My Journey of Self-Discovery

A Self-Advocacy Curriculum for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Instructor's Guide

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Copies of the curriculum will be made available to all Regional Autism Programs in Oregon, as well as Special Education Program Directors in Region 2. Training on how to use the curriculum will be made available to any of the regions upon request.

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Introduction

Teaching self-advocacy is teaching independence.

Carroll and Johnson Bown (1996) refer to self-advocacy as a life skill. They propose that training in self-advocacy skills enables students with disabilities to become more autonomous adults. Further, enhanced self-advocacy skills provide an excellent "antidote" to the social isolation and immaturity that may cause a significant number of students with disabilities to drop out of school.

Being effective self-advocates during their college years may also help students with disabilities become more successful in the transition from school to employment. In talking about bridges to career success, Satcher (1995) noted that college graduates with learning disabilities who have the best career outcomes were those who were aware of their strengths and limitations, could describe how those characteristics affect their performance, and could request from their employers services and accommodations that enhance their productivity on the job.

Advocacy in education is training for advocacy in life. Given that the public school system is charged with enabling students to lead full and productive lives, it makes sense to include self-advocacy as part of that education for all students with disabilities. The ramifications of not learning self-advocacy skills can be very debilitating. Once students leave the shelter of high school and the IEP, the responsibility for obtaining needed accommodations and assistance rests with them. They will no longer have special education case managers to provide guidance. Employers and college professors may view overt parent involvement as inappropriate. After high school it should be the individual's responsibility to act on his or her own behalf.

So, having good self-advocacy skills after high school is critical for many reasons, but can these skills be taught? In a study designed to test the effectiveness of a self-advocacy training program to prepare college students with disabilities to advocate for their needs, Roessler and Brown (1998) found that students are deficient in self-advocacy skills but that they can learn these skills in a structured training program.

An informal survey of high school special education case managers and parents of target students in Central Oregon was conducted by the authors to look at the perceived need for self-advocacy skills (N=30). A review of the data indicates 90% of teachers and 100% of parents surveyed feel self-advocacy skills are very or critically important, and yet teachers reported they are providing information on self-advocacy skills to only 33% of target students. They are providing information on disability and learning style to only 25% of target students. Seventy percent of these teachers said they do not have materials available to teach these skills. They reported that only 29% of target students actively participated in their last IEP meeting. With respect to who is getting information to regular class teachers of target students regarding their disability and needed accommodations, responding teachers stated it is usually the teachers themselves (92%) or the Autism Specialist assigned to their site (92%). Only 8% reported that the target students are sharing information about themselves with their teachers. Clearly, parents and teachers in the survey consider self-advocacy skills to be important, and yet the majority of target students are not receiving training in self-advocacy issues and are not seen as active self-advocates.

To summarize, research indicates that students who are effective self-advocates are more successful in school and later on in life. Research also indicates that self-advocacy skills can be taught successfully. Parents and teachers feel that

self-advocacy skills are important but that most students are not active or skilled self-advocates. The purpose of this curriculum is to give transition-age students with Autism Spectrum Disorder the skills to advocate effectively for themselves.

Who is this curriculum for?

This curriculum is designed for transition age (14-21) individuals who are receiving special education services as students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. These students may be referred to as having "high-functioning" or "mild" autism. They may have a medical diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, Autism, or Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified. Most of these students are receiving their education in regular high school settings. The curriculum is most appropriate for students with cognitive abilities in at least the average range. Students with significant oppositional or non-compliant behaviors may not benefit from this curriculum.

Who should present this curriculum?

This curriculum is designed to be presented to target students by an adult instructor who knows the students well and who has at least a basic knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Instructors may include special educators, counselors and Autism Specialists.

An overview of the units in the curriculum:

Unit 1: WHAT IS SELF-ADVOCACY? Students will be introduced to the concept of self-advocacy. (2 sessions)

Unit 2: WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)? Students will learn about ASD and the behaviors and characteristics associated with it. (1 session)

Unit 3: WHAT DOES ASD LOOK LIKE IN ME? Students will explore how ASD affects their performance in school and work situations. Students will develop ASD profiles of themselves. (2 sessions)

Unit 4: WHAT IS MY LEARNING STYLE? Students will learn about their individual learning style by completing a learning style self-assessment. They will also learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the various types of learner. (3 sessions)

Unit 5: WHAT ACCOMMODATIONS DO I NEED? Students will learn about specific accommodations that might be appropriate for them. (1 session)

Unit 6: WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER DISABILITY LAW? Students will learn about the three federal laws that may impact them as individuals with disabilities: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (1 session)

Unit 7: WHAT IS AN IEP? WHAT IS AN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION? Students will learn about the components of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and analyze their own IEP. They will also learn about the evaluation required for special education eligibility. (2 sessions)

Unit 8: HOW CAN I BE AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE IN POST SECONDARY SETTINGS? Students will learn about their rights and responsibilities in postsecondary settings and why having good self-advocacy skills will be so important after high school. (2 sessions)

Unit 9: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE? HOW CAN I OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS? Students will learn about personal and external barriers to effective self-advocacy. They will also learn strategies to deal with these barriers. (1 session)

Unit 10: HOW DO I EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MYSELF AND MY NEEDS? Students will learn strategies on how to

effectively communicate with others, especially teachers and employers. (2 sessions)

Unit 11: MY 'LETTER OF INTRODUCTION'. Students will write a letter of introduction to share with teachers and employers that details their strengths, how they are impacted by their disability, and accommodations that might help them. (4 sessions)

Unit 12: CELEBRATING SUCCESSFUL SELF-ADVOCATES. Students will take a post-test and participate in a self-advocacy game. (1 session)

How to use this curriculum

This curriculum can be taught in individual or small group (2-4 students) settings. Thirty-minute sessions are recommended. Many units will take multiple sessions. The curriculum includes both instructor and student manuals. Instructors will need to make copies of the student manual for each participant and place in a 3-ring binder. The student manual is not intended to be used without guidance from an instructor using the instructor's guide. Most materials needed to teach the curriculum are included. Needed materials for a particular session are listed at the beginning of that session's description in the instructor's guide. Suggested outlines for teaching each unit are also included in the instructor's guide. Instructors should carefully read both instructor and student sections of a unit before teaching that unit; some will require a little advance preparation time.

Recruitment of participants

The need for self-advocacy instruction should ideally be addressed at each student's IEP meeting. If the IEP team decides that the student requires specially designed instruction in this area, then a goal is written to address this need. This curriculum could be one of the tools used in providing specially designed instruction. An informational letter for parents that describes the curriculum is included at the end of this section. Instructors may choose to give this letter to

parents of targeted students at the IEP meeting or just prior to beginning the curriculum.

Student pre- and post-testing

In order to determine what your target students know and don't know about self-advocacy, both before and after they have been exposed to the curriculum, the authors suggest you administer pre and post tests. The pre-test is at the end of this section; the post-test is at the end of Unit 12 in the Instructor's Guide. Because you may not get the best results if you ask the students to write out their answers, the best-case scenario would be to give the test in an individual interview setting with each student. If this is not possible, you may need to add additional sessions. Allow students alternative ways to complete the test if writing is too difficult or aversive (e.g. dictate answers to another person or a tape recorder, type answers). Explain to students that the purpose of the test is to find out how much they know about self-advocacy. The test will not be graded but it is important for them to do their best.

Student challenges

Individuals who are on the high end of the autism spectrum (for whom this curriculum is designed) usually have problems in the areas of communication, social interaction, thinking and acting flexibly, and sensory processing. Some common learning difficulties that may impact student performance as they go through this curriculum include:

- Difficulty understanding complex language, following verbal directions, and understanding the intent of words with multiple meanings
- A relative weakness in comprehension and abstract thought
- Thinking that tends to be rigid
- Difficulties with change in routine or transitions between activities; a desire for structure and routine
- Problems with motor coordination; handwriting is difficult for many

- Difficulty attending and staying focused, easily distracted
- Difficulty understanding the rules of social interaction
- Lack of interest in the things that reward typical students (e.g. intrinsic rewards, grades, praise)
- Poor organizational skills
- Anxiety and stress
- Sensory sensitivities

Strategies for instructors

- Avoid verbal overload. Keep directions concise and use visual supports.
- Limit your use of non-literal language (e.g. idioms, sarcasm). Check regularly for comprehension.
- Use written schedules and checklists to establish routine and expectations.
- Whenever possible, 'warn' the students of upcoming transitions and potential changes.
- If needed, provide alternate ways for the student to complete the writing assignments in each unit (e.g., the student dictates and someone else writes).
- Provide an environment that is as distraction-free as possible.
- Provide clear written expectations and rules for behavior.
- Provide incentives for participation that are meaningful for the students (e.g. the students earn participation points for a pizza party at the end).
- Provide a place for student materials to be kept between sessions.
- Allow 'breaks' if stress level seems high.
- Avoid argumentative interactions and power struggles.
- Be aware that normal levels of auditory, visual and tactile input can be too much or too little for some students.
- Regularly remind your students about confidentiality – what others say in the group stays there.

In the student manual, the process of learning to become an effective self-advocate is referred to as a journey of self-discovery. Students will be learning many new things about themselves, and some of these things might be difficult for them to grasp and/or accept. Your role as their instructor is to be their guide on this journey. Good luck.

Dear Parents:

At your child's most recent IEP meeting, a goal was identified by the team to improve his or her self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy is the ability to understand and effectively communicate about your own interests, needs and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions. Research indicates that students with disabilities who are effective self-advocates are more successful in school and later on in life. Yet most high school students with disabilities are not active self-advocates. Your student has the opportunity to participate in a program designed for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder to learn self-advocacy skills. Students participating in the program will learn about:

- What self-advocacy is and why it is important
- Autism Spectrum Disorder and what it looks like in them personally
- Their individual learning style
- Accommodations (things to help them learn better)
- Their rights and responsibilities under disability and special education law
- Their Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- How to communicate important information about themselves
- Barriers to effective self-advocacy & strategies to overcome the
- Self-advocacy after high school

I will be the lead instructor. Sessions will be thirty minutes long and will be held weekly for approximately 12-15 weeks, beginning on _____. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at _____.

Sincerely,

Pre-test

Student Name _____ Date _____

What does being a self-advocate mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

What are some qualities of a good self-advocate?

_____

_____

_____

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

_____

_____

Name some characteristics or behaviors a person might have that indicate he or she has Autism Spectrum Disorder?

_____

_____

_____

How do you learn best?

_____

_____

What are some strategies you use that help you learn new information?

_____

_____

What are accommodations?

_____

_____

List 3 accommodations that you need to be more successful at school or work?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What do you know about the federal laws that pertain to people with disabilities in schools and in the workplace?

_____

_____

What is an IEP? What do you know about your IEP?

_____

_____

_____

What is the purpose of an educational evaluation?

_____

_____

What barriers, if any, do you think you might face in advocating for yourself in school or work situations?

How will your rights and responsibilities be different in post-secondary settings?

UNIT 1: WHAT IS SELF-ADVOCACY?

Approximate Unit Time: 2 sessions

This unit introduces the concept of self-advocacy to the student. You may be surprised at how many students don't have a clue about what being an effective self-advocate means. Self-advocacy is fairly easily defined: it is the ability to understand and effectively communicate about your own interests, needs and rights. However, like many things, it is much harder to do.

Hopefully you will have administered the pre-test before beginning this unit. With the results of their pretests in hand, you will have a better understanding of what they know about ASD and self-advocacy.

Following are suggested outlines for teaching this unit:

Session One

Materials Needed: strips of paper (I inch x 4 inch)

1. Introductions. All members introduce themselves. You may also want to include a getting-to-know-each-other activity. One possible activity is called One of a Kind. Explain that each of us is "one of a kind" because we have unique qualities, experiences, likes and dislikes that make us who we are. Examples: "I have 5 sisters", "I can juggle", "I collect old lunch boxes", "I love anchovies on my pizza". All participants (including the instructor) write their name and something unusual or interesting about themselves on a strip of paper. Collect the strips. Read each aloud without saying the name and have group members guess who wrote it.
2. Review of group rules, procedures, incentive program.
    - Rules: If you are teaching the self-advocacy curriculum in a small group setting, each group should establish its own rules because ownership enhances compliance. It is important that all members

feel the group is a safe place: one free of put-downs and intimidation. You may wish to suggest rules in the areas of participation, confidentiality and management of disagreement. Once the rules have been developed they should be written down and posted where all group members can see them.

- Procedures: Review basic housekeeping procedures with the group: days/time/location of sessions, where manuals and other materials will be kept, where group members will sit, etc. Also discuss the general procedures that will constitute an individual session: quick review, student read-alouds, discussions, at least one activity and session wrap-up.
- Incentives: Many students with ASD aren't motivated in school by the things that motivate typical kids (e.g. grades, teacher praise, and the intrinsic motivation of learning something new or doing something well). In order to get active participation you may need to implement some kind of incentive program. For example, each student could earn points for following the group rules. A certain number of points earned can 'buy' something at the end of the session (e.g. a can of pop, a bag of chips) or can be saved for a bigger reward when the curriculum is completed (e.g. a pizza party, an off-campus outing).

