



SELF-ADVOCACY PROGRAM

# WITHOUT LIMITS

FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND POST SECONDARY STUDENTS IN TRANSITION



# Trainer Instructions

## Part 1: Welcome Parents and Guardians

1. **Welcome** all attendees.
2. **Read** or paraphrase the following to the group after the general introductions and greetings to the parents

### Parenting is Challenging and Rewarding

*“Being a parent is one of the most challenging and rewarding responsibilities that any of us have. Each child’s dreams and goals are different. What remains constant is that every parent wants their child to develop into the best person that they can be. When parents have a child that has a disability, these basic goals of parenthood do not change. However, the parent’s job can become more demanding and oftentimes more difficult. There have been countless books and articles written about traits, habits, and attributes that help to make people in our culture successful. But only recently has there been any serious research of what traits, abilities, and attributes help to make a person with a disability successful.”*

### Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Workplace is Growing

*“In the last decade, there has been significant progress in the field of employment of persons with disabilities. Accomplished and highly productive employees with disabilities are no longer unusual in companies. We know what employers who successfully hire persons with disabilities have in common with each other. Because of the corporate development of disability as a diversity group and targeted in-house focus groups we now are beginning to understand what successful persons with disabilities have in common with each other as well.”*

3. **Explain** that the following activities provide parents with guidelines to help develop and nurture these traits and attributes in their own children. In this exercise, they will learn the point of view, traits and approach that successful persons with disabilities use and how to apply them to their own child’s life journey.

**Write** the following four statements on the board:

1. ***Their disability is not who they are***
2. ***Impairment versus disability***
3. ***Communicating their needs to be successful***
4. ***Failure is not a four-letter word***

5. **Divide** everyone into small groups of four to five participants.

## **Part 2: Their Disability is Not Who They Are**

1. **Distribute** the “Their Disability is Not Who They Are” handout to each participant. Give the participants 10 minutes to review the handout and discuss the handout questions.

2. **Discuss.** Bring the group back together and ask each group to report on their responses to the questions. Record any key words or ideas on the board under the appropriate topics.

3. **Discuss** the points below with the group following the responses from “Their Disability is Not Who They Are”:

- Discuss how parents can help their children with a disability to keep the reactions of others to their impairment in proper perspective and reinforce the development of healthy relationships.
- Discuss the things parents do to establish confidence, identity, and self-esteem in their children.
- Discuss how parents balance their effort between the disability issues facing their child and nurturing their development as a confident and fully-realized person.

Repeat the small group and full class discussions with the remaining three handouts. Discuss the points below with the group following each handout.

## Part 3: Impairment Versus Disability

- 1. Distribute** the “Impairment Versus Disability” handout to each participant. Give the participants 10 minutes to review the handout and discuss the handout questions.
- 2. Discuss** Bring the group back together and ask each group to report on their responses to the questions. Record any key words or ideas on the board under the appropriate topics.
- 3. Discuss** the points below with the group following the responses from “Impairment Versus Disability”:

Explain that our children are all less disabled today than in the past because our environment has become more accessible and accommodating to their needs. There is still a long way to go, but we are headed in the right direction.

When successful persons with impairments run into a barrier with a job or tasks, they don't first ask what can be changed about themselves, but ask what can be changed about their environment, barrier, or task.

If we see the disability as being in the environment, one way to make our child more functional with an impairment is to change or improve our child's environment.

Remember that one of the most important things we can change about the environment is the attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes that people have towards persons with disabilities.

## Part 4: Communicating Their Needs to Be Successful

1. **Distribute** the “Communicating Their Needs to Be Successful” handout to each participant. Give the participants 10 minutes to review the handout and discuss the handout questions.
2. **Discuss.** Bring the group back together and ask each group to report on their responses to the questions. Record any key words or ideas on the board under the appropriate topics.
3. **Discuss** the points below with the group following the responses from “Communicating Their Needs to Be Successful”:

Explain that if your child is not able to understand their disability and/or express their needs in the workplace, the parent needs to develop a plan to contact and partner with advocates for their child and be prepared to advocate for them. Encourage a discussion of examples from the parents.

Have you practiced or role played with your child on how to best communicate their needs when they are confronted with barriers? Encourage parents to share their stories or examples.

## Part 5: Failure is Not a Four-Letter Word

- 1. Explain** there is one thing that many parents of successful children who have disabilities have chosen not to protect their child from – failure. Why? Because all success is not good and all failure is not bad.
- 2. Ask** if any of the parents have examples of their children experiencing failure during an activity? Ask what happened? What did the parents learn from it? What did the child learn?

*“A failure that you learn from is more valuable than a success that you fail to understand.”*  
– Dr. Richard Pimentel

- 3. Explain** to the group that there is one more vital attribute that successful persons with disabilities all share: they believe in themselves. That’s where parents play one of their most important roles. Believing in yourself starts with someone who believes in you. Some of the parents may be able to name the person who first believed in them. We must support our children; encourage and protect them. Perhaps the most important thing we can do is to believe in our children because it is the key to them believing in themselves.

# *Their Disability is Not Who They Are*

## Handout #1

Successful persons who have disabilities have a positive self-image that they are able to share with others. They realize that each person with a disability is made up of two things:

1. What they have (the disability/impairment)
2. Who they are

If their disability is obvious to others, the disability is what others will most often see first. This can make it seem to the child that their disability is the most important thing about them. If this reaction causes the people seeing them to be uncomfortable or react negatively, it is possible that the student with the disability will begin to see themselves in a negative light as well.

When the disability is not obvious, it is sometimes called a hidden or invisible disability. People might be aware of the disability when the person with the disability needs some kind of accommodation or change to the school or working environment. Sometimes, as in the case of learning disabilities, autism, emotional disabilities and some physical impairment, such as diabetes or epilepsy, the disability is seen through the actions, performance, and behaviors of the person. In these cases, people often react just as strongly or more as they do to an obvious visible impairment.

Overcoming their own disability is often easier for a child than overcoming other people's reactions and beliefs about their disability. It is important to understand that who they are is always going to be more important than any impairment that they may have.

The quality relationships they have with their friends, family, fellow students, and coworkers are not based on what disability they have but on who they are. It is this sense of self and personal worth that they obtain from these relationships that give them the strength to not internalize the negative reactions of others and the confidence to develop relationships with those who have these negative reactions.



## Questions

**1.** Have you ever had a relationship with someone with a disability and, after you got to know them, their disability became less important to you and who they were as a person became more important? Have you ever done or said something to them that was funny or embarrassing because you simply forgot they even had the disability?

This happens to everyone. How can parents help their children with a disability to keep the reactions of others to their impairment in proper perspective and reinforce the development of healthy relationships?

**2.** We know what happens if others believe our children's disabilities are more important than who they really are. But is it possible for our children to believe that about themselves? Can they become so focused on their disability that they lose sight of who they are? Have you ever seen this happen with your child? What are some of the things you do as a parent to establish confidence, identity, and self-esteem in your child?

**3.** Is it possible that a parent can become so focused on the taxing day-to-day issues of their child's disability that they can lose focus of their child's dreams, aspirations, and who they are becoming? Has this ever happened to you? What can parents do to keep in mind that the disability or impairment their child has is not as important as who they are and who they are becoming? What can we do as parents to balance our effort between the disability issues our children face and nurturing their development as a confident and fully-realized person?