitation counselors, church leaders, etc. The second important thing to remember is that a supportive person needs to be someone who believes in you and your abilities. He or she is someone who can help you generate new ideas about your transition-related goals.

It is important to first consider the supports you may already have in your life. These could be friends, family, teachers, and many other people who believe in your abilities and want to see you do well.

If for any reason you do not already have some sort of support system in place, there are a lot of places where you can look for supportive people. Perhaps you have a parent or guardian who can help you discover your abilities and aide in the transition process. You may have a teacher or counselor who might have some new ideas about realistic goals and how you can accomplish them.

Finding supports may be as easy as talking to your parent or guardian, or it may require a little more thought and work. No matter what your situation, however, there are always people out there who will believe in you and help you through the transition process. Sometimes it's just a matter of knowing where to look.

Activity 4.1 - List of Supporters

Develop a list of supports you have in your life. Make sure you get contact information and the best way to communicate. (i.e., phone or email). Complete the worksheet below.

Name	Address	Phone: home and cell	Email address
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

After you complete your list, talk to your supporters about what you have learned so far about your disability and transition process. Share your transition plans with them and write down their response to your plans. If they were not supportive of your plan, list the steps you took to advocate for yourself and your future. Use the questions below to assist you with your conversation.

1. How will you explain your disability to others?
2. What are the key points of your transition plan?
3. What feedback did you receive from supporters?
4. List steps taken to speak up for yourself or use self-advocacy skills.

Practice possible scenarios and role-play what may happen. For example, what could you say if you want to go to college? What if your parents or teachers tell you that is not possible?

Activity 4.2 - My Disability Is!

Please complete the following worksheet based on the information you have discovered up to this point.

My disability is: _____

Things I know about my disability include:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Accommodations I currently use are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Activity 4.3 – Postsecondary Goals (after high school goals)

Please complete the following worksheet using the results of your transition assessment, school schedule, and insight into your goals.

My goals after graduation from high school include:

Begin with the phrase, “After high school...”

Example: After high school, I will attend a 2-year college in the field of welding.)

Education or Training:

Employment:

Independent Living:

Goals I can work on this school year

Activities I can work on this school year to meet my postsecondary goals are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

People I can ask to assist me with these activities include:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Activity 4.4 - Review Question

1. What is transition and what are the three transition goal areas?
2. What is advocacy?
3. What are the 4 keys to being a good self-advocate?
4. What are the DO's and DON'Ts of advocacy?
5. What questions should you ask your teacher and others about your IEP and transition plan?
6. How do you find the supports you need?

Summary - Terms to Know

- 1) **Transition** – An organized set of activities that help you move successfully from high school to college, postsecondary training, independent living, or work. Transition focuses on what you need and what you want to do with your future
- 2) **Self-advocate** – A person who speaks up for themselves and what they want!
- 3) **Post school goal** – Things that students decide to do with their life after they leave high school
- 4) **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** – A form that outlines your abilities, skills you need to work on in school, and your accommodations, and helps you plan for your future goals
- 5) **Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)** – Law passed in 1990 by Congress to ensure that people with disabilities would have equal access and equal rights

The three post school outcomes:

1. Postsecondary education or training (going to a 2- or 4-year university, community college, technical school, certificate program to assist with employment, or anything that furthers your education or training on the job)
2. Employment (job or career)
3. Independent Living (living on your own successfully – living where you want to and with whom, getting around in your community, managing a budget, and doing what you want to do in your free time)

Keys to being a good self-advocate:

- 1) Do research – Know your options!
- 2) Communication – Talk to people! Be assertive, but polite!
- 3) Compromise – Let your teachers and parents lend a helping hand; they know their stuff.
- 4) Teamwork – Know who you can ask to be a part of your IEP team.

Activity 4.5 – Things to add to your portfolio

Remember your portfolio is a project you will continue to work on throughout this class and throughout your education. Create Section 2 and consider adding the following information to this section:

- The 4 keys to being a good self-advocate
- List of supporters
- IEP goals
- Postsecondary goals
- List of accommodations and how they are used

Resources:

Please use the Opening Doors Series, http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_transition Transition Resources for Students with Disabilities Planning for Life after High School.

