Self-Advocacy

One of the most critical features of being an adult is the ability to make your own choices in life. Where you work and what job you perform are important choices and require decision making skills that you will use often as an adult. Use this section to develop strategies that can help you advocate for yourself as you start your journey into employment and adult life.

What are Self-Advocacy Skills?

Valerie Paradiz, Ph.D. offers a good description of self-advocacy and why it is so important.

“Self-advocacy is a life-long endeavor [and it is never too early – or late] to start cultivating self-awareness, self-monitoring, and deeper exploration of what it means to be autistic, by way of peer discussion groups. Self-advocacy differs from advocacy in that the individual with the disability self-assesses a situation or problem, and then speaks for his or her own needs. Learning how to do this takes practice and direct instruction. Too often, we raise our kids, treat our patients, and educate our students without ever speaking to them directly about autism. Perhaps we’ve made assumptions or even harbor fears that they aren’t capable of self-reflection. Yet if we deny kids our children this very important aspect of identity, we limit their ability to become the successful adults we want them to be. As with any academic subject, teaching self-advocacy takes training as well as knowledge of and respect for the disability movement. Parents can model self-advocacy at home, teachers can offer curricula in school, and most importantly, peers on the autism spectrum can offer strategies for good living and share mutual experiences.”

To read Dr. Paradiz’s full article, visit this website: Developing Self Advocacy Skills: An Integral Aspect of Transition Planning.

Self-Advocacy is:

- speaking up for yourself
- asking for what you need
- negotiating for yourself (working with others to reach an agreement that will meet your needs)
- knowing your rights and responsibilities
- using the resources that are available to you
- being able to explain your disability either by the use of written words, pictures or gestures

Learning to ask for help is another step in developing self-advocacy skills. In order to do this, you must be able to identify that there is an obstacle or difficulty, and then seek out assistance to have the issue resolved.
Justin’s Self-advocacy Story: Justin Haynes

Justin, an employee at the National Institute for Health in Bethesda, Md., decided to share his social challenges with his co-workers by creating a PowerPoint presentation explaining how he has been impacted by autism. He shared his presentation at a department meeting with his co-workers and supervisors at the NIH. You can learn more about Justin by viewing some of the slides from that presentation below. His story is also featured in the book: High School Transition that Works! Lessons Learned from Project, by Maryellen Datson, J. Erin Riehle and Susie Rutkowski (page 196).

A note about disclosure: By sharing his story, Justin was advocating for himself and working to improve his work performance and relationship with his co-workers. Not everyone will want to disclose their autism to their employer or co-workers in as public a way as Justin did. It is your choice. Skip ahead to the Soft Skills – Understanding the Social Elements of Your Job Section for more thoughts on disclosure and how it can affect your job.
Overview

Name: Justin A. Haynes
Age: 21
Birth date: 9-9-1989
Birthplace: Washington, D.C.
Gender: Male
Family: Mom/Dad/Older Sister/Cousins
Education: The Ivymount School

Interests

- I have an interest in Japanese Culture.
  - I would like to learn how to speak Japanese.
  - I like the geography of Japan.
  - I love those cherry blossom trees.
- I have an interest in Video game design.
  - I use PowerPoint to practice my creation of a main menu screen and a storyline.
  - I usually get pictures off the internet and create a scene.
- I like Georgetown Hoyas Men and Women’s teams.
  - I like to go to a basketball game.

What I do now at OCRTME

- I do grand rounds (Thursday or Friday).
- I go on a mail run (9:00).
- Sometimes I deliver mail to Bldg 31.
- Upload pictures to Flickr. Terra sent me that project. I’ve learned how to upload them now.
- Data Entry.
  - I scan and/or copy agreements to Vicki and e-mail ’em to her.
- Miscellaneous office tasks.
  - I know how to use Excel, PowerPoint, Word, Outlook, Flickr, scanner/copier.
  - I’m comfortable with technology so I can learn new programs or projects quickly.
Justin's Learning Style

- I like to get instructions both verbally and in writing.
  - Writing down instructions helps me remember.
  - It doesn't matter if I get it by email or printed.
- For new tasks I like to be shown how to do it once.
  - It helps me remember how to do it on my own.
  - Visual learner (pictures, graphs, charts)
  - Kinesthetic learner (physically doing it)
- I'd rather be in a quiet place.

Areas where I need some help

- Looking at people in their eyes makes me nervous when talking.
- Reason I work fast: I'm a fast learner. But I might make an error.
- Need help asking questions.
- Need help explaining; I have trouble explaining concepts. It does make sense but too hard to get it out of my head.
- Conversation skills needed.
- Asking for more work.
- Prioritizing work.
- Giving direct answers.
- Sometimes I just need help getting started.
- Improving myself by talking on the phone.

Goals

- Work better at my job at OCRTME.
- Go to college so I can become a game designer.
- I want to learn how to use more programs.
- Participating in more meetings.