3. 3-minute wrap up: Incentive system check (e.g. add up points, deliver reinforcers). Each student states one new thing they learned in this session.

Session Two:

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, incentive system, member names and the last session.

2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud the unit introduction and **What is self-advocacy?** starting on page **3** of the student manual. Explain any concepts not understood.
3. Discussion. Points to consider in the discussion:
    - Some students may not yet know much about their educational eligibility of ASD. At this point just tell them that it is the category under which they are receiving special education services and that they will get much more information about ASD in later units.
    - Self-advocacy is easy to define but involves many components. Knowledge is the key: know yourself, know what you need, know how to get it.
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **3** of the student manual, **Why is self-advocacy important?**
5. Discussion: Points to consider in the discussion:
    - Research shows that successful people are effective self-advocates.
    - High school and post-secondary settings (college or work) are VERY different in terms of the supports available. Most of the supports students get under IDEA will end when they leave high school: no IEP, no case managing teacher, no accommodations or modifications without specific request. (Give some examples here.) Parents should start fading from the picture too. It will be the individual's responsibility to act on his or her own behalf to get needs met. More in-depth information will be provided on all of these points in later units.
    - While still in high school, using self-advocacy skills can also be very powerful. It shows others that the student is mature, responsible and that they care about themselves and their future. Teachers really admire these traits.

6. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **4** of the student manual, **What are some qualities of good self-advocates?**
7. Discussion of reading material. Points to consider in the discussion
   - Have students clarify or give an example for each bulleted item in their manual (e.g. "What does 'believe in themselves' mean to you? Give me an example.")
   - Discuss 'rights' versus 'favors'.
8. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **5** of the student manual, **What will I learn about in this unit?** to end of section.
9. Check for questions.
10. 3-minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned from this unit.

Hopefully your group will be looking forward to beginning their journey of self-discovery. Remind them to keep an open mind, to be positive, and to be honest with themselves.

UNIT 2: WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Approximate Unit Time: 1 Session

Understanding his or her disability is a very important step for the student in becoming a successful self-advocate. This unit introduces the students to autism spectrum disorders. The students must first learn about the features of the disability in order to be aware of how it affects them. This unit also provides a brief summary of the components of a medical diagnosis.

It may be helpful for you to review each of your student's eligibility reports. This may offer you insight into how each student is affected by ASD and how these factors may impact their behavior, how they respond to others and how they process the information presented in this manual.

In Oregon, educational eligibility for ASD consists of documented impairments in communication, social interaction, patterns of behavior interests and/or activities that are restricted, repetitive or stereotypic and unusual responses to sensory information. The educational team must determine that there is an adverse educational impact and that special education services are needed.

The four main areas of an educational eligibility for ASD in Oregon:

- **Communication**: Expressing and understanding both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.
- **Social Interaction**: Talking with others, making friends, understanding social nuances in different situations and taking the perspective of others.
- **Patterns of Behavior**: (Referred to in the student manual as thinking and acting flexibly) Interests or activities that are repetitive or restricted. Extreme interests in very narrow subjects, having to do things in a

particular way or in a particular order and difficulty with unexpected changes.

- **Sensory Issues:** The way the brain interprets the information that comes in through all of the senses. Vision, smell, touch, taste, sound and movement area all sensory channels that give our brains information to process.

In addition to these four areas, there are other ways in which these individuals often show impairments. For example:

- **Theory of Mind** is the understanding that everyone thinks, feels and knows different things and being able to take another person's perspective. People with ASD have difficulty being able to predict what someone else may feel, think or do in a given situation.

- **Emotional Responses** are often difficult for people with ASD to modulate and understand. They may show inappropriate responses to situations they observe such as laughing when others don't find the situation funny.

- **Anxiety** may be expressed in a variety of ways such as shutting down and not interacting or becoming loud and agitated. Anxiety may be caused by a slight change of schedule, an obsessive thought or by the stress caused by having to interact with others on a daily basis.

- **Executive Function** is the ability to prioritize and organize, choosing which stimuli is important to focus on. Although students with ASD typically rely heavily on structure they have difficulty creating it for themselves.

- **Abstract thinking** is the ability to take things beyond a literal interpretation. Students with ASD are typically very concrete in their understanding.

Medical Diagnosis

In the DSM-IV-TR, autism spectrum disorders fall under the category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders. Pervasive Developmental Disorders are characterized by severe and pervasive impairment in several areas of development: reciprocal social interaction skills; communication skills; and/or the presence of stereotyped behavior, interests, and activities.

Autistic Disorder describes individuals with more significant delays. People with this type of Autism often have mental retardation as well. Onset is prior to the age of 3 years and differences are often seen by the age of 18 months.	**Asperger's Disorder** describes individuals who did not have a significant delay in the development of language and who have normal cognitive development.
Rett's Disorder (existing only in females), and **Childhood Disintegrative Disorder** are quite rare and are both regressive in nature, with a loss of physical and cognitive skills in addition to the symptoms of a Pervasive Developmental Disorder.	**Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD/NOS):** describes in an individual that does not quite meet criteria in any other category and yet still shows some symptoms of a Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

The following is a suggested session outline for this session:

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentives, member names, and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud from **What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?** starting on page **7** in the student manual.

3. Discussion. Have students discuss each of the questions and answers in the section they have read.
    - Students may want to share their own diagnosis at this time.
    - They may want to discuss other family members that may be affected.
    - Let them know that this unit is about general information about ASD and there will be plenty of time to share specifics of how they are impacted by ASD in later units.
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading **What are the characteristics of ASD?** starting on page **8** in the student manual. The reflection questions associated with each area ask the student to think about how characteristics of ASD would affect people in various situations.
5. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud from **What is the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational eligibility?** starting on page **12** in the student manual.
6. Discussion. As you discuss medical diagnosis vs. educational eligibility some of your students may want to discuss their various diagnoses or eligibilities. The purpose of this manual and accompanying activities is to focus on the student's educational eligibility. Some information to point out to the students includes:
    - Students may or may not have a medical diagnosis.
    - Encourage students to ask their parents or medical professional for more information about their medical diagnosis.
7. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

Unit 2 Instructor Supplementary Materials

Autism Spectrum Disorder Educational Eligibility Criteria (as required by Oregon Administrative Rule 581-015-0051):

For a child suspected of having an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the child shall meet all of the following minimum criteria:

(A) The team shall have documented evidence that the child demonstrates all of the behaviors in the following rule. Each of these behaviors shall be:

(i) Characteristic of an Autism Spectrum Disorder

(ii) Inconsistent or discrepant from the child's development in other areas; and

(iii) Documented over time and/or intensity.

(B) The child shall exhibit the following:

(i) Impairments in communication

(ii) Impairments in social interaction

(iii) Patterns of behavior, interests, and/or activities that are restricted, repetitive, or stereotypic; and

(iv) Unusual responses to sensory information.

(C) For a child to be eligible for special education or EI/ECSE services as a child with anAutism Spectrum Disorder, the child's team shall determine that:

(a) The child's disability has an adverse impact:

(i) On the child's educational performance for school-age child; or

(ii) On the child's developmental progress for a preschool child; and

(b) The child needs special education services or, for a preschool child, EI/ECSE services, as a result of the disability.

A child may not be eligible for special education services on the basis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder if the child's primary disability is an Emotional Disturbance as set forth in section (4) of OAR 581-015-0051. However, a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder as a primary disability may also have an emotional disturbance as a secondary disability.

DSM-IV Pervasive Developmental Disorders diagnostic criteria:

299.00 Autistic Disorder

A. A total of six (or more) items from (1), (2), and (3), with at least two from (1), and one each from (2) and (3):

(1) Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:

(a) marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors, such as eye-to- eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction

(b) failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level

(c) a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest)

(d) lack of social or emotional reciprocity

(2) Qualitative impairments in communication, as manifested by at least one of the following:

(a) delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime)

(b) in individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others

(c) stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language

(d) lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level

(3) Restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities as manifested by at least one of the following:

(a) encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus

(b) apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals

(c) stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting or complex whole-body movements)

(d) persistent precoccupation with parts of objects

B. Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas, with onset prior to age 3 years:

(1) social interaction,

(2) language as used in social communication, or

(3) symbolic or imaginative play.

C. The disturbance is not better accounted for by Rett's disorder or childhood disintegrative disorder.

299.80 Asperger's Disorder

A. Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:

(1) marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors, such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction

(2) failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level

(3) a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to other people)

(4) lack of social or emotional reciprocity

B. Restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, as manifested by at least one of the following:

(1) encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus

(2) apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals

(3) stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)

(4) persistent preoccupation with parts of objects

C. The disturbance causes clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

D. There is no clinically significant general delay in language (e.g., single words used by age 2 years, communicative phrases used by age 3 years).
E. There is no clinically significant delay in cognitive development or in the development of age-appropriate self-help skills, adaptive behavior (other than in social interaction), and curiosity about the environment in childhood.
F. Criteria are not met for another specific pervasive developmental disorder or schizophrenia.

299.80 Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

This category should be used when there is a severe and pervasive impairment in the development of reciprocal social interaction or verbal and nonverbal communication skills, or when stereotyped behavior, interests, and activities are present, but the criteria are not met for a specific pervasive developmental disorder, schizophrenia, schizotypal personality disorder, or avoidant personality disorder. For example, this category includes "atypical autism" --presentations that do not meet the criteria for autistic disorder because of late age of onset, atypical symptomatology, or subthreshold symptomatology, or all of these.

UNIT 3: WHAT DOES ASD LOOK LIKE IN ME?

Approximate Unit Time: 2 Sessions

This unit will introduce the student to the ways they are individually impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorder. Understanding the specific ways their disability affects them is a very important step for the student toward becoming a successful self-advocate. This information will enable them to determine what accommodations will be helpful in reaching their goals in any setting.

Again, it may be helpful for you to review each of your student's eligibility reports. This may offer you insight into how each student is affected differently by ASD. Your Autism Specialist may be a valuable resource to you in this unit, he or she may be able to help you to be aware of some of the more subtle signs these students often display that are features of ASD. Your students may seem resistive to identify the ways they are affected by ASD. They may lack insight into how others see them. You may need to help to guide them as they move through this section to identify features of ASD that they might exhibit. This is a difficult process for students and is intensely personal for them. Some may want to share a great deal with the group. Try to allow flexible time for sharing but do not be afraid to set limits if you see particular students monopolizing the group time.

The following is a suggested session outline for session one of this unit.

Materials needed: Highlighter pen for each student.

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names, and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud starting with the unit introduction on page **14** of the student manual through the **Communication** section.

3. Activity and Discussion. Offer highlighter pens to each student for this activity. Have each student read the list of communication features in the student manual and indicate by either highlighting or circling the items that they feel pertain to them specifically. There may be a great deal of discussion about these specific items as they work through the list. Be prepared to help them if they need assistance in identifying personal characteristics in the communication area.
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud from page **15, Social Interaction** of the student manual.
5. Activity and Discussion. Repeat #3 above for the social interaction section.
6. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit and one example of how they are affected in each area discussed.

The following is a suggested session outline for session two of this unit.

Materials needed: Highlighter pens.

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names, and the last session.
2. Activity and Discussion. Resume reading and highlight characteristics of ASD that the student's see in themselves. Offer highlighter pens to each student for this activity. Have each student read the list of features in **Thinking and acting flexibly** section on page **16** of the student manual.
3. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud starting on page **17, Sensory Processing** of the student manual.
4. Discussion and activity. Talk with the group about sensory preferences and how they are different for everyone. This topic usually brings about a great deal of discussion as people share their preferences. Remind the group that many people who do not have ASD have strong sensory

preferences. Discuss how different people get their sensory needs filled by doing everyday things. Have students indicate the items within this section that pertain to them by highlighting or circling the item.

5. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit and one example of how they are affected in each area.

UNIT 4: WHAT IS MY LEARNING STYLE?

Approximate Unit Time: 3 Sessions

This unit introduces the concept of individual learning style to the students. Students will learn about three main learning styles and some of the behaviors and characteristics associated with each style. Students will then complete the Learning Styles Inventory to identify their own personal learning style. They will also learn about specific learning and study strategies that work well for their learning style.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows that students do not learn in the same way. All students can learn; they just learn differently. Learning style involves the internal structures and processes that affect how a person receives, interprets and uses information. Research has shown that there are at least three main learning styles that people adopt: visual, auditory and haptic (also referred to as 'hands on' or tactile/kinesthetic).