Opening Doors to Self-Determination

Developing new skills and achieving goals help students grow. Knowing their strengths and addressing their weaknesses is important as students prepare for life after high school. As students move through school and toward adulthood, they go through a process of considering who they are and who they wish to become. What kind of work would they like to do? What will they need to do to pursue this work? What living arrangements do they envision? What education, training, and services will be available to them along the way? Students can work with counselors, parents, and teachers as they work with this resource.

Opening Doors to Employment

Opening Doors to Employment was created to provide input and direction to students as they set and work toward their employment goals. It offers career exploration strategies, job preparation advice, and job search strategies. It addresses questions such as:

What kind of work would be best for me? How do I know I can do certain kinds of jobs? How can I get a job and keep a job? If I get a certain kind of job, could I live on my income?

Opening Doors to Postsecondary Education and Training: Planning for Life after High School

This Opening Doors booklet leads the reader through a process of planning for life after high school that includes making decisions, planning, and taking actions. Specifically, this publication is a tool for students with disabilities to use as they begin to plan for a successful future. Each student can consider his or her strengths and weaknesses, plan a high school experience that will achieve specific goals, explore possibilities for work and a career, and identify the next steps for life after high school.

Additional Self-Determination Resources

See Think, Plan, Do! Self-Determination Project at Westchester Institute for Human Development, <http://www.nymyway.org/Howto/ThinkPlanDo/index.html>

Learn How to Get What You Need. Build Your Own Support System. Imagine What You Can Do. Developed by: Mary Ann Beckman, Laura Owens and Jessica Steuer <http://dpi.wi.gov/files/sped/doc/tran-self-determination-hbk.doc>

Teacher Insight

What it looks like in the classroom

Chapter 4 allows the students to take responsibility for their current and future fulfillment, notably how their disabilities affect their fulfillment. It's important that the students have a role in contributing to decisions. It's also important that they know how to go about it, which Chapter 4 teaches. Activity 4.3 is perfect for the transition portion of an IEP. During meetings, it allows students to take ownership and talk about their futures. It is non-threatening and easy to understand.

What the students learn

The students will learn that it's important to start thinking about life after high school before high school even starts. They will also learn that they can help themselves by starting to work toward their postsecondary goals in high school, particularly in the area of course selection. In Activity 4.1, particular students will have a hard time coming up with individuals to help them achieve their goals. Though tough, it will allow them to recognize reliable people in their lives.

What the teacher learns

By the end of this chapter, you will discover that some students are apprehensive about thinking into the future. Be interested in seeking answers from them regarding postsecondary living. You will have students who are certain of their plans, while others shutter in fear at the thought of it. Activity 4.3 is a seamless way to collect information without creating extra work for yourself. Take the opportunity to determine if your teaching is serving their needs and goals. Out of the entire guide, you may find yourself using Activity 4.3 the most.

WI State Teaching Standards addressed

Standard #8 – Teachers know how to test for student progress.

Standard #9 – Teachers are able to evaluate themselves.

Evidence

See artifact on the following page.

EXAMPLE



Activity 4.3-Post-Secondary Goals (after high school goals)

Please complete the following worksheet using the results of your transition assessment, school schedule and insight into your goals.

My goals after graduation from high school include: (Begin with the phase, "After high school,")

Example: After high school, I will attend a 2 year college in the field of welding.

Education or Training: After high school, I will enroll in the Culinary arts Program at a local 2-year college.

Employment: After high school, I will seek employment in the food Service industry.

Independent Living: After high school, I will independently live in an apartment near the location of my job.

Goals I can work on this school year

Activities I can work on this school year to meet my Post-Secondary goals are:

1. Talk with the school counselor about entry requirements for the local technical college
2. Find a job at a restaurant in my town.
3. Research the career of a chef
- 4.

People I can ask to assist me with these activities include:

1. School Counselor
2. Parent(s)
3. Librarian
- 4.

Chapter 5

Self-Empowerment

5

Learning Points

- What is empowerment ?
- What is IDEA?
- What is an IEP?
- How to get involved in your IEP
- What is transition planning in the IEP?

Materials Needed

- All handouts
- Coordinated set of activities, middle school
- Access to a computer
- Student portfolio

Activities

- 5.1 – Getting involved with your IEP
- 5.2 – Your Transition Plan
- 5.3 – Portfolio-Section 3



Empowerment leading to college: Rachel's Story

Every kid at some point thinks about life after high school. Either they are going to go onto college, go right to work, or attempt to reach their independent living goals. I knew from a very young age that college was going to be my choice.

