

Lesson 4: Developing Communications Skills

Guidelines for Lesson Administration

These lessons can be administered to individuals or small groups of students. If working with groups of students, it is highly recommended that participating students and their parents/guardians provide consent for participation and that there is a detailed description of the lesson contents and what information will be shared amongst participants. If working with groups of students, careful consideration will be needed to protect privacy and respect individual confidentiality as much as possible. It is the lesson administrator's responsibility to ensure that the lesson plan delivery conforms to school district policies and provincial/state/federal laws.

Qualifications for Lesson Administration

It is recommended that these lessons be administered by an educator who has some training in special education policies, practices, and assessment.



Preparation Required Prior to Lesson Administration

Students who participate in this lesson should be aware that they have a learning disability and have a very basic understanding of how their learning disability impacts their learning. It is recommended that an educator reviews the student's IEP and psychoeducational assessment in an individual meeting prior to commencing lesson number one.

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer & Eddy (2005) indicate that for students to become successful self-advocates, they need a knowledge of self, a knowledge of rights, and the communication skills to advocate. This lesson focuses on developing the communication skills to request accommodations and supports. Many researchers and educators have identified this type of lesson as critical to the development of self-advocacy skills and have incorporated role play as a means of improving communication skills (Prater, Smith Redman, Anderson & Gibb, 2014; Campbell-Whatley, 2008; Hart & Brehm, 2013; Summers, White, Zhang & Gordon, 2014). This lesson builds on the work of Prater et al. (2014), who used acronyms to teach students to request accommodations. It also adds a problem-solving and conflict resolution focus when requesting accommodations. Lopez (2017) and Holzberg (2017), using the SACR tool (Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution), have demonstrated that conflict resolution skills can support students with improving their self-advocacy skills.

**Self-Advocacy in High School Lesson Series:
A Guide to Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities in British Columbia**

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to define the term accommodation.
2. Students will further develop communication strategies for requesting accommodations and supports.
3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the I-ASK steps in a role-playing activity

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout #1: *I-ASK Cue Cards*
2. Handout #2: *Developing Communication Skills Through Role Play*

LESSON (60 minutes)



Incorporating Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Learning: When beginning the lesson with a small group, you may wish to acknowledge that you are learning on the traditional territory of the local First Nation through a circle process. The process can also be used to support connection and belonging.

1. Review Prater, Smith Redman, Anderson & Gibb's (2014) definitions of Self-Advocacy and Accommodations:

Self-Advocacy: To speak up and ask for what you need

Accommodations: Changes that can be made that will help you succeed or reach your goals

2. Review how students in British Columbia have the right to access the accommodations in their IEPs. The goal of today's lesson is to learn how to communicate those rights and request accommodations and supports.

3. Share the learning intentions with the class:

Learning Intention 1: Students will be able to define the I-ASK steps in requesting an accommodation.

Learning Intention 2: Students will practice advocating for the accommodations and supports they need in the classroom through role play.

4. Activity #1: Steps for Requesting Accommodations

- a) Provide a paper copy of Handout#1. Remind students that in high school, teachers often have many students and may forget to provide an accommodation that is needed and listed in an IEP. It's important to note that teachers want their students to be successful and that students should not hesitate to request the supports listed in an IEP. It is important to review the importance of selecting an appropriate time to connect with a teacher to request an accommodation.
- b) Highlight that it is important to have a strategy for communication. Introduce the I-ASK steps.

I-ASK Steps to Requesting Accommodations:
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- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">I- Identify yourself as a student with an IEPA- Ask for an AccommodationS- State how this Strategy helps youK- Keep advocating when needed! |
|--|

- c) Model the request of an accommodation using role-play. Include examples where you follow the I-ASK steps and non-examples, where steps are omitted. Have students highlight the correct and incorrect techniques you are using while making reference to the I-ASK strategy.
- d) Provide a paper or electronic copy of Handout #2 to students. Have students work through Activities 1 and 2. Provide feedback and corrections as needed.
- e) Introduce students to the idea that there can be many ways that an accommodation can be set up depending on the teacher, classroom, resources, and school. Students and teachers sometimes need to work together to figure out what works best. Provide the visual below for further discussion and discuss the different ways that accommodations for reading support and extra time on tests can be set up.