- **Visual learners** learn through seeing. They prefer to observe what they are trying to learn. While reading or listening they often visualize a mental picture of the object or activity. They may have a difficult time remembering things they hear only. They remember faces rather than names. They make lists and reminder notes. They are often very imaginative. They usually sit in the front of the classroom and take lots of notes (though they often doodle too). They need a quiet environment to learn best. Visual learners learn better with pictures, diagrams, charts, graphs, tables, maps, videos, exhibits, and demonstrations. However, some visual learners are more print oriented than picture oriented.
- **Auditory learners** learn through listening. They prefer to hear what they are trying to learn and would rather have something explained verbally than to read about it. They rarely form mental pictures but remember the

way words sound in their head. They need to hear something to remember it. They remember names but not faces. They may listen while looking out the window and often do not take notes in class. They often ask for clarification of written instructions. They may read aloud under their breath. They enjoy talking and listening to others talk. Auditory learners learn better with lectures, discussion, tapes, oral presentations and studying out loud.

- **Haptic learners** learn through moving, doing and touching. They prefer to learn through a hands-on approach, rather than just watching or listening. They are action-oriented and do best when involved in movement activities. They may be in constant motion and need frequent breaks or changes of pace to help them stay focused. They are easily distracted. They usually gesture a lot when talking. They often fidget or fiddle with things. They would rather jump right in and not wait to hear or read instructions. They problem-solve through the trial-and-error method rather than a step-by-step approach. Their lockers, desks and notebooks are disorganized. Haptic learners learn better using manipulatives, physical games, experiments, field trips, role play and construction tasks.

Most people manage to use a combination of these styles but one style is usually dominant. The preferred learning style is the easiest way for a person to learn. Knowing and understanding one's own learning style helps an individual to:

- Learn more effectively and efficiently
- Capitalize on individual strengths
- Compensate for weaknesses
- Find a way to study that best fits individual needs
- Develop a list of strategies that help him or her learn better (possible accommodations/modifications)

- Take more responsibility for his or her own learning

The following are suggested outlines for teaching this unit:

Session One

Materials needed: Your own completed Learning Style Inventory

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **19** of the student manual, **What are learning styles?** and **Why is knowing about your own individual learning style important?**
3. Discussion. Points in the discussion could include:
   - Every person has a unique neurological blueprint; we all learn differently
   - Your learning style is simply your preferred or easiest way to learn
   - Give examples (or ask students to) for each reason listed in the text to know and understand your own learning style. You could use yourself as the example; "I know I learn best by seeing something. That is my strength. So when I am learning something new, I make it visual. I ask my instructors for handouts or to write important information on the board. When I study I read my notes over and over again so I can keep seeing the information."
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **20** of the student manual, **What are the types of learning styles**
5. Discussion. Points in the discussion could include:
   - The 3 learning styles are the 3 main ways humans get information from their environment: through sight, hearing and touching/moving.
   - No person uses only one learning style. Everyone is a combination of styles, though one is usually dominant.

- No one learning style is "good" and another "bad". The learning styles are simply different.
- As the students read about the 3 different styles ask questions:
  - Does this sound like you?
  - What are some other things a visual (or auditory or haptic) learner might do or like?

6. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned in this session.

Session Two

Materials needed: Enlarged copy of the rating scale used in the Learning Style Inventory, copies of the Learning Style Inventory and Scoring Form for each student (masters are found at the end of this unit)

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have one student read aloud, starting on page **21** of the student manual, **The Learning Style Inventory.**
3. Students complete Learning Style Inventory. This three-page self-rating inventory asks students to rate their learning preferences. When inventories are scored, a student's learning profile will be obtained, indicating their learning style preference.
   - Tell students this tool will help in understanding the way they learn best. There are no right or wrong answers.
   - Review and discuss the rating scale (a score of '4' means……..). It may be helpful to post an enlarged copy of the scale in the front of the room.
   - Read all statements out loud and discuss meanings if necessary. Have students score the statement before moving on to the next one.

- When all items have been rated, have students carefully transfer the scores onto each line of the scoring sheet (page in the student manual), total each category and write that number on the appropriate line.
- Have students convert each category score into a percentage (divide the total score into the category score) and record the percentage on the appropriate line.

4. Learning Style Activity. Have students read and complete the brief activity on page **21,** What did you find out about your learning style?
5. Share and discuss results of the Learning Style Inventory. Remind students of rules regarding confidentiality; what other students say in the room, stays in the room. Ask students to share their findings about their individual learning styles. If people are shy, begin by sharing information about your own learning style. Questions to ask in the discussion could include:
   - Did the test confirm what you already knew about yourself?
   - How many people here are clearly visual learners? Auditory learners? Haptic learners? Combinations?
   - If you had a preferred learning style, what are some examples that support that finding? (e.g. "I'm a visual learner. My visual score was twice as high as the other 2 scores. I take lots of notes in class and always make lists. I love charts and graphs. I create pictures in my head to help me remember things.")
   - If you had a learning style area that was significantly weaker than the others, what are some examples that support that finding? (e.g. "I was really low in the auditory area. I have a hard time remembering names and I hate lectures.")
   - What can you do with this information?

6. Copy Learning Style Inventory. Have the students turn in their completed Learning Style Inventory. Before the next session you should make a copy of the inventory to keep in their file and return the original to them.
7. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned this session.

Session Three:

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Pass out Learning Style Inventory. Have each student place their own completed inventory at the end of Unit 4 in their student manual.
3. Student Read-Aloud. Have a student read aloud, starting on page **22** of the student manual, **Making your learning style work for you.** Read aloud the strategy bullets for all three learning styles and clarify or give examples if necessary.
4. Strategy Activity. After you have read all of the bulleted suggestions for each learning style, have the students go back and silently read the section for their own preferred learning style. If they did not have one dominant style, they may need to read two sections. Students are then to circle 3-4 strategies that they can commit to using in class or when studying at home. These should be strategies they think may help them to learn, remember or study better. Have students share their circled strategies with the group.
5. 3-minute wrap-up: Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned.

Most students find completing the Learning Style Inventory to be a fun activity. After all, it is about their favorite person! This activity can yield some very useful information that many students probably haven't thought much about before.

LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY

What's your learning style? Everybody has a preferred learning style. Knowing and understanding your learning style helps you to learn more effectively. Through identifying your learning style, you will be able to capitalize on your strengths and compensate for your weaknesses. Read each sentence carefully and consider whether it applies to you. Then score yourself by writing the number that best describes your reaction on the line next to each sentence.

4-almost always	**3**-often	**2**-sometimes	**1**-never or almost never

_____ 1. I prefer having someone tell me how to do something rather than read the directions myself. I follow oral directions better than written ones.

_____ 2. I take lots of notes during class.

_____ 3. It helps me to look at the person speaking. I can listen better.

_____ 4. I think better when I have freedom to move around; studying at a desk is not for me.

_____ 5. It is easy for me to understand maps, charts and graphs.

_____ 6. I remember names and what people say better than what they look like or what they are wearing.

_____ 7. I am constantly fidgeting or fiddling with something.

_____ 8. I solve problems more often with a trial and error approach, rather than step by step.

_____ 9. When memorizing something, it helps me to say it over and over to myself.

_____ 10. For extra credit, I'd rather create a project than do a report.

_____ 11. I like to sing, hum or whistle to myself.

_____ 12. I find it helpful to talk to myself when I'm problem solving or writing.

_____ 13. When I am learning something new I prefer information to be presented visually (overheads, slides, diagrams, etc.)

_____ 14. I'm good at using my hands to make and repair things.

_____ 15. I'm usually pretty quiet and don't talk a lot in class.

_____ 16. I often touch people when talking to them.

_____ 17. I am able to clearly picture things in my head.

_____ 18. I prefer hearing a lecture or tape rather than reading from a textbook.

_____ 19. I can easily pay attention to a speaker even when my head is down or I'm looking someplace else.

_____ 20. When taking a test, I can "see" the textbook page with the correct answer on it in my head.

_____ 21. I prefer to stand while working.

_____ 22. I remember something better if I write it down or draw pictures and diagrams. I like to make lists.

_____ 23. For extra credit, I prefer to do an oral report or a report on tape rather than a written report.

_____ 24. I would rather get directions in writing. I have trouble understanding verbal directions.

_____ 25. I am active in group activities and discussions.

_____ 26. I am always on the move. It's hard for me to sit in one place for very long.

_____ 27. I need frequent breaks when studying.

_____ 28. I find it easy to listen to people talk. I like to talk a lot too.

_____ 29. I would rather get news listening to the radio than reading the newspaper.

_____ 30. I doodle a lot. Even my class notes have lots of pictures and designs on them.

_____ 31. I don't like to read or listen to directions. I'd rather just start doing

_____ 32. When reading I listen to the words in my head or I read aloud. It helps me to use my finger as a pointer when reading.

_____ 33. I use musical jingles or rhymes to help me memorize things.

_____ 34. It is hard for me to understand what a person is saying or to get work done when there is background noise (talking, music.)

_____ 35. My notebook, desk and locker look disorganized.

_____ 36. I use my fingers to count and I move my lips when I read.

_____ 37. To earn extra credit, I would prefer to write a report.

_____ 38. I learn best when I am shown how to do something and then get to do it.

_____ 39. I remember faces but forget names.

_____ 40. When I am trying to remember something new (like a phone number), it helps me to picture it in my head.

_____ 41. I don't become lost easily, even in unfamiliar surroundings.

_____ 42. I don't like listening to people talk for very long. I get impatient and my mind wanders.

_____ 43. It's hard for me to picture things in my head.

_____ 44. I don't need to take notes in class to remember the material.

_____ 45. I use a lot of gestures and expressive movements when talking.

Learning Style Inventory

Scoring Form

***Carefully* transfer your ratings from the Learning Style Inventory on to the appropriate numbered lines below.**

2. _____	**1. _____**	**4. _____**
3. _____	**6. _____**	**7. _____**
5. _____	**9. _____**	**8. _____**
13. _____	**11. _____**	**10. _____**
15. _____	**12. _____**	**14. _____**
17. _____	**18. _____**	**16. _____**
20. _____	**19. _____**	**21. _____**
22. _____	**23. _____**	**26. _____**
24. _____	**25. _____**	**27. _____**
30. _____	**28. _____**	**31. _____**
34. _____	**29. _____**	**35. _____**
37. _____	**32. _____**	**36. _____**
39. _____	**33. _____**	**38. _____**
40. _____	**43. _____**	**41. _____**
42. _____	**44. _____**	**45. _____**
Visual	**Auditory**	**Haptic**
Total _____	**Total _____**	**Total _____**

Visual Total: _____
Auditory Total: _____
Haptic Total: _____
TOTAL of all 3: _____

Convert each category to a percentage (divide each score by the total)

Visual = visual score / total score = _____%
Auditory = auditory score / total score = _____%
Haptic = haptic score / total score = _____%

UNIT 5: WHAT ACCOMMODATIONS DO I NEED?

Approximate Unit Time: 1 Session

Accommodations for the student with ASD may allow them to be more successful in situations that would be very difficult otherwise. There may be things that interfere with students learning that, as instructors, we may not even be aware of. There are some very specific accommodations that could make a huge difference in an individual's comfort level in any environment. Being aware of these students' specific needs may allow them to perform to the best of their ability in classes. By making these accommodations you may be surprised how much more able these students are to succeed in classes and work environments. Many of these students are unaware of the accommodations that would be helpful to them. By helping the students identify needed accommodations you will support them in advocating for themselves.

The following is a suggested session outline for this unit.

Materials needed: Copies of most recent IEP for each student.

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names, and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud starting on page **25, What are Accommodations and What accommodations do I need to make me more successful at school and work?** in the student manual.
3. Activity. Read the examples of accommodations aloud beginning on page **28** in the student manual. Some of your students may need assistance in identifying the accommodations they need. As you read through the chart of accommodations, have students indicate accommodations they feel they need by marking in the box to the left of

each. Please be careful that the things that they choose to write on the extra lines are indeed accommodations and not modifications that may affect the way they are graded or evaluated. This is where your careful review of the eligibility reports and IEP's will come in handy.

4. 3-Minute Wrap-up: Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one accommodation they think could be helpful to them in each area.

UNIT 6: WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER DISABILITY LAW?

Approximate Unit Time: 1 Session

This unit provides the student with a brief introduction to their rights and responsibilities under disability law. If you are not already familiar with the three laws discussed in this unit, it would be advisable to do some additional research on these laws. You can find information about these laws on a variety of websites, including www.ed.gov, www.wrightslaw.com, www.cec.sped.org/, www.nichcy.org, www.ldonline.org, www.hhs.gov/ocr/504.html, www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm.

The following is a suggested session outline for this unit.

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **31** of the student manual, **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)**.
3. Discussion. Encourage students to reflect on what they have just read about their rights under IDEA. Some key features to point out are:
    - As these terms relate to IDEA, rights are things that the student is guaranteed under the law; responsibilities are things the student should do to be an active participant in their education
    - This law is explicitly for students age three through 21.
    - Each student must have an IEP that is written by a team, every 12 months.
    - Students have to be invited to be involved in their IEP when they are 14 to 21 years old.

- Evaluations must be completed every three years to continue their special education eligibility.
- They are all things that would make them a successful self-advocate. They are not required under the law.

