

# How Parents Can Help Their Child Develop Self-Advocacy

Linda McKenna Gulyn, Ph.D. Professor of Psychology  
Marymount University Arlington, Virginia [linda.gulyn@marymount.edu](mailto:linda.gulyn@marymount.edu)

## TOP SIX TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. **Cultivate Self-Knowledge** This is the time in life psychologist Erik Erikson says young adults struggle with the question, "*Who am I?*" Identity formation is a natural and necessary part of emerging adulthood. Important for self-advocacy!

Hopes and dreams after high school? What does she value? Under what conditions does she learn or work best? Alone? With others doing the same job? Without time pressure? Move around? Outdoors? Quiet or lively? Computers?

2. **Promote Self-Direction and Independence** An adolescent's quest for autonomy and sense of responsibility is natural and necessary. But teens slipping from our grasp, give us the urge to take stronger control! Let's balance risk-taking with a secure base of family.

Encourage independence NOW – Responsibilities he is capable of taking on to become more independent and self-reliant? Help with food prep, laundry, house cleaning, medication management, budgeting and banking, scheduling activities, placing phone calls.

3. **Build a Support System** We all need someone who is "on our side!" This may include friends or family in the area, advisors, disability services professionals, even professors and work supervisors

4. **Gather Resources** Encourage your emerging young adult to practice asking for help and seeking information in a wide variety of situations. Minimize "doing for."

5. **Social Skills** Help your emerging adult practice educating others about her accommodation needs. These valuable social skills include making appointments and show up on time. Be pleasant and grateful for help.

6. **Problem Solve and Prepare for Difficulties** When your son or daughter encounters a dilemma or problem, asking open-ended questions that require thoughtful consideration, rather than solving a problem or telling your son/daughter how to think.  
*Communicate your confidence in her ability to learn from mistakes.*

## Sources

ACCESS Project Colorado State University [Accessproject.colostate.edu](http://Accessproject.colostate.edu)

Reiff, H. (2007). *Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Disabilities: Making it Happen in College and Beyond*. Dude Publishing, Port Chester, NY

Santrock, J.W. (2010). *Adolescence*. New York: McGraw-Hill

University of Indianapolis, 2013