My dream has always been to become a teacher. One of the first steps of getting into college is to take the SATs, a test that takes about half of the day. I have a learning disability (LD for short) and the SAT would have taken me the whole day to finish if I didn't have accommodations.

Knowing myself and how my disability affects me on tests, I knew I had to tell my guidance counselor to make sure I had all the accommodations I typically used while taking a test. When I take tests, I am allowed to have extended time and a person who reads the test to me.

I went to my guidance counselor thinking that getting my accommodations for the SAT would be simple. I came to find out that I was wrong. We had to fill out paper work and wait for a College Board to approve my accommodations. There was just one problem, my counselor would not sign the papers I needed to send to the College Board, because she thought I didn't use the accommodations I was requesting often enough on tests. She was extremely wrong. I used my accommodations all the time.

Needless to say I was a little irritated. Simply because all my teachers knew I used my accommodations, and the one person who is supposed to be helping me get in to college didn't know anything about me and how much getting accepted into school meant to me. I left school that day determined to find my own solution to this little problem.

I went home and told my mom we needed to schedule a meeting with my guidance counselor. My mom, being the advocate on my behalf, called the school right away and asked for an appointment. Minutes later my telephone rang. It was my counselor telling us that she felt we did not need to have a meeting. At first mom and I agreed the meeting was not necessary. Then when we were in the car after the call to cancel the meeting, we began talking about the whole SAT mess. Days after, my mom called the school. My guidance counselor walked into the library and saw me taking a test using my accommodations... isn't it ironic, don't you think? Soon after she saw me in the library, I got the papers saying that I was granted my accommodation request.

I was able to take my SAT on a level playing field because I was able to take charge and tell people exactly what I need to succeed. It makes me feel good to know that I have learned how to advocate for myself and not back down!
NEVER BACK DOWN!

Discussion Points: Rachel's Story

1. How did Rachel demonstrate empowerment?
2. Who did Rachel turn to for assistance to help her get the accommodations she needed? Who would you turn to if you had this need?
3. What have you learned from Rachel's story?
4. What were Rachel's last words of advice to you as a student with a disability?

Empowerment leading to independent living: Stacy's Story

Despite being diagnosed with Athetoid Cerebral Palsy at three months of age due to complications during birth, I've accomplished a lot. From starting therapies when I was just eight months old, to getting my first power wheelchair when I was two, to starting school at the age of three, to graduating high school and going on to UW-Whitewater, to graduating with a BA in Advertising—I've defied many challenges. However, the biggest challenge came after graduating college.

After graduation from UW-Whitewater in May 2009, I moved back home with my parents in Fond du Lac. The plan was to get personal care setup and move into an apartment in Fond du Lac. For six years in Whitewater, I lived independently in a regular dorm and had personal care workers come in four times per day to help me—get up, lunch, dinner, and bed. It worked so well. I loved being independent! When I moved back to Fond du Lac, I thought finding a care agency and an apartment wouldn't be that difficult. I couldn't have been more wrong!

Because I have the cognitive capability to make financial and care decisions for myself, I'm not on the Care Management Option (CMO). Therefore, I had to find care agencies that would bill Medicaid or IRIS. This was not an easy task—especially in Fond du Lac! Before I could even really look for apartments, I had to get care lined up first because I couldn't live on my own without assistance. For whatever reason, agencies couldn't staff my shifts. In the year and a half I was at my parents, we tried two different agencies, and the most we ever got covered was two shifts per day. This was unbelievably frustrating because I knew if given the right supports, I could live independently.

Last summer, I began researching different living options on the internet. I came across the Cerebral Palsy of Mideast Wisconsin's Independent Living website. My mom and I went to tour a house late last August. I admit I was skeptical because I'm not particularly fond of the idea of segregating people with disabilities. However, when I saw the setup of the Willo Apartments, I was very impressed! The units are so accessible and, although all the residents have disabilities, it's nothing like a group home. After we toured, I knew this was where I wanted to be. We were told about how the personal cares were set up and that there was a waiting list. We filled out the paperwork and the wait began.

In October, I got word that I'd been approved to live in a unit. Now, it was just a matter of waiting! I'd send an email every few weeks to see if anyone had heard anything. In mid-December, I got the email that I'd been waiting for—a unit had become available and I was next on the list! In February, I moved in. I don't think I've ever been so excited! I am independent again!