There is space in the manual for the students to list one example of an IDEA right they are currently taking advantage. Some examples of a right would be: I have an IEP; my IEP allows for extra time on tests; I was just evaluated, etc. There is also space to list one example of a component of their schooling that they have taken responsibility for. Some examples of a responsibility would be: I went to my last IEP meeting; I know what accommodations I need and how to ask for them; I have a goal to learn how to take turns in a conversation, etc.

4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **33** of the student manual, **Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)**.
5. Discussion. Some key points to note about Section 504 are:
   - Learning, something they may have trouble with, is considered a major life activity under 504.
   - Discrimination based on disability cannot occur in places that receive federal funding, including public schools, public colleges, and community centers.
   - Public colleges, universities, technical schools cannot ask students if they have a disability during the admissions process.
   - The post-secondary student is responsible for providing information about their disability and their needed accommodations. They will not have an IEP once they leave high school.

   The students will again be asked to list a right and a responsibility that they are entitled to under this law. Some examples of a right include: A college can't ask me if I have a disability during the admissions process; I

cannot be excluded from federally funded community activities because I have a disability; Because I have trouble learning I must be given reasonable accommodations, etc. Examples of responsibilities include: I have to share information about my disability to get services after high school; I have to ask for accommodations that I need when I go to college, etc.

6. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud starting on page **35** of the student manual **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**.
7. Discussion. Key features of ADA to emphasize:
   - This law will be important to them after high school in education and work situations.
   - The same definition of disability applies to ADA as 504.
   - Discrimination in a job situation based on disability is not allowed (if the company has more than 15 employees).
   - Individuals must be able to complete the skills necessary for the job with reasonable accommodations.
   - The individual is responsible for asking for accommodations if they need them.

   The reflection question asks the students to think about a situation in which they might need the protections of ADA, such as getting hired for a job or getting a job promotion, etc.
8. Student Read-Aloud and Summary. Have the students take turns reading aloud starting on page **36** of the student manual **Summary of My Legal Rights Under Disability Law.**
9. Rights and Responsibilities Review Activity. Have students complete the questions on the review form.
10. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

UNIT 7: WHAT IS AN IEP? WHAT IS AN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION?

Approximate Unit Time: 3 Sessions

This unit will introduce the students to their IEP and to the educational evaluations that are used to determine special education eligibility. This section is designed to help the students understand what is in their IEP and why it is there. Although they may not be familiar with the IEP format, the students will most likely already have been exposed to much of the information that is contained in the IEP. This may have come either from the previous activities in this manual or from their general awareness of their educational program. It is important for the students to have a thorough understanding of their IEP and the IEP process in order for them to make informed decisions about their education. This unit also provides a brief introduction to educational evaluations. The purpose of this information is to inform the students about the evaluation cycle and the various components of an evaluation. Many of the students who are participating in these activities have been eligible for special education for a number of years. They may have been too young when they were first evaluated to know about the evaluation procedures.

The following are suggested teaching outlines for the sessions in this unit:

Session One:

Materials needed: overhead projector, overheads and paper copies of blank IEP forms used by your district, a copy of each student's IEP, and a list and photos of all staff that may be involved in IEP's and evaluations (optional).

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names, and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **39** of the student manual, **Questions and Answers about IEP's.**

3. Discussion. Encourage the students to ponder the questions and answers you have just reviewed. As you discuss who is on educational teams, personalize this discussion by mentioning the staff in your school. You may have pictures of unfamiliar staff available to share with the students.
4. IEP Overheads. Using the text from **What is in My IEP?** on page **41** in the student manual as a guide, walk the students through the blank IEP form. It is not advisable to handout the student's actual IEP until you have reviewed the components of the blank IEP.
5. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

Session Two:

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names, and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **42** of the student manual, **How Can I Help Develop My IEP?** and **What Should I do at my IEP Meeting?**
3. Discussion. This would be a good place to have the students share their own experiences regarding their IEP meetings
4. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

Session Three:

Materials needed: A copy of each student's educational evaluation (if you are doing the optional activity)

Note: If you do not do the optional evaluation activity, this session should be very short.

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names, and the last session.

2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **43** of the student manual, **Educational Eligibility Evaluations.** Continue reading through the end of the unit, including the **Frequently Asked Questions about Educational Evaluations** section.
3. Discussion. Some helpful questions to start this discussion with may include:
   - What role have you taken in your most recent evaluations?
   - Have you seen your evaluation report? If yes, what thoughts did you have about your evaluation?
   - What other questions do you have about the evaluation process?
4. MY EVALUATION ACTIVITY. (*optional)* As mentioned in the student manual, it is advisable for the students to review their evaluation reports with the author of that particular report. The author of the evaluation will have the most complete information for the student on how to interpret information in the report. Depending on who conducts evaluations in your school, you may want to invite the primary evaluators (school psychologist, speech therapist, autism specialist) to come to your class and meet with students individually. The worksheet for this activity can be found at the end of this unit.
5. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

MY EVALUATION

You may want to learn more about your evaluations. If this is the case, ask your special education case manager to share your evaluations with you.

My last evaluation was conducted on_____

My last evaluation was conducted by:

_____

_____

_____

Read through your evaluation. There may be information you do not understand.

Make a list of the questions you have about your evaluation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

UNIT 8: HOW CAN I BE AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE IN POST-SECONDARY SETTINGS?

Approximate Unit Time: 2 Sessions

This unit provides the student with information and skills that they will need as they enter post-secondary settings. Many students, teachers and parents do not realize the changes between high school and post-secondary setting in terms of the individual's legal rights.

The following are suggested teaching outlines for the sessions in this unit:

Session One:

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **47** of the student manual, **Post-Secondary Options.**
3. Discussion and Activity. When the students finish reading, encourage them to talk about what they think they want to do after high school. Use the questions at the end of the section to have the students discuss or individually contemplate what they want to do. The questions are:
   - What do you want to do when you finish high school?
   - If you are confused about your options after high school, who would be a good person to talk with to help you set your goals?
   - What skills will you need to meet your goals after high school?
   - What activities might prepare you for life after high school?
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **49** of the student manual, **Employment**.
5. Discussion. Ask students if they have had jobs already, and if so, what parts of their jobs were successful for them, and which parts they struggled with.

6. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

Session Two:

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **50** of the student manual, **Educational Opportunities**.
3. Discussion. Take a group poll to see who is considering post-secondary education and what schools they are considering. Discuss who the students should talk with if they are considering enrolling in post-secondary education.
4. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

UNIT 9: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE? HOW CAN I OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?

Approximate Unit Time: **1 Session**

This unit is designed to provide the students with a realistic perspective on what issues they will face as advocates for themselves. It is important to be honest with the students about the barriers they may face. There is a fine line between being honest with the students and discouraging their self-advocating because the barriers are too great. This unit will attempt to establish a balanced look at the barriers.

The following is a suggested outline for this session.

1. Quick Review. Review rules, incentive system, member names and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **53** of the student manual, **External Barriers to Being an Effective Self-Advocate**.
3. Discussion. Ask students to list 1-2 external barriers they have faced before you begin the discussion. Next, encourage a group discussion about external barriers. It is important for the students to understand that there are many types of barriers and they present themselves in different ways. You may want to expand on some of the themes discussed in this section, for example, giving examples of how a student might be excluded.
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **54** of the student manual, **Personal Barriers to Being an Effective Self-Advocate**.
5. Discussion. Ask students to list 1-2 personal barriers they have faced before you begin the discussion. It may be helpful for you to share

experiences you have had advocating for your students. Be careful to let the students lead this discussion, as opposed to you pointing out their personal barriers. As the students reveal their personal barriers, help them to identify strategies to overcome the barriers.

6. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns, starting on page **55** of the student manual, **Strategies for overcoming barriers to being an effective self-advocate.**
7. Discussion. During this reflection time it will be important to stress the value of being prepared by knowing about how their disability affects them and how to share that information. Encourage them to think about how they will use the information they have gathered throughout this manual to overcome barriers to being effective self-advocates.
8. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive check. Each student needs to give an example of one thing they learned from this unit.

UNIT 10: HOW DO I EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MYSELF AND MY NEEDS?

Approximate Unit Time: 2 sessions

This unit focuses on the verbal communication skills students should use when communicating about themselves and their needs with people in authority such as teachers, school administrators, college professors and employers. It also presents the issue of disclosure; what are the factors the individual should consider before sharing information about his or her disability with others.

By definition, all individuals with ASD have some communication difficulties. The ASD students targeted for this curriculum may be sophisticated in their vocabularies and have good structural language skills, but have very poor social communication abilities. Most also have deep and pervasive deficits in their understanding of what is communicated to them through words and through nonverbal channels such as voice tone, body language and facial expression.

Because a key element to being a good self-advocate is the ability to effectively communicate with others, many of our target students are at a disadvantage because of their poor communication skills. It is not the intent of this unit to try to remedy all of their communication problems. Rather, the focus is quite narrow: to teach the students skills to use when they are communicating about themselves and their needs with people in authority.

The following are suggested outlines for teaching this unit:

Session One:

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system and the last session.

2. Student Read-Aloud. Have a student read aloud the introductory paragraph of this unit on page **58** of the student manual.
3. Discussion. Points in the discussion could include:
    - All people with ASD have some difficulties with communication. If students are comfortable with sharing, ask them to state some of the communication difficulties they experience that they learned about in Unit 3.
    - The focus of this unit is on sharing information about yourself and your needs with people in authority. Have students give examples of when this would occur in a school or work setting.
4. Student Read-Aloud. Starting on page **58** of the student manual, have a student read the first paragraph aloud of **Disclosure: Who should I communicate with about my disability and my needs?**
5. Discussion. Points in the discussion could include:
    - While they are in high school some information about a student's disability will automatically be shared (hopefully!) with relevant others. What do they think about this?
    - You may want to talk a little about confidentiality law after high school if students are concerned about who has access to information about them. Federal laws prevent disability information from being released without the individual's consent. Within an institutional community (such as a college), disability-related information is shared only on a need-to-know basis and only for very specific reasons. After high school, an individual with a disability is under no legal or ethical obligation to disclose his or her disability, unless an accommodation is required.
6. Student Read-Aloud and Discussion. Have students take turns reading aloud the factors that might influence a decision to disclose, beginning on page **59** of their manual. Discuss each factor after it has been read.

Focus on the pros and cons of disclosure in different situations. Some examples: If the job you are applying for takes advantage of your strengths and your disability will not impact your performance, should you disclose information about your disability to your employer? Why or why not? If a class you have to take is totally lecture and you are a visual learner who has a difficult time taking notes, should you disclose information about your disability to your teacher? Why or why not?

Some other points in the discussion could include:

- Even though a student's high school teachers probably have some information about the student's disability, the information is usually fairly limited and is not generated by the student. What would a good self-advocate do about this situation?
- If an individual needs accommodations on the job or at school (after high school), they must disclose their disability. Employers and professors are not responsible for providing accommodations if an individual has not disclosed their disability.
- Although there are laws in place to protect against discrimination based on disability, some individuals with disabilities will encounter discrimination. Some students fear discrimination if they disclose. Have students in your group already felt they have been discriminated against? Is it something they worry about? What did/could they do about it?

7. 3-Minute Wrap-up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned in this session.

Session Two:

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system and the last session.

2. Student Read-Aloud and Discussion. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **60** of the student manual, **How should I communicate with others about my disability and my needs?** After each strategy is read, stop and discuss it briefly. When appropriate, model or have a student model the tip. Some examples: model the appropriate distance to be used when talking to another person, have a student model talking in a neutral or friendly tone of voice.
3. Communication Role Play. Have one student read aloud, starting on page **63** of the student manual, **Communication Role Play.** It is not necessary to role play all of the suggested situations. Choose ones that are appropriate to the needs of the individuals in your group. Read selected situations out loud. Then assign a group member to play the student in that situation. You (rather than another student) should play the authority figure in each situation. After each role play, have the group critique the performance based on the student's use of the communication tips**.** Did the student look at the person while talking? Was he or she respectful and tactful? Did he or she stand too close to the other person while talking?
4. 3-minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned.

UNIT 11: MY LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Approximate Unit Time: 4 sessions

This unit introduces students to the concept of a 'letter of introduction'. For our purposes here, a letter of introduction is a relatively brief (one page front and back) description of an individual's disability, strengths, learning style and the accommodations necessary to be successful. The letter is given only to important people in the individual's life who should know about the individual's disability and who are in a position to help by providing support and accommodations.

Students will compile information about themselves from Units 3, 4 and 5 and will write their own letters of introduction using the template found on page in the student manual. This letter will be the culmination of all the learning that they have done while completing this curriculum. The authors of this curriculum have taught many students with ASD to write and use letters of introduction. They have had nothing but positive feedback from teachers, employers, college personnel, parents and the students themselves.

The following are suggested outlines for teaching this unit:

Session One:

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system and the last session.
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **65** of the student manual, **What is a letter of introduction? Why write a letter of introduction? Who do I share my letter of introduction with?**
3. Discussion. Points in the discussion could include:

- There are other types of letters of introduction. The purpose of this letter is very specific: to present information on disability and accommodations needed.
- The letter can be a great way to pull together all of the information the students have collected about themselves in previous units. It is much easier for most students to present information about themselves in writing rather than verbally. Do the students in your group agree?
- On page of the student manual is a list of people most students would consider sharing their letters with. Do your students agree? Why or why not? Do they have other names to add to the list?
- Have students give specific names when discussing who they think they will share their letters with. Have them write their answers on page of the student manual.

