

Self-Determination

The Journey to Motivation and Independence

Empowering students who are blind to develop Self Determination skills are vital to become a successful contributor to society.

I will share a journey of a motivated independent 13 year old, the first set of photos are accomplishments that can be achieved with self-determination. The journey covers developing skills in motor bike riding until you can independently change gears and ride around a paddock with family and friends. The adaptations to Swimming which ensures that the determination is paying off. Then receiving a National record in 50 Backstroke. Determination to master kneeboarding behind a boat and jump the wash. The second set of photos incorporate other students I have worked with whom are blind and their beginning journey to independence.

“I empower to create a sense of belonging and purpose amongst the students I work with - to develop each student as a learner, a community member and a contributor to society are integral life skills that I foster.”

Self-determination underpins all areas of the expanded core curriculum, decision making, self-advocacy, problem solving, goal setting. Without successful self- determination skills, Adaptive Technology has no purpose, without effective communication skills, social integration has no meaning, and without self-determination skills, career education is only a dream. This set of skills must be explicitly taught from birth.

The family unit is the starting point for self-determination, empowering all members to take ownership and encourage and promote independence. The child needs responsibilities, the 2 year old can help set the table, and pull a chair up to the sink and wash up. Give choices carry the garbage out or put the dishes away.

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When my son was born blind with no light perception, I read extensively and studied every aspect of blindness I could get my hands on. I came to the conclusion if I motivate him with external factors that focus on concept development related to body awareness and spacial awareness and provide him with various experiences and pre teach all skills before the milestones then he would/could have more opportunities than his sighted peers. He has developed into an internally motivated person, who has chores, responsibilities, and deadlines and is curious, has high ambitions and will self-advocate for his needs.

Self-determination starts with a baby and involves developing self-exploration skills through repeated experiences, choice-making, decision-making, and problem solving. I have achieved this when my students say "I do it myself".

- A one year old coasting along on the bike, fast and listening for the doorway to turn, trusting his skills in echolocation. (Developing a love of braille books, braille everywhere at home).
- A 2 yr old needing 45 mins to get in the car, negotiating the time to explore and analyse the steps, the exterior and interior of the car.(More braille books, with two hands for reading).
- The 3 yr old attending an early 6 months of preschool which teaches the prerequisites of effective communication, routines, knowledge of self and others, and personal management before they start preschool.(A whole language approach to braille reading, peer shared reading.)
- Starting preschool confidently, with the knowledge of routines and language. Accepted by peers as a competent member of their class. (Braille reading early readers).

- The 5 yr old starting Kindy, negotiating with the school to not have a teachers aid, as the required skills can be taught through the transition process, regular visits, tactile map of the school and intensive orientation and mobility, 6 months before the student starts school. Classroom teachers will need to build a relationship with the student, and the student will need to engage with the classroom teacher. (A confident braille reader setting goals with the high achieving students).
- Develop a Play time Plan at school which is peer negotiated, and a roster is set up to determine Who, Where and What to play? Once the decision is negotiated students must fulfil their obligations. Personal advocacy.

Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviour. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults (Field et al., 1998, p. 2).

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Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). *A practical guide for teaching self-determination*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.