

## SELF-DETERMINATION IDEAS FOR PARENTS

**Definition for Self-Determination:** The attitudes and abilities needed for people of all ages to understand choices and consequences, problem solve, make decisions, set personal and professional goals, and take actions necessary to meet the goals.

### **Activities to Promote Self-Determination**

#### **Ages 2 to 5**

- Provide opportunities to make decisions. For example, “Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt?” Look for other opportunities, such as making decisions about food, play activities, etc.
- Look for opportunities to talk about the facts used to make decisions. For example, when one shirt might be long sleeve while the other is short sleeve. Talk about how hot they got when playing yesterday so what will it be like if they chose the long sleeve over the short sleeve shirt. Teach children how to consider different choices and how the choices makes life better or worse.
- Provide feedback. For example, describe for me what you were doing when your crayon broke (they pushed too hard). What caused it to break? What can you do next time to help yourself and take care of your belongings (not push so hard).
- Provide opportunities for planning. We are going to grandma’s house this weekend. What will you need to bring since there will be time to play and we will all go to church the next day?

#### **Ages 6 to 8**

- Provide opportunities to chose from different strategies to get the job done. For example, “do you remember your spelling words best when you write them down, have someone test you out loud, or take practice tests.” The strategy the child identifies as the best one for them is the one they use to do their homework to study for a spelling test.
- If your child does not know what strategy works best for them, ask the teacher to give you ideas on what he or she has observed in the classroom. You may even want to try different study methods, then you and your child record the grades and make a decision together about which study strategies worked the best and why.
- Learning about consequences. Teach children to reconsider choices. “This morning you forgot your lunch money, how did that affect you at lunch”. If the child says, “I got to eat anyway”, make sure they realize the extra steps they had to make in order to eat. For example, they had to talk to the teacher, get money from the office, call you, or whatever they had to do. Then ask them what they could have been doing if they had not had to take that extra step, for example, more time at the lunch table talking to friends, more time for recess, etc. You may have to look long and hard to

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- make sure they understand the negative side of forgetting money and try to make sure that you and the school do not “rescue” them. No one learns to do things differently if there are no negative consequences.
- Show them examples. Sometimes children do not know what a good example of a clean room or homework paper looks like. Take a picture of their room when it looks the way you want it to look. Now you have a standard for the child to follow and they know what it should look like when the job is “done”.

### **Ages 9 to 11**

- Making decisions. Teach children a method for making decisions. Write the decision at the top of the page. Write the possible decision choices. Then write the possible advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Help the child to look at which choice will help them to get the outcome they want.
- Reviewing past decisions. “You were angry at Jo for teasing you and so you hit her. Now you have to sit out at recess for a week. What are some other things you could have done instead? What might have happened if you had used some of the other ways of solving the problem?”
- Analyzing life. Take the opportunity for children to analyze why things happen to other people and how to use that information to keep from making the same mistakes. “Did you notice that Mary did not get to play in the game today? Why do you think she did not get to play? Help your child to see that Mary is always late to the game or practices and having to sit out the game is her consequence. Explain that Mary’s coach is trying to teach her an “adult life skill”. Mary cannot be late for the game, students cannot be late for class, and I cannot be late for work. We all have a job to do and our role as a member of the team, class, or business is to be on time so we can all work together and get the job done. How can I (the child) use this information to keep from making mistakes that are easy to prevent?”
- Preventing problems. “You got a low grade on your research paper. What did you do to make it a strong paper? What extra steps did you take? Do you have a grading sheet that said what the teacher would grade on and did you use it to review your completed paper? What steps did you leave out? What can you do next time to be more successful?”