4. Student Read-Aloud and Discussion. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **66** of the student manual, **The components of a letter of introduction** and the two sample letters on pages . As the sample letters are read, stop frequently to get student feedback. What do they think about sharing this kind of information with others? What do they think of the letter format?
5. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned.

Session Two:

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system and the last session.
2. Student Activity. Students will begin drafting their own letters of introduction using the template found on page **76** of their manual.
   - Begin the process by having a student read aloud the first paragraph under **Writing my letter of introduction** on page **67**of the student

manual. Then read aloud the description of each letter component. After each description is read, have the students go to the letter template and complete the appropriate section.

- Depending on the section of the letter they are working on, they will need various reference materials found in their manuals. These references include:
    - the sample letters on page **72-75**
    - the lists of disability characteristics developed in Unit 3 on pages **14-18**
    - information on personal learning style from page **21**
    - and the list of accommodations developed in Unit 5 on pages 28-30
- Before the students fill in the sections on the template where they list the difficulties they have in the four areas, have them review the four lists they made of personal ASD characteristics on pages **14-18** of their manual. On each list, have them circle only the characteristics that they feel might impact their performance in a school or work setting and that they are comfortable sharing with others. For example, most people do not need to know that a student is an extremely picky eater and will only eat soft foods. It is important for students to think carefully about how they word these statements. Though they are addressing difficulties they have, they don't want to paint a too negative picture. Students should also include a statement about their preferred learning style in either the communication or sensory processing section. For example: "I am a visual learner and have difficulty understanding a lot of verbal information."
- Complete each letter section as a group and don't let some students get ahead of others. Students may enjoy working together. Spend time with each student assisting and giving feedback. Some students

may need to dictate their letters while you or someone else writes. Hopefully, by the end of Session Two students will have completed the first three sections of their letter (greeting, introduction and disability statement, and characteristics of ASD).

3. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned.

Session Three:

Materials needed: One or two computers and printers

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system and the last session.
2. Student Activity. Students will continue working on the drafts of their letters of introduction as in Session Two. Students should be able to complete the drafts in this session.
   - When students are completing the section on strengths and areas of interest, tell them it is OK to brag a little bit but not too much. Have them list two to four things that they think are really good at and/or really like doing. If students can't think of things to put in this section, have them ask other people for input.
   - When students are completing the section on accommodations, (labeled 'things that can help me be successful'), emphasize the importance of this part of their letter. This is where they are asking for the reader's help and support. Suggest they keep this section relatively short: five or six statements at most. Make sure the accommodations asked for are reasonable and appropriate. Make sure language is polite: ask; don't demand.
   - When students complete the section on who to contact for more information, suggest that they list themselves first, followed by one or two other trusted people who know them well.

- If time allows, have students type their drafts using the sample letters on pages **72-75** as models. They may need a lot of assistance with typing or someone may need to do it for them. This is an important step so make sure it gets done one way or another. Save these versions on disk for later editing. Make hard copies of the letters for them to take away to get input from others. Ask students to bring back the edited letters and feedback for next session.

3. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned.

Session Four

Materials needed: One or two computers and printers

Read each student letter prior to this session so that you can provide input.

1. Quick Review. Review group rules, the incentive system and the last session.
2. Discussion. If students are comfortable, have them share any input they received from others who read the drafts of their letters of introduction. Share your input as well.
3. Student Activity. On the computers, have students make any changes to their letters that are needed. Print and make copies. Have students sign each copy. Be sure to have each student put a final copy of their letter into their student manual at the end of Unit 11.
4. Student Read-Aloud. Have students take turns reading aloud, starting on page **70** of the student manual, **How do I share my letter of introduction?**
5. Student Activity. Have students practice sharing their letters with each other, with one student taking the role of teacher or work supervisor.
6. 3-Minute Wrap-Up. Incentive system check. Each student states one new thing they learned.

UNIT 12: CELEBRATING SUCCESSFUL SELF-ADVOCATES

Approximate Unit Time: 1 Session

This unit consists of a culminating activity to encourage the students to celebrate their new skills.

The following is a suggested outline for this session:

Materials needed: Game squares written on chart paper or white board, timer for game, prizes for game, post-test, snacks (optional).

1. Quick Review. No review this time. Hopefully this is known information!
2. Student Read-Aloud. Have a student read the inspirational message on page **79.**
3. Post-test. Hand out post-tests to each student. Explain to the students that the purpose of this test is to find out what they have learned about self-advocacy. The test will not be graded, but it is important for them to do their best.
4. Curriculum Reflection and Discussion**.** Use the **Successful Self-Advocate Review** form to have students reflect on their experiences as participants in this curriculum. Once the students have completed the form, have them share their responses with the group. If students did share their Letter of Introduction will someone, have them share how their meeting went.
5. Self-Advocacy Game. Explain to students that they will be playing a modified version of the popular television game show "Jeopardy". Tell the students that they will need to raise their hand if they want to answer a question. Have prizes available for the end of the game. Prizes could include a nice 3-ring binder for them to store their IEP's, reports, etc., a nice pen, highlighters, sticky notes, etc.
6. Curriculum Finale. Encourage students to continue honing their self-advocacy skills. Thank them for their participation in this program.

7. Share Letter of Introduction. (optional) Have students make an appointment with someone who they want to share their letter of introduction with. Use the letter provided with this unit to explain the purpose of the meeting and solicit feedback.

Post-test

Student Name_____Date_____

What does being a self-advocate mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

What are some qualities of a good self-advocate?

_____

_____

_____

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

_____

_____

_____

Name some characteristics or behaviors you have that indicate you have Autism Spectrum Disorder?

_____

_____

_____

What is your most dominant learning style?

_____

_____

What are some strategies you use that help you learn new information?

_____

_____

_____

What are accommodations?

_____

_____

List 3 accommodations that you need to be more successful at school or work?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are the federal laws that pertain to people in educational and occupational settings?

_____

_____

Identify one protection you have as a person with ASD because of each of the laws.

_____

_____

What is an IEP? What do you know about your IEP? (What is one goal you have on your IEP?)

_____

_____

What is the purpose of an educational evaluation?

As an individual with ASD who may need accommodations in educational or occupational settings, how will your rights and responsibilities be different in post-secondary settings?

What barriers, if any, do you think you might face in advocating for yourself in school or work situations?

What strategies will you use to overcome barriers to being an effective self-advocate?

Do you share information with other people about having Autism Spectrum Disorder? Yes or No

Who do you share information with?

What things influence your decision to disclose information about yourself?

SUCCESSFUL SELF-ADVOCATE REVIEW

What was one new thing you learned as a result of this curriculum?

What element of this curriculum was most challenging for you?

Do you think this curriculum was helpful in preparing you to advocate for yourself? Why or why not?

Are there parts of this curriculum that you need to practice more or learn more about? Which parts?

	ASD JEOPARDY SQUARES	
ASD and Learning Style	Legal Issues	Advocacy Strategies
People who learn best by hearing new information	An educational document that needs to be reviewed and revised yearly	Effectively sharing information about yourself and your disability with others
The four main areas of ASD	The age range when you must be invited to your own IEP meeting	The term for sharing information about yourself and your disability with others
Things that might help you to be a more successful student or employee	Caring for one's self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks, and learning	The three word phrase for how to request accommodations
The medical diagnosis for high functioning autism spectrum disorders	You are responsible for disclosing information about yourself and your disability under these two laws	A written document that describes you and your special needs to a teacher or prospective employer

	ASD JEOPARDY ANSWERS	
ASD and Leanring Style	Legal Issues	Advocacy Strategies
What are auditory learners?	What is an IEP?	What is self-advocacy?
What are communication. Social interaction, thinking and acting flexibly, and sensory?	What is 14-21 years old?	What is disclosure?
What are accommodations?	What are major life activities (as defined in Section 504)?	What is Ask; don't demand?
What is Asperger Syndrome?	What is Section 504 and ADA?	What is a letter of introduction?

Dear _____,

_____ is a student you know who has been receiving instruction in self-advocacy skills. As a final activity of the class, students wrote letters of introduction to share with teachers and employers that detail their strengths, how they are impacted by their disability, and accommodations that might help them. The above-mentioned student has arranged a meeting to share his or her letter of introduction with you. In order to help evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction students received in self-advocacy skills, it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions regarding the letter of introduction and the student's ability to effectively communicate with you during the meeting.

Did the student appropriately present the letter of introduction to you? (e.g., make an appointment, choose the right time and place)

_____

_____

Did the student effectively communicate during the meeting? (e.g. enough but not too much information; appropriate eye contact, tone of voice, facial expression and proximity while talking; respectful, diplomatic language)

_____

_____

_____

Was the letter of introduction helpful? Do you now know more about this student and how to help them?

_____

_____

_____

The student was taught to use the following elements during meetings with authority figures to discuss disability issues and request accommodations. Please check those elements you feel they were able to use successfully.

_____Introduction
_____presentation of information
_____request for accommodations
_____check-in for your agreement
_____closure

Thank you for your time. Please return this completed form to me.

Sincerely,

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My Journey of Self-Discovery

A Self-Advocacy Curriculum for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Student Manual

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UNIT 1: WHAT IS SELF-ADVOCACY?

This is the beginning of your journey down the road to becoming an effective self-advocate. This part of your journey will include:

- What is self-advocacy?
- Why is self-advocacy important?
- What are some qualities of good self-advocates?
- What will I learn about in this manual?

This manual is for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is designed to help you become an effective self-advocate. There are many steps in developing self-advocacy skills. But before we talk about those steps, let's first further define self-advocacy.

What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is a life skill. It means being able to direct your own life. It involves the ability to understand yourself and to communicate about your abilities, needs and rights. It involves making decisions about your life and taking responsibility for those decisions.

Knowledge is the key to effective self-advocacy. Like anything else, the more you know, the better you understand, and the easier it is to do. Good self-advocates know themselves, know their rights and responsibilities, know how to communicate and know how to work well with others to get what they need.

Why is self-advocacy important?

Research has shown that successful adults have good self-advocacy skills. This might not seem so important now while you are still in high school, but soon you will be out of high school living in the adult world. Many of the supports you have been getting as a special education student will end when you leave high

school. Then, the responsibility for getting your needs met will be yours and yours alone. For example, if you go on to college and need extra help there because of your disability, YOU are the person who needs to find the right office and person to ask for that help. YOU are the person who gives out information about your disability. YOU are the person who deals directly with your instructors about issues related to your disability. Unlike high school, there is no Special Education teacher to intervene with others on your behalf. Your parents should start fading from the picture too. It is time for them to let go. After high school it will be your responsibility to act on your own behalf.

While still in high school, using self-advocacy skills can also be very powerful. It shows others that you are mature, responsible and that you care about yourself and your future. Teachers really admire these traits.

What are some qualities of good self-advocates?

Effective self-advocates:

- Believe in themselves
- Know themselves really well
- Know how to ask questions
- Know how to ask for help
- Know who can help them get services
- Know their rights and remember that rights are NOT favors
- Do not let other people do everything for them
- Are assertive; they let other people know what they want and need but they do not demand
- Have good communication skills
- Don't give up easily but keep their cool
- Respect the rights and feelings of others; they are polite
- Show up for meetings and appointments on time

- May ask questions for guidance, but then they make up their own minds after reviewing the information

What will I learn about in this manual?

This manual is organized into units, each of which covers a component of being a successful self-advocate. You will learn about:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- What ASD looks like in you personally and how it affects your life
- Your individual learning style, strengths and weaknesses
- Accommodations – things that could help you be more successful in school and work
- Your rights and responsibilities under disability and special education law
- Your Individualized Education Program (IEP) and your educational evaluations
- Self-advocacy after high school
- Barriers to being an effective self-advocate and how to overcome these barriers
- How to effectively communicate important information about yourself and your needs to others
- How to write a letter of introduction to share with teachers/employers

Each unit includes some material to read and one or more activities. Most units will take one or two 30-minute sessions to complete. You will go through the material in this manual with an adult instructor as your guide.

If you are working in a group with other students it may be hard initially for you to share personal things about yourself. Just remember, the other group members will be doing the same thing and it will be hard for them too. Sharing personal information in a comfortable environment with others who have similar issues is a great way to learn more about yourself and about other people. It is still a

difficult thing to do though, especially when you talk about your weaknesses. Therefore, it will be important for all group participants to be respectful of other members' feelings. All personal information shared in group is considered confidential: what other group members say in the group stays in the group and is not to be discussed outside of the group with other people.

Try to approach this process of self-discovery with an open mind. Be honest with yourself. Good luck on your journey.

"To get through the hardest journey we need take only one step at a time, but we must keep on stepping." Chinese Proverb

UNIT 2: WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

In this portion of your journey you will learn the following:

- What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?
- What are the characteristics of ASD?
- What is the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational eligibility?

