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## **Note to the Teacher:**

### **Target Population**

This handbook was created specifically for teachers of students with mild to moderate disabilities. In most cases, the majority of students with these disabilities qualify for special education services under the category of "Specific Learning Disability." However, this handbook can also be used for students with disabilities other than those having a learning disability.

### **Purpose of the Program**

The primary goal of this program is to give teachers a guide for teaching self-advocacy to their students. It is hoped that following the completion of this program, students will acquire a solid foundation of self-advocacy by being able to do the following:

- State reason for being in a special education program
- State disability and its implications
- State individual learning profile including strengths and weaknesses and learning style
- Describe needed accommodations and modifications as well as how to ask for them
- State rights and responsibilities as related to special education and federal law

### **Program Implementation**

It is suggested that this program be implemented as a unit over a period of several weeks, for example on several successive Fridays with a review of previously covered material in-between. It is also very important to vary the pace AS NEEDED, depending on the amount of prior knowledge and individual needs of the students. It is likely that the students will need plenty of repetition before truly understanding each component of the program. This should be accomplished through class discussions and additional teacher-made activities, as deemed necessary by the teacher. Pages 1-18 should be photocopied for each student to follow along and to take home following completion of the program.

It is also highly recommended that the teacher find out each student's disability, processing area (if necessary), as well as the major strengths and weaknesses of each student. Part of this program will require each student to find out the above information about himself/herself, so it will be very helpful for you to do so in advance. Self-knowledge is the first and most important step towards your students' ability to effectively self-advocate. The ultimate success of this program will depend on the amount of effort by the teacher as well as the teacher's ability to teach and reinforce each component of the program.

### **Parent Involvement**

As with any instructional program, student participation as well as parent involvement is critical for optimal achievement. It is recommended that the letter on the following page be filled in by you with the necessary information and given to the parent of each child prior to beginning the program.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### ➤ What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy means understanding yourself, including knowledge about your disability, your strengths, and your weaknesses. It also includes knowing what accommodations or modifications you may need in the classroom to help you be more successful. In addition, self-advocacy means knowing your rights and fulfilling your responsibilities.

The ability to advocate for yourself is very powerful. It shows others around you, especially adults, that you demonstrate a lot of maturity because you understand your disability and are ultimately ready to take responsibility for it.

### ➤ What is a Successful Self-Advocate Able to Do?

You will be a successful self-advocate when you can do these things:

1. Explain why you are in special education.
2. Describe what kind of disability you have and why you need special help in school.
3. Understand what your strengths and weaknesses are as well as how you learn best.
4. Know what kinds of things the teacher can do to help you do well in the classroom and how to ask for those things if needed.
5. Know what rights the law gives to you because you are in special education.
6. Understand and fulfill your responsibilities!

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6. Understand and fulfill your responsibilities!

➤ **Why Should I be a Self-Advocate?**

The ability to advocate for yourself is like owning up to your disability and taking responsibility for it by doing what it takes to overcome your weaknesses. Everyone has weaknesses, but people with disabilities are often challenged more than those without disabilities. It has been said that people with disabilities are often stronger than those without because they have had more to overcome than other people. The bottom line is this: People with disabilities who advocate for themselves are more successful than those who don't!!

What does being a self-advocate mean to you?

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