It is important to look for services early to help in planning your future. We all want to be independent and it takes much planning to find the right assistance to make it happen. My advice is, at a young age begin your transition planning for life after high school.

Discussion Points: Stacy's Story

1. What were the challenges Stacy was facing after graduating from college?
2. How did Stacy show empowerment to live on her own?
3. What is Stacy's advice to you?
4. What have you learned from Stacy's story?



What is Empowerment?

Empowerment is a process which helps people gain power and control of their life. People who are empowered have the knowledge and ability to lead.

Empowerment includes:

- Having decision-making knowledge and power
- Having access to information and resources
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices
- Having a positive outlook on being able to make change
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stereotypes or discrimination

Why is empowerment important?

- To be able to make decisions about your life
- To show others that you have control of your own life
- To take responsibility for your own actions
- To be true to yourself

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the Secondary Transition Process

Many youth hear about their IEP's and their transition plans, but few students actually know what their school is talking about. This section will provide you with:

- An explanation of the federal law that protects your rights
- An overview of what an IEP is and why it is important for you to participate
- How to use the transition process to plan for your future

What is IDEA?

IDEA stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This is a national law which determines the accommodations and supports provided to students with disabilities from ages 3 to 21. IDEA works to ensure that all students have a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), which means all students should be taught in a public school for free while getting an education that is right for the student. This education should help the student's goals of further education or training, employment, and/or independent living. IDEA requires that students with disabilities have an IEP, or an Individualized Education Program.

What is an IEP?

When you have a disability, you have certain legal rights to help you succeed. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is one of those rights. An IEP is a form that summarizes what you do well, the needs you have, how your disability affects your learning, what skills you need to work on in school this year, what services your school will provide, and where your learning will take place. It also lists the accommodations you receive and what your goals are for high school and after high school. It is created by a team of people who include your teachers, your family, and most importantly, you! You are also allowed to invite whoever else you feel needs to be a part of your "team" (such as friends, a pastor, or a counselor). Since your IEP is all about you, you have a unique opportunity to be in control of your life and your experiences in high school. Having input and actively participating in your IEP can help you be successful long after you graduate.

Your school teachers and you are responsible for making sure that the goals, accommodations, and supports that are written in your IEP are working for you. Each year, your IEP must be reviewed. This is done at what is called an IEP meeting. Your IEP is reviewed once a year, and updated as needed.

How You Can Participate in your IEP?

1. Do research – Ask to know what your IEP says before the meeting and request a copy. You should try to truly understand what it says. If you do not understand, do not be afraid to ask.
2. Write it down – Think about what you want to say and write it down so you don't lose track of your thoughts. This will allow you to express yourself and let your ideas and thoughts be heard.
3. Communicate – Your IEP is about you! Know your strengths and weaknesses and tell people what you could use for accommodations to assist you. Tell your IEP team what you see for your future (if you don't know, that's okay). Use your assessment results to show how you decided on your future plans.
4. Be a part of the team – Get to know the people that are on your IEP team. Know what they can do for you. Letting the adults know what you want is important, but also keep in mind that adults might have some good ideas and suggestions—they are "professionals." Remember: Be polite, but be willing to fight for what you need and want.

What can be scary about your IEP?

Going to your first IEP meeting can be overwhelming. You will probably see:

1. A bunch of people wearing shirts and ties
2. A couple of people you do not even know
3. Your principal and your parents in the same room

Be aware that:

1. It can be hard to speak your mind
2. Teachers use their own language that is difficult to understand.
Always ask for clarification

Even though an IEP meeting can be scary, it is your chance to have a say in your future goals, activities, classes, and accommodations at school. Get involved!

Teacher Preparation – Activity 5.1

Each student will need a copy of their IEP. They will use it to help answer the questions in Activity 5.1.



Activity 5.1 – Getting involved with your IEP

A guide to help you take charge of your IEP and transition plan

Questions to ask your teacher about your IEP:

- 1) What is my IEP?

- 2) What are my IEP goals?

- 3) How does my IEP affect my education?

- 4) How does my IEP prepare me to live independently?

- 5) What is your role in my IEP?

- 6) What is my role in my IEP?

- 7) What is my parent/guardian's role?