If you are using this manual you are probably eligible for special education services as a student with ASD. ASD is an educational term used in the state of Oregon. You may also have a medical diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome or Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a disaability that occurs in the brain and affects the way the brain takes in and processes information. People with ASD learn differently; this does not make them less able to learn and it does not necessarily make them more or less intelligent than other people. ASD is a disability that does not show on the outside, meaning you do not look different to other people just because you have it. People do not usually know you have it until they have been told.

Who may have ASD?

ASD has become a much more common disability over the last 10 years. There are about four times as many boys with ASD as girls. Sometimes it runs in families. Some of your other family members may share some of the same types of difficulties you do or they may not.

What are the causes of ASD?

ASD is a disorder that is present from birth. The cause is not yet known but it is now thought to be multi-causal, meaning it is caused by a combination of factors. There is a great deal of research going on right now to learn more about what causes ASD.

Is there a cure for ASD?

There is no "cure" because ASD is not a sickness or a disease. It is a set of behavioral characteristics.

Does ASD impact everyone who has it in the same way?

No. This is because it is a spectrum disorder. The symptoms and characteristics of ASD can present themselves in a wide variety of combinations, from mild to severe. Two people with the same diagnosis can act very differently from one another and have varying skills.

Can people have more than one diagnosis?
It is possible to have other diagnoses along with ASD. Some people with ASD have other diagnoses such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Learning Disabilities.

What are the characteristics of ASD?
In Oregon, students who have an educational eligibility must show characteristics of ASD in four areas. The four areas are:

- Communication: Expressing and understanding both verbal (spoken) and non-verbal (un-spoken) communication such as body language.
- Social Interaction: Talking with others, making friends, understanding social nuances in different situations and taking the perspective of others.
- Thinking and acting flexibly: Interests or activities that are repetitive or restricted. Extreme interests in very narrow subjects, having to do things in a particular way or in a specific order and difficulty with unexpected changes.
- Sensory Processing: The way the brain interprets the information that comes in through all of the senses. Vision, smell, touch, taste, sound and movement area all sensory channels that give our brains information to process.

Communication

Here are some things that may be difficult for you:

- Understanding words that have more than one meaning such as trip (meaning vacation) and trip (meaning to fall)
- Understanding idioms such as "It is raining cats and dogs." and metaphors such as "Her hair was like a shiny new copper penny."
- Understanding others' body language, gestures and facial expressions; being aware of your own body language, gestures and facial expressions and what messages they send to others
- Understanding lengthy verbal directions
- Using humor appropriately as well as knowing how to act when someone else is trying to be funny
- Expressing your ideas and thoughts clearly, both verbally and in writing

You also have strengths in the area of communication. Your strengths may include a very large vocabulary or an incredible memory. You may also do very well understanding written directions.

After reading the following situation, write down your thoughts on how Paul is affected by ASD.

Paul has difficulty with understanding lengthy verbal directions. How could this impact him in his job as a line cook at McDonald's?

_____

_____

_____

Social Interaction

Here are some things that may be difficult for you:

- Making and keeping friends
- Knowing how to act or behave in a group

- Understanding and expressing emotions and understanding the emotions of others
- Understanding and caring about what other people think
- Understanding the different social rules for different environments
- Beginning, maintaining, and ending conversations, especially when they are not about your favorite topics
- Working in a group toward a common goal

Some of your strengths may include talking easily with someone that shares your interests. You may be comfortable getting up and talking in front of groups about topics that interest you. You can be honest and you can be a very loyal friend.

After reading the following situation, write down your thoughts on how Angie is affected by ASD.

Angie has trouble understanding the perspective of other people. How could this affect her ability to participate in class discussions?

_____

_____

_____

<u>Thinking and acting flexibly</u>
<u>Here are some things that may be difficult for you:</u>

- Having diverse interests
- Organizational skills
- Dealing with unexpected changes
- Doing things out of order or out of routine
- Starting and stopping something
- Accepting correction and constructive criticism

Some of the strengths you might show may include having very strong interests and knowing a great deal of detail them. You might find it very easy to follow a schedule or routine. You may be a very punctual person, always being on time to work or school.

After reading the following situation, write down your thoughts on how Jared is affected by ASD.
Jared has a very difficult time keeping his things organized. How could this affect his performance at high school?

_____

_____

_____

Sensory processing
Here are some things that may be difficult for you:

- Loud unexpected noises
- The texture of certain foods
- Sensitivity to smells
- Certain types of touch
- The feeling of certain types of clothing
- Focusing or shifting your attention

These sensory differences are not unique to ASD. Many people have sensory preferences, things they find calming or things that bother them. Everyone's sensory system interprets things differently.

After reading the following situation, write down your thoughts on how Travis is affected by ASD.
Travis has trouble tolerating loud unpredictable noises. How could this possibly affect him as he tries to obtain his drivers license?

What is the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational eligibility?

There is a difference between an educational eligibility and a medical diagnosis. A medical diagnosis is made by a doctor using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). In this manual there is a list of specific criteria that must be met to give a medical diagnosis. Medical diagnoses on the autism spectrum include Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

An educational eligibility is something that is established through the public school system in order for a student to receive special education services. In Oregon, the educational eligibility is not broken down into specific categories as in the DSM-IV. Instead, a student must meet the following criteria:

- Exhibits characteristics indicative of ASD in four areas (communication, social interaction, thinking and acting flexibly, and sensory processing)
- Characteristics of ASD exhibited must have an adverse impact on his or her education
- Require special education services

So, now you know more about ASD in general. In the next unit we will focus on how ASD affects you specifically.

UNIT 3: WHAT DOES ASD LOOK LIKE IN ME?

In this portion of your journey you will learn how you, personally, are affected by ASD in these four areas:

- Communication
- Social interaction
- Thinking and acting flexibly
- Sensory processing

The previous unit gave some examples of how people with ASD are often impacted in the four areas. Now it is your chance to identify some of the specific ways you, personally, are affected by ASD. Remember each person with ASD is very different. Everyone has different things that they are good at and different challenges.

Circle or highlight any of the statements that you feel describe you in each section. There are extra lines in each section to add other statements that describe you and how you function in these specific areas. Think carefully about each item and be as honest with yourself as you can be.

Communication:

Expressing and understanding both verbal communication (spoken) and non-verbal communication (unspoken; such as body language).

The following statements are often true for people with ASD:

- Sometimes I get confused by lengthy verbal directions.
- I have difficulty reading other people's body language or facial expressions.
- I have a hard time listening to people when the topic is not one I am interested in.

- I have been told I sometimes talk too much about my interests.
- I have a hard time knowing how people feel by looking at them.
- I have difficulty having conversations with others.
- Some statements confuse me because they can mean different things.
- I am often not sure how to react when people are trying to be funny.
- I do not always understand what people mean when they talk to me.
- I am confused when people use a lot of gestures when they talk.
- It is easier for me to write my thoughts than to tell them to someone.
- People have told me I talk too loud or too soft for the situation.
- Other people have a difficult time understanding how I am feeling.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Social Interaction:

Talking with others, making friends, understanding social rules in different situations and taking the perspective of others.

These statements are often true for people with ASD:-

- I find it difficult to make and/or maintain friendships.
- I am often not sure how to act in a group of people.
- I find it difficult to enter a social situation.
- I would prefer to work alone; I have difficulty working in groups.
- I have a hard time determining if another person is listening to me.
- I do not often start conversations with others my age.
- I would prefer not to interact with others very often.
- I have a hard time listening to another person and looking at them at the same time.
- I find it challenging to guess what someone else might be thinking or feeling about a situation.

- I sometimes have a hard time when other people have different opinions than I do.
- I am not sure how to express my emotions.
- Some people say I can be bossy.
- I am confused by the different rules in different social situations.
- I find it hard knowing how to react to others, especially in new or unfamiliar situations.
- I can be brutally honest.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Thinking and acting flexibly: Extreme interests in very narrow subjects, having to do things in a particular way or in a particular order and difficulty with unexpected changes.

The following statements are often true for people with ASD:

- It bothers me when things are done out of order; I need to complete things in a certain order.
- I get very anxious when I think I may have made a mistake.
- I get upset or angry when someone tries to show me a better way to do something.
- I like everything to stay in the same place; it bugs me when things get moved around.
- There are not many people my age who share my interests.
- Certain thoughts get "stuck" in my head.
- I have a hard time being organized.
- I like to complete something before moving on to the next thing.
- I have a hard time handling unexpected changes.

- I have a hard time focusing my attention; I find my mind drifts back to my interests quite often.
- I like schedules, routines and knowing what will happen next.
- I do not understand when other people change their minds.
- It bothers me when someone else says or does something wrong.
- I have very strong interests in certain things.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Sensory Processing: Touch, smell, taste, sound, movement and vision are all sensory channels that may be affected by the way the brain interprets information coming in.

The following statements are often true for people with ASD:

- There are many foods I will not eat because of the way they feel in my mouth.
- My clothing choices are made by the way clothes feel to me.
- Certain sounds bother me, scare me or make me anxious.
- I get very nervous in large groups of people.
- The lights in some rooms bother me.
- There are certain types of touch that irritate me.
- I seem to notice smells that other people don't notice; certain smells bother me greatly.
- I find it confusing trying to listen to someone in a noisy environment.
- When someone touches me unexpectedly it startles me.
- It is hard for me to concentrate in certain environments.
- I have difficulty shifting and focusing my attention.
- There are many things I do not like to touch.
- I have trouble with handwriting.

- Sometimes I think I am not as coordinated as others.
- _____
- _____
- _____

By now you have learned a great deal of information about ASD. You have learned some of the common characteristics that are often exhibited and have identified some of those characteristics in yourself. Next, you will be using this valuable information to identify the ways in which you learn best. Remember, everyone with ASD is different and has a unique set of strengths and challenges. Your task will be to identify your strengths and challenges and to learn how to focus on your strengths and to adapt to the challenges.

UNIT 4: WHAT IS MY LEARNING STYLE?

On this stop in your journey you will learn about the following:

- What are learning styles?
- Why is knowing about your own individual learning style important?
- The three types of learning styles
- The Learning Style Inventory
- Making your learning style work for you

What are learning styles?

Learning styles (also called learning modalities or learning channels) are different approaches or ways of learning. Every person learns differently. As a learner, every person possesses a unique combination of strengths and preferences. Every person has his or her own particular, individual, preferred learning style. Individual learning styles have been compared to fingerprints; they are one-of-a-kind.

Why is knowing about your own individual learning style important?

Your individual learning style is the one that is easiest for you. Knowing and understanding your learning style helps you to learn more effectively. It will enable you to capitalize on your strengths and develop coping strategies to compensate for your weaknesses. It will help you when you develop your list of needed classroom accommodations to share with your teachers. It will be useful in finding a way to study that best fits your needs. It will also help you take more responsibility for your own learning and be a better self-advocate.

What are the types of learning styles?

One way of thinking about learning styles is in terms of the three ways through which individuals receive, process, store and communicate information. The

three ways are visual, auditory, and haptic. Visual learners learn best through seeing. Auditory learners learn best through hearing. Haptic learners (also called tactile/kinesthetic learners) learn through moving, doing and touching. No one uses just one of the styles exclusively. In fact, everyone uses all three learning styles, but usually there is one that is preferred or dominant. We can learn effectively in more than one way, but usually one is preferred or easiest. For example, you may be able to learn from listening to a lecture but prefer reading a handout. Making sure your strongest style is being used will help you learn. No one learning style is either *good* or *bad*; the learning styles are simply different.

Visual Learners: - *they prefer to observe what they are trying to learn*
Visual learners process information principally through sight. They learn best by watching or reading. They may think in pictures. They like visual displays such as diagrams, illustrations, overhead transparencies, videos and handouts. They like to take notes. They have more difficulty remembering things they only hear.

Auditory Learners: - *they prefer to hear what they are trying to learn*
Auditory learners process information principally through hearing. They learn best from lectures, discussions, and listening to what others have to say. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. They need to hear something to remember it.

Haptic Learners: - *they prefer to learn by doing*
Haptic learners process information through moving, touching and personal experiences. They learn best through a hands-on approach, rather than just watching or listening. They like to build, manipulate, or do experiments. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and are easily distracted.

The Learning Style Inventory

There are many instruments out there that can help you determine your learning style. Some are quite complicated. The one included here is very simple and only looks at the three areas discussed above: visual, auditory and haptic. Your instructor will lead you through the process of completing the inventory. When you are done, you will have three different percentage scores, one for each learning area. The area with the highest percentage is your preferred learning style. Some students will find that all three percentages are pretty equal. Others will find two areas that are fairly equal and one that is quite a bit larger or smaller. Most will find that one area stands out as the most dominant.

What did you find out about your learning style?
For example, did you have one area that was clearly the strongest (a high percentage score)? Did you have one area that was weaker (a low percentage score)? Did this test confirm what you already knew about how you learn?