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Accommodation in IEP	Different Ways the Accommodation Can Be Set Up in Our School
Access to Copies of Classroom Notes	1) Teacher provides paper copies 2) Teacher uploads notes to a website for students to print 3) School provides student with photocopier access at the end of class to copy notes 4) School provides an Educational Assistant to take notes
Access to Reading Supports	
Extra time for Tests	

- f) Conclude this discussion by highlighting that when students request an accommodation, they might need to work with the teacher on finding the best way to set it up. There will be times when an accommodation cannot be simply implemented. Introduce a second acronym: Alt + CM + Leave (which takes its inspiration from the keyboard commands: Alt+Ctrl+Del, which are used to troubleshoot computer problems). A new set of steps can be followed in situations where there might be a problem or conflict:

Alt- Find and suggest an alternate solution or choice to meet everyone’s needs.

CM- If solutions cannot be found and students encounter resistance from a teacher for using an accommodation, teach students to suggest to the classroom teacher that they will need to connect with the Case Manager to come up with a better plan. This final step can be followed to avoid conflict escalation and to access the Case Manager’s expertise to create a plan of support.

Leave- Encourage students to exit the conversation politely, knowing that their Case Manager will help them work through this situation.

Alt+CM+Leave (3 Steps to Resolving Conflict)

- Alt- Think of an alternate solution
 CM- Suggest you both meet with your Case Manager if stuck
 Leave- Leave the conversation

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- g) Have students work through the remaining activities on Handout #2. Observe the role-playing and provide appropriate feedback. Encourage further rehearsal if needed.



Educator's Note: *In developing self-determination lessons, Campbell-Whatley (2008) has suggested using problem scenarios in self-advocacy and developing problem solving skills- as well as developing strategies for handling anger. This is part of the rationale for Alt+CM+Leave.*

5. Conclusion. Review the I-ASK steps and let students know that during the next lesson, they will be preparing to communicate with their classroom teachers and practice their self-advocacy skills.

If Students struggle with the acronyms... For students who struggle significantly with the acronym, a simpler alternative can be to use two steps: I-ASK and I-EXPLAIN. Encourage students to ask for an accommodation and explain why they need it.

Extension Activity #1: Developing a Communication Strategy for Different Environments

- a) Summers, White, Zhang & Gordon (2014) created an activity for college students to assist them in learning to identify and select accommodations. The researchers encouraged students to consider the challenges they face with three areas of learning in college: physical spaces, academic expectations, and social/advocacy expectations. This activity can be adapted for high school students. They can think about the challenges that exist in their classrooms and how they can request supports. Use the table below to facilitate the activity.

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Class Name: _____

	What challenges does this class have for me?	What accommodations or supports do I need?	What phrases can I use to request these accommodations?
The Classroom/Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Room location <input type="checkbox"/> Desk Comfort <input type="checkbox"/> Furniture Set-up <input type="checkbox"/> Lighting <input type="checkbox"/> Noise <input type="checkbox"/> Access to Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Windows as distraction <input type="checkbox"/> Access to movement breaks <input type="checkbox"/> Other Activities nearby <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ 		
Assignments and Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Homework <input type="checkbox"/> Assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Activities <input type="checkbox"/> Tests <input type="checkbox"/> Projects <input type="checkbox"/> Reading <input type="checkbox"/> Writing <input type="checkbox"/> Math Calculations <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Group Activities and Projects <input type="checkbox"/> Laboratories <input type="checkbox"/> Note-taking <input type="checkbox"/> Access to Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety about expectations and workload 		
Working with Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Peers who distract <input type="checkbox"/> Missing Peers who support <input type="checkbox"/> Group Activities and Projects <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety about being part of a group or with others 		

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ASSESSMENT

1. Successful completion of the role-playing activities