- 8) Who else is part of my IEP team?

What is transition planning in the IEP?

Transition planning must be included in your IEP beginning at age 14. Transition planning helps you figure out what you are going to do after you graduate from high school. These are called postsecondary goals. Your school is required to help you develop post school goals for when you leave school. Your post school goals are found on the transition page of your IEP (I-8).

The three “postsecondary goals” you need to think about when planning your future are:

1. Postsecondary education or training (going to a 2- or 4-year university, community college, technical school, certificate program to assist with employment, or anything that furthers your education or training on the job.
2. Employment (a job or career)
3. Independent Living (living on your own successfully – living where you want to and with whom, getting around in your community, managing a budget, and doing what you want to do in your free time, etc.)

How do I set post school goals?

To be able to set post school goals, you need to know about yourself, including your strengths, preferences, interests, and weaknesses. Assessment is a process where you learn about yourself and your post school goals. Even though assessments may involve taking some tests, it can also involve things like learning about jobs through real life experiences. When you are asked to take a test, it’s important for you to learn about why it is happening, what to expect, and how you can get accommodations to take the test. After you take the test, it is important to sit with someone you trust to talk about what happened and how you are feeling, and to review your results. This information can be used to help you develop your post school goals. In Chapter 3, Transition Assessment, you took some informal assessments. These results can assist you in writing these goals.

Your post school goals directly influence the classes and activities you will take during high school. Transition planning helps the IEP team know about what you are interested in doing and includes agencies that may help you transition out of high school more easily.

Once you know what your postsecondary goals are, you need to develop a plan of activities to participate in while you are still in school. Transition services (activities while you are still in school) are organized activities that help you move from middle school/high school to college or postsecondary training, employment, or independent living. You are involved with these activities (while you are still in school) in order to prepare you for the postsecondary goals you have written.

Once you graduate from high school, the assistance and services you receive from your teachers, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and wrap-around services, and the people who help you with math, reading, behavior, test taking, etc., will no longer be there to help you. But as

you know, life does not end after you leave high school. Therefore, you need to have a plan to be able to achieve your goals and live life as an adult. The transition process was created to help you set your goals and get the things you need to achieve your dreams.

What type of assistance I may need after high school

There are several agencies that may be able to assist you once you graduate from high school. This may seem like long into the future, but it is important to have an idea of what is available. For example, you may think you are not able to go to college because you have a learning disability. Did you know that there are disability resource centers at college that can provide accommodations? Many students with disabilities are attending college and are very successful. Why you may ask? Because they have asked for what they need to succeed! In the next activity, you will explore different agencies that may be able to help you in succeeding with your postsecondary goals.

Teacher Preparation – Activity 5.2

To prepare for this activity, have each student review the Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP) of their IEP. If there is not a PTP written at this time, that is okay. Complete the worksheet to prepare for the students PTP. You may also want to use the Transition Services handout to assist in the activities section of this worksheet (#2).

Activity 5.2: Your Transition Plan

Transition Planning Worksheet:

1. What are my postsecondary goals for:

Education or Training

Employment

Independent Living

2. What activities do I in need in school to help me achieve my postsecondary goals? (Transition Services)

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

3. What agencies or organizations may be able to help me meet my postsecondary goals? (Resource: Opening Doors: A Guide to Adult Services)

a.

b.

c.

d.

How To Participate In My IEP

Now that you have reviewed your IEP and written your postsecondary goals, it is time for your IEP meeting. Because the IEP is about YOU, you need to be the one in charge during the IEP meetings. Everyone will be talking about YOUR education and life, so it is important for you to express your opinions. If you feel that something needs to be created or changed in your IEP, there are steps you can take to do so.

Getting ready for the IEP meeting

Prepare before your IEP meeting. Review your IEP from last year and make notes on the changes or additions you would like to see. Also highlight things you don't understand. Talk to a trusted adult about what you would like to see in this year's IEP. Also talk with your teacher about these changes. Remember you are a team.

Before the meeting, do your homework so that you are able to:

- 1) Discuss your post school goals (It's okay if everyone does not agree with your goals.)
- 2) Describe your disability
- 3) Talk about your strengths and needs
- 4) Describe your learning style (how you learn best and what gets in the way of your learning)
- 5) Tell team members the accommodations you need and why you need them
- 6) Describe any medications you are taking or medical needs you have

How to Make Sure My IEP Is Going As Planned?