Making your learning style work for you

Once you have figured out your learning style, you will need to use specific strategies to fit your way of learning. Below are some practical suggestions pertaining to each learning style. Your goal, now that you know which learning style is easiest for you to learn in, is to take advantage of that information and use it.

Strategies for Visual Learners:

You will learn better when you read or see the information. Learning from a lecture may not be easy for you.

- Read information and use other visual materials such as pictures, charts, maps, graphs, etc.

- Have a clear view of the teacher when they are speaking. Sit in the front of the class if possible.
- Take lots of notes and/or ask your teacher for handouts.
- Write things down that you want to remember.
- Write down all oral directions. Sometimes you may want to ask to do written rather than oral reports.
- Use color highlighters to highlight important information in your notes, handouts, etc.
- Use graphic organizers such as webs and outlines when writing reports or studying for a test.
- Study alone in a quiet place.
- To help you remember information, visualize it as a picture.

Strategies for Auditory Learners:

You will learn better when information comes through your ears. You need to hear it to understand it. Learning from a lecture will probably work well for you. You probably won't learn as well just reading from a book.

- Participate in class discussions; discuss your ideas verbally.
- Sometimes you may want to ask your teacher if you can give oral presentations rather than do written reports.
- Tape record lectures instead of taking notes.
- Read out loud when possible. If you have to be quiet, try "hearing the words in your head" as you read. Your brain needs to hear the words as you see them.
- Recite out loud the things you want to remember (e.g. dates, quotes, lists, etc.)
- Make up musical jingles or rhymes to aid memorization.
- Dictate to someone while they write down your thoughts.
- Study with a friend so you can talk out loud and hear the information.

Strategies for Haptic Learners:

You will learn best by doing, moving, or hands-on experiences. Getting information from a textbook or a lecture is not as easy for you.

- Take classes where you learn by doing (e.g. science, computer lab).
- When reading, move your finger along the words.
- If you need to fidget in class, experiment with ways of moving that don't make noise or disturb others. Things to try: crossing your legs and jiggling the foot that is off the floor or squeezing a stress ball.
- Sometimes you may want to ask your teacher if you can build a model or do a project rather than give oral or written presentations.
- Take study breaks often but make sure to get right back to task. A reasonable schedule would be 20-30 minutes of study and a 5-minute break.
- Study alone in an organized place where you can move around.
- Move around when learning new things or when trying to memorize something (e.g. read while on an exercise bike).
- Do work in a standing position.
- Chew gum while studying.
- When you're at home, try studying while lying on your stomach or back. You may not study best at a desk.

You now have a lot of information about how you learn best and some strategies that you can use to maximize your learning. Your results from the Learning Style Inventory may also have shown that you have learning channels that may be rather weak. For example, you may have found out that you are a strong visual learner and a weak auditory learner. This is important information to have, given than many middle and high school classrooms are geared to strong auditory learners (e.g. lots of lecture).

What you will do in the next unit is take this information about your

learning style strengths and weaknesses, along with information about how you are impacted by ASD, and use it to generate a list of appropriate accommodations; things that you and your teachers can do to help you learn better or give you a better way of demonstrating your knowledge.

UNIT 5: WHAT ACCOMMODATIONS DO I NEED?

In this unit you will learn about the following:

- What are accommodations?
- What accommodations to I need to make me more successful at school and work?

What are accommodations?

Accommodations are specific changes that can be made to make you more successful. An accommodation allows an individual to complete the same task as their peers, but with a change in the timing, formatting, setting, scheduling, response, and/or presentation. Something that would change the way you are graded would not be classified as an accommodation; it would be called a modification.

What accommodations do I need to make me more successful at school and work?

Determining what accommodations to ask for can be tricky. Knowing about your disability and your learning style can help you to determine which accommodations would be helpful. In high school, accommodations are addressed through your Individual Educational Program (IEP). You will learn about your IEP in Unit 7. After high school, you will be responsible for requesting accommodations on your own. It will be very helpful for you to have thought about the accommodations you will need in advance and to have planned out what it is you want to ask for. The more you can share of this information directly with the people you are working with or learning from, the better it will be for you.

In this unit, possible accommodations are organized into the following categories:

Input: Accommodations to the way that materials are presented to you and the way you are taught. For example, having someone read the directions for a worksheet out loud. Accommodations in this area are often helpful because they will allow you to receive information in the mode that is most effective for you, for example visually, auditory, or tactile.

Output: Accommodations in the way that you complete tasks and assignments. For example, giving essay test answers orally to your teacher instead of writing them. Accommodations in this area are often helpful because they allow you to show what you have learned using the mode that is most successful for you.

Environmental: Accommodations to the environments where you receive instruction and show what you have learned. For example, a private or secluded work area to minimize distractions. Accommodations in this area are often helpful in minimizing environmental distractions and providing environments that are more conducive learning.

Time: Accommodations that affect the amount of time you spend on assignments or tests. For example, tests that are un-timed. Accommodations in this area are often helpful if are anxious about unscheduled or timed activities.

Work support: Accommodations that help with organization and task completion. For example, written assignment checklists so you know what tasks need to be completed and the order in which they should be completed. Accommodations in this area are helpful in defining assignments so that you can better focus on the content of the assignment.

On the following pages you will find lists of common accommodations often used by students with ASD. Mark the box next to the accommodations that you feel you would need. Try to pick just a few accommodations. It will make teachers and supervisors more willing to go out of their way to make sure you get what you need to do your best. There are extra lines after each group of

accommodations for you to list some that you may think of that are not listed and are specific to your needs.

Input

Examples of accommodations

	Copy of teacher's or other student's notes
	Highlighted text
	Outline or study guides for tests
	Visual aids (charts, graphs, overheads etc.)
	Written information read out loud
	Books on tape
	Important directions or other information given in writing

Output

Examples of accommodations

	Alternate format for assignments (oral instead of written responses, projects instead of written reports, audio or videotaped reports instead live reports)
	Reduced number of assignment or test questions
	Extra time to complete assignments, tests, etc.
	Use of word processor
	Spell check on computer
	Calculator

Environment

Examples of accommodations

	Early or extended passing time
	Preferential seating
	Quiet work or testing location
	Quiet space for breaks
	Study carrel or private work space

Time

Examples of accommodations

	Warning for schedule changes
	Extra time to complete work or tests
	Individualized assignment time line

Work Support

Examples of accommodations

	Written checklists
	Note taker
	Organizational systems
	Tape recorded directions
	Cue cards in environment, written reminders
	Written steps for projects

Other

	Break time when stressed or over-stimulated
	Time for stretching or movement activities between tasks
	Independent work tasks

This may have been a difficult section for you to complete. Identifying personal weaknesses is difficult for most people. This will be valuable information for you. Knowing what accommodations to ask for will help you to be as successful as possible in your work and school environments.

UNIT 6: WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER DISABILITY LAWS?

This leg of your journey toward becoming an awesome self-advocate will include:

- IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004
- 504: Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- ADA: The Americans with Disabilities Act
- Summary of My Legal Rights Under Disability Law
- Rights and Responsibilities Review

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)

This law ensures that you and other students with disabilities are provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE), in the least restrictive educational setting. This means you have the right to be educated in a setting that is as similar as possible to the setting where your non-disabled peers are educated. It also means that if a more restrictive setting would be more effective for you, then you are entitled to be educated in that setting. This law will be most important to you during your elementary and secondary years.

RIGHTS (things that are guaranteed to you under the law):

- An Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be written for all students who meet disability requirements under IDEA. The IEP is a written document that outlines who you are and what type of special education services you are going to receive. (More information about IEP's will be covered in Unit 7).
- Your IEP should be developed with input from the school staff, your family, and you (particularly when you are age 14-21).

- IEP's are written every 12 months. They include long-term goals and short-term objectives that define what skills you are going to work on. Your IEP can be reviewed more frequently if your team decides something needs to be changed in your IEP.
- Necessary accommodations or modifications will also be written in your IEP, such as if you need extra time for tests, or assignments with fewer questions. (Remember, you just learned about what types of accommodations you need in Unit 5.)
- You must be included in the general curriculum as much as possible.
- You will be evaluated to determine if you continue to need special education services at least every three years.

Think about your own educational experience. List one example of an IDEA right you are currently taking advantage of.

_____

RESPONSIBILITIES (things you should do to be an active participant in your education planning):

- Attend and actively participate in your IEP meeting. This means you need to help your team determine what goals you need to work on.
- You need to participate in your own evaluation. You need to try your best if and when you are tested.
- Once your goals are established, you need to work hard to achieve your goals.

Now list one example of a component of your education that you have taken responsibility for.

_____

Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)

This is a civil rights law that prevents discrimination based on a person's disability. Disability, as it relates to this law, is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of an individual's major life activities. "Major Life Activities" include: caring for one's self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks, and learning. The law prohibits public schools and other agencies that receive federal funding from excluding individuals based on their disability. If a student does not meet the eligibility requirements established by IDEA, then a "504 plan" should be investigated. If a student in elementary or secondary school meets the eligibility requirements under IDEA, then 504 automatically covers them. A student will not need a separate "504 plan" because their IEP will provide appropriate protections. Section 504 does not require the individual or the institution to generate a written plan. This law will be most important to you in post-secondary settings. Section 504 applies to all public colleges and universities, as well as most private colleges and universities. It may also apply to you in the workplace if your workplace receives federal funding.

RIGHTS:

- Any group that receives federal funding cannot discriminate against you because of your disability. There are many programs that receive federal funding, including public educational institutions and federally funded workplaces.
- A public institution that receives federal funding cannot ask if you have a disability when you are applying for school admissions or applying for a job.
- You may be entitled to accommodations for academic requirements. This applies to public high schools and colleges. In college, academic requirements that are essential to the program of study (such as math classes for a math major) are not subject to accommodations.

Give one example of a right you are entitled to because of this law.

_____

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- You need to provide documentation about your disability to post-secondary institutions in order to receive accommodations. Specifically, you will need information about how your disability affects your learning. You will also need information that describes appropriate accommodations.
- You also need to share information about your disability and needed accommodations with appropriate instructors. You only need to share information about your disability with instructors from whom you are requesting accommodations. (This is called disclosure; we'll talk about it in depth in Unit 10).

Give one example of a responsibility you have because of this law.

_____

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act makes it illegal for private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions to discriminate based on a person's disability in employment, state and local government, public transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications. The ADA applies to workplaces that have 15 or more employees. The definition of disability used with Section 504 is also used for ADA eligibility. As with Section 504, a written plan is not required for you to receive accommodations under ADA. This law will be most important to you when you are in work situations to prevent discrimination by your employer.

RIGHTS:

ADA guarantees equal opportunity and appropriate accommodations for all individuals with disabilities in the following areas:

- All facilities that are used by employees need to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.
- Employment: Discrimination in recruitment, hiring, promotions, firing, training, pay, social activities, and other privileges of employment. ADA restricts the asking of questions about your disability before a job offer is made and makes it so that your employer is required to make accommodations for your known limitations. Your employer must also use appropriate tests to determine if you are eligible for a specific job.
- State and local government services: This section of the act requires that state and local governments provide people with disabilities equal access to all of their programs, services and activities.
- Public Transportation: All public forms of transportation (buses, subways, trains, etc.) must be accessible to people with disabilities.
- Public Accommodations: All public facilities, including restaurants, stores, hotels, recreation facilities, etc., must be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Telecommunications services: This section of the act pertains to people with hearing and speech disabilities. It requires telephone companies to provide technology that allows people with hearing or speech disabilities to communicate using telephones.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- For you to qualify for accommodations under ADA, a record of your disability is required. You are required to share this information with your employer.

- You only need to share information about your disability with people from whom you are asking for workplace accommodations.

When in your life do you think you might need the protections provided by ADA?

_____

Summary of My Legal Rights Under Disability Law

The following table contains a summary of the laws described above.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), amended in 2004	Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
Type/Purpose		
An education act to provide federal financial assistance to state and local education agencies to guarantee special education and related services to eligible children with disabilities.	A civil rights law to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities, public and private, that receive federal financial assistance.	A civil rights law to prohibit discrimination solely on the basis of disability in employment, public services, and accommodations.
How do you qualify for services?		
Your school must conduct an appropriate evaluation to determine if you need special education services.	You must be qualified for the services or job.	You must provide documentation of your disability and be qualified for the program, service or job. Appropriate documentation may include your IEP, your educational evaluation reports, or any reports conducted by non-school agencies that describe your disability and needed accommodations.