Throughout the year, and at the end of each grading period, look at the copy of your IEP. You should ask yourself the following questions to make sure you are making progress on your goals and that you are getting the right support:

What are your IEP Goals?

Are you getting the accommodations and related services discussed at your IEP meeting? If not, what are you not getting?

If you are not getting the accommodations and related services discussed at your IEP meeting, who can you talk to about getting them?

Who can you talk to if you are not making the progress you would like with your annual goal(s)?

What successes are you having in reaching your post school goals?

What challenges are you encountering in reaching your post school goals?

Have you contacted any agencies or talked to anyone who can help you with your post school goals?

Are you becoming more independent with the services and accommodations you are receiving?

Activity 5.3 – Portfolio Section 3

Remember your portfolio is a project you will continue to work on throughout this class and throughout your education. Create Section 3 and consider adding the following information to this section:

1. All handouts from this chapter
2. A copy of your IEP

Summary:

Earlier, you read about the definition of empowerment. Becoming involved in your IEP is a major step to empowerment. Learning about yourself, your disability, and the people in your life who can assist you in meeting your goals is empowering yourself to build a strong future. Continue to advocate for yourself and you will see great results for your future. The choices you make are what determine your future.

Be Empowered!



Teacher Insights

What it looks like in the classroom

The students will be very interested in looking through their IEPs. Though this shouldn't be the first time they see them, students may ask questions or raise concerns about things they notice. Depending on the level of self-advocacy, some students may even ask for changes to be made. It's important to explain the reasoning for various statements, goals, or accommodations that are listed. It's advisable that you go through the IEP as a group, page by page. If students have questions, answering them on an individual basis is recommended to protect privacy. Activity 5.1 will take two or three class periods.

What the students learn

The students will better understand the components of an IEP, along with how the IEP process works. They will have the opportunity to review their accommodations, ensuring they are utilizing them. Throughout Chapter 5, students will become more familiar with their own IEPs, in turn enhancing self-empowerment skills. This will give them another opportunity to think about how they are meeting their current goals and planning for future goals.

What the teacher learns

Despite how often you expose students to their IEPs or listed accommodations, it may still seem unfamiliar or foreign to some. There are so many facets to an IEP, reiterating the most important components will be the best use of class time. Students will feel greatly empowered knowing they have stock in their IEPs by being familiar with the process. It's important to plan for some students to lose interest, while others will want to take a copy home to read beyond class time. The goal is empowerment.

WI State Teaching Standards addressed

Standard #2 – Teachers know how children grow.

Standard #6 – Teachers communicate well.

Evidence



Transition Resources:

Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network: Secondary Transition Toolkit

Developed by youth for youth

1st Edition July 2008

<http://pyln.org/Files/PYLN2ndTransitionToolkit.pdf>

Wisconsin Youth First

Developed by the Youth Community on Transition

www.wiyouthfirst.org

Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative (WSTI)

www.wsti.org

Got Transition?

www.gottransition.org

Zarrow Center for Enriched Learning

<http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy/lessons-and-materials.html>

Wisconsin Healthy and Ready to Work Project – Waisman Center

<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/hrtw/CONSORTIUM.HTML>

The Youthhood

www.youthhood.org

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities:

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center

<http://www.nsttac.org/>

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Opening Doors to Employment

Opening Doors to Employment was created to provide input and direction to students as they set and work toward their employment goals. It offers career exploration strategies, job preparation advice, and job search strategies. It addresses questions such as:

- What kind of work would be best for me?
- How do I know I can do certain kinds of jobs?
- How can I get a job and keep a job?
- If I get a certain kind of job, could I live on my income?

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This Opening Doors booklet leads the reader through a process of planning for life after high school that includes making decisions, planning, and taking actions. Specifically, this publication is a tool for students with disabilities to use as they begin to plan for a successful future. Each student can consider his or her strengths and weaknesses, plan a high school experience that will achieve specific goals, explore possibilities for work and a career, and identify the next steps for life after high school.

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Opening Doors a Guide to Adult Services will help students, their families, and educators understand the adult service system as well as services available in the community. Preparing for graduation and thinking about the future beyond high school is a very exciting time in anyone's life. The possibilities are endless. This guide will help students prepare for this new journey to adulthood.



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