When will this law be most important to me?		
When I am in elementary, middle, or high school.	When I am seeking educational accommodations in post-secondary settings.	When I am seeking job related accommodations.
Is their a written plan describing me and the services I need?		
Yes. You will have an IEP.	A written plan is not required, but you may generate something in collaboration with your teachers and the disability services staff at your post-secondary institution.	A written plan is not required.
Will I have a case manager?		
Yes.	No. You are responsible for sharing information about your disability and requesting accommodations.	No. You are responsible for sharing information about your disability and requesting accommodations.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES REVIEW

1. Which law is most important to you if you are enrolled in community college?
   a. IDEA
   b. ADA
   c. 504

2. Your IEP must be reviewed at least every:
   a. 6 months
   b. 12 months
   c. 3 years

3. What does FAPE stand for:_____

4. How often must you be reevaluated for Special Education under IDEA?
   a. every 3 years
   b. every year
   c. before you graduate from high school

5. Circle all "Major Life Activities" as defined in 504 and ADA.

Seeing	hearing	archery	breathing
Working	skiing	learning	speaking
Gardening	showering	cooking	walking
Performing manual tasks		playing video games	

6. Can a public college, university, or technical school ask you if you have a disability before admitting you?_____

7. Who is responsible for informing a public college or technical school that you have a disability and need accommodations?

_____

UNIT 7: WHAT IS AN IEP? WHAT IS AN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION?

This stop on your journey to becoming an awesome self-advocate will include:

- Questions and Answers about IEP's
- What is in My IEP?
- How Can I Help Develop My IEP?
- What Should I do at my IEP Meeting?
- Educational Eligibility Evaluations
- Frequently asked questions about evaluations

Questions and Answers about IEP's

What is an IEP?

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. An IEP is a written document that is developed for all students, from kindergarten through age 21, who need special education services because they have a disability. Your IEP describes who you are, what your strengths and needs are and what services your school will provide to help you meet your needs.

Why do I need an IEP?

As mentioned in Unit 6, IEP's are required by the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Your educational team conducted an evaluation at some point in the past three years and determined that you have a disability and you need specialized instruction. More information about evaluations will be included at the end of this unit.

What is the purpose of an IEP?

The IEP is designed to make sure that everyone on your educational team (including you, your family, and your school staff) know what your educational program will include each year.

How is an IEP developed?

IEPs are developed at least every 12 months. Your educational team meets to talk about your strengths and needs for the coming year. The outcome of this meeting is the written IEP.

Who is on an educational team?

Some or all of the following people may be on your educational team.

- You (especially when you age 14-21)
- Your parents or guardian
- At least one of your regular education teachers
- At least one of your special education teachers
- Autism Specialist
- School psychologist or evaluation specialist (if any evaluations occurred)
- Your school counselor (if schedule or graduation issues are being discussed)
- School or Special Education administrator
- People from community agencies that you are involved with, such as vocational rehabilitation or mental health
- Other people that know about your strengths and needs and who can help plan your educational program

Why should I participate in my IEP?

Your educational program will be discussed at the meeting. *Your* opinions are an important part of this discussion. After all, this is *your* life everyone is meeting about. A good self-advocate gets involved in all aspects of his or her educational program.

What is in My IEP?

Your IEP must include certain information about you. Each school district has different IEP forms, but the information is usually organized in a similar manner.

- Name, identification number, Disability, School, Case Manager, Program Review Dates.
- Present Level of Educational Performance: includes specific information about who you are and how you are doing at school. Your strengths and needs will be addressed in this section.
- Long-term goals and short-term objectives: are based on the needs stated in your Present Level of Educational Performance.
- Specialized instruction and related services: instruction relating directly to your IEP goals. Related Services are other services that the school may provide to meet your needs, such as speech, occupational or physical therapy.
- An explanation of special consideration factors, such as how much of your school day you will spend outside of classes with non-disabled peers.
- Modifications or accommodations you will need to be successful in the school setting. (You discussed these in Unit 5.)
- Information on how you will participate in state and district tests.
- When and where the school will start providing services to you; how often the services will be provided; and how long the services are expected to last.
- How the school will measure your progress toward your goals.
- How the school will tell you and your parents about your progress on your goals.
- The transition services you need to get ready for life after finishing high school.

How Can I Help Develop My IEP?

- Tell your parents or guardian and case manager that you are interested in participating in your next IEP.

- Find out when your next IEP is due. Your IEP meeting will happen on or before this date.

  My next IEP is due:_____
- Ask your parents or guardian or your case manager for a copy of your current IEP.
- Read your IEP carefully. There are many different sections in your IEP. The next part of this section will help you better understand the different parts of your IEP.
- You may feel uncomfortable at your meeting because you will be in a room full of adults who will be talking about YOU! Remember that everyone who is at the meeting is there because they care about you and want you to be successful. If you think you will have a hard time talking at the meeting, it might be helpful to make some notes about your questions and thoughts. Then you can either read your notes or give them to someone else to read for you.

What Should I do at my IEP Meeting?

- Be on time for your IEP meeting.
- Bring this manual to share with your team.
- When you are talking, use a strong voice and look at the other people at the meeting.
- Use the notes you developed about your IEP to help you be clear and concise about your needs.
- Listen to everyone's ideas. If you don't understand something or disagree with a suggestion, calmly ask for clarification.
- At the end of the meeting, thank everyone for their time and support.

Educational Eligibility Evaluations

Your educational team is required to consider whether you continue to meet the eligibility criteria to receive special education services at least every three

years. Your educational team, including you, must decide what information they need in order to determine if you are still eligible for special education services as a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder and all other eligibility areas. In order to determine if you still meet the eligibility criteria as a student with a disability, your team will conduct some sort of evaluation. The evaluation may or may not involve you. If you are 18, you have to give the team permission to conduct the evaluation. If you are under age 18, you parents or guardian must give permission for the evaluation to occur.

There are four main steps involved in evaluations. They are:

Step 1: Team Meeting

- According to federal guidelines, your educational team should meet to discuss what they already know about you and what new information they need as it relates to your educational performance. The goal of the evaluation is to determine if you still have a disability, and if so, what special help you need to be more successful at school.

Step 2: Information Gathering

This is the information gathering phase of the evaluation. An evaluation may include some or all of the following components:

- How well you use and understand language
- How you think and behave
- Your school achievement ability
- Your potential aptitude (intelligence)
- Sensory issues you might have
- Autism spectrum disorder characteristics
- What job-related or post-school interests and skills you have
- Different educational professionals may participate in your evaluation. Testing may be completed by one or several of the following individuals:
    - School Psychologist

- Regular Education Teacher
- Special Education Teacher
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Autism Specialist
- Occupational or Physical Therapist
- Vocational Specialist
- Behavior Specialist

Step 3: Evaluation Review

- After all of the evaluations are completed, your educational team will meet again and review the results. They will determine your eligibility and for special education and your educational needs. The Oregon Department of Education has 11 disability categories, including Autism Spectrum Disorder. You might have just one, or you could have several.

Step 4: Re-evaluation

- Your educational team will re-evaluate you at least every three years. Your re-evaluation may include some of the aspects from your first evaluation. It may appear that the evaluation is less thorough; however, there are some tests that cannot be used frequently. There are some other tests that do not need to be repeated because you have not changed enough to take it again.

Frequently Asked Questions about Educational Evaluations

Where are evaluations kept?

- Evaluations must be kept in your school or your school district's office, in a locked file cabinet. Check with your case manager to find out where evaluations are kept in your district.

Who has access to my educational evaluations?

- You
- Your parents or guardian

- All school staff that may assist in planning or delivering your educational program, including teachers, administrators, counselors and evaluators.
- Anyone else that you or your parent give written permission to access your evaluations.

Will I always qualify for special education services?

- Maybe. Each student with ASD is different. Sometimes teams decide that the student doesn't continue to show the characteristics of ASD or their ASD is not adversely impacting their educational performance. If this is the case, then the student may still be able to receive services under Section 504 or they may not need any special services anymore.

What do all of the assessment scores mean?

- Check to see who wrote the report. Then ask your case manager to set up an appointment with the author of your assessment. The person who wrote the report will be best able to explain the assessment results.

UNIT 8: HOW CAN I BE AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE IN POST-SECONDARY SETTINGS?

This portion of your journey toward becoming an awesome self-advocate will include:

- Post-Secondary options
- Employment
- Educational Opportunities (vocational, technical, college, university, etc.)

Post-Secondary Options

When you graduate from high school you will have many options available to you both in terms of employment and educational opportunities. You will also have many opportunities to advocate for yourself. All of the skills you have learned thus far in this manual will be put to the test as you enter the adult world.

Your rights and responsibilities as an individual with a disability will change significantly when you leave high school. When you turn 18 you are responsible for yourself, even if you still live with your parents. Your parents can still be involved in your life, but you are ultimately responsible for decision making. You can continue to consult with your parents or other supportive people in your life, but you are the one who will sign on the dotted line and take responsibility for your actions. This may be a very scary or very exciting thought for you.

As you prepare to leave high school, you should be thinking about what you would ultimately like to do with your life. You will need to do research on employment options and how to acquire different jobs. There are some jobs that will be available to you immediately after you leave high school. Some jobs will require that you have a diploma or have earned your GED. There are other jobs that will require you to receive further education and training.

You may already have specific plans for after high school or you may be confused about what to do in the future. Whether you know what you want to do or you are confused about what to do, the Transition Services section of your IEP can help you get the support you need from your school and other agencies to be successful when you leave high school.

What do you want to do when you finish high school?

_____

_____

If you are confused about your options after high school, who would be a good person to talk with to help you set your goals?

_____

What skills will you need to meet your goals after high school?

_____

_____

_____

What activities might prepare you for life after high school?

_____

_____

_____

Employment

As you think about your employment options, you should take into consideration your strengths and interests. You may be able to get support for job placement and coaching through your local Vocational Rehabilitation Service Program. If you are interested in learning more about what types of services your

Vocational Rehabilitation program offers, ask your case manager to help you contact the program in your area. Not all individuals with ASD qualify for this service, but it is a good resource to consider when you are thinking about employment.

As mentioned in Unit 6, the American's with Disabilities Act or ADA, is a federal law, which will help to protect you from work place discrimination based on your disability. Here is a quick review of your rights and responsibilities in relation to this law.

RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
• You cannot be discriminated against because of your disability in employment settings. • If you are qualified for a job, discrimination cannot occur in hiring, firing, or promotion. • You can receive accommodations on the job if they do not change the job requirements (if your employer has more than 15 employees). • If licensing exams are required for your job, you can receive accommodations on those exams.	• You must share information about your disability with employers if you want to receive accommodations. • You must have a current psycho-educational evaluation (a medical diagnosis or school evaluation should work; your IEP will not be sufficient). • You need to complete job tasks and be a responsible employee. • You need to ask for help if you do not understand how to complete your job.

Employed adults with ASD have reported various factors that have made them more successful in the work environment (Muller, Schuler, Burton & Yates, 2003).

You may want to consider some of these factors as you think about what type of a career you would like to have. The factors they reported were:

- Many adults with ASD report having difficulty adapting to new job routines; you may want to consider a job where the job responsibilities do not change frequently.
- According to adults with ASD, finding a job that matches your strengths and interests is very important.
- Adults with ASD found jobs with the following characteristics to be most successful for them: jobs requiring technical skills; jobs requiring minimal social interaction; jobs having clearly defined routine; jobs and workplaces that allow adequate time to learn new routines; jobs involving minimal sensory stimulation; and jobs allowing a flexible work schedule.
- Many adults with ASD who were surveyed stressed the importance of vocational supports, including vocational rehabilitation staff, job supervisors, and co-workers.

Educational Opportunities

If you think that you want more training or education after high school, there are several different educational paths you may take. You may choose to attend vocational or technical school where you will get specific training for a job. Another option is a college or university where you will gain general knowledge in a particular field of study, but you will not gain specific job training in most cases. The college or university may be public or private. You may also choose to attend community college. Regardless of which educational setting you choose, there will be new challenges for you as you advocate for yourself.

As mentioned in Unit 6, there are two specific laws that will apply to you in post-secondary educational settings. They are *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA) will no longer apply to you. This means you

will not have an IEP or a case manager. Here is a quick review of the rights and responsibilities you will have in post-secondary settings.

RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
• You cannot be discriminated against because of your disability in education. • You are entitled to accommodations based on your needs (but accommodations must be reasonable and not alter the content of the curriculum). • You cannot be charged extra tuition for your accommodations. • You can receive accommodations on exams if needed. Standardized tests (including ACT and SAT) can also be subject to accommodations.	• You must share information about your disability with educators if you want to receive accommodations. • You must have a current psycho-educational evaluation (a medical diagnosis or school evaluation should work; your IEP will not be sufficient). • You need to attend your classes and complete assignments. • You need to anticipate problems you may face in classes and request accommodations. Informing professors after a test that you were having trouble will not change your grade. • You need to ask for help if you don't understand your class assignments. • You need to ask for help if you don't understand what classes you need to take to get a

	particular degree.

UNIT 9: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE? HOW CAN I OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?

On this portion of your journey you will learn about the following issues:

- External barriers to being an effective self-advocate
- Personal barriers to being an effective self-advocate
- Strategies for overcoming barriers to being an effective self-advocate

External Barriers to Being an Effective Self-Advocate

External barriers are things that are outside of you that prevent you from being able to do something. They may be as obvious as a locked door or as subtle as someone not talking to you because they don't like something about you. As you become more involved in your educational and vocational planning, you may begin to face external barriers to being a self-advocate and getting the support that you need.

Here is a list of some common barriers you may face:

- People who do not think you have a disability because you don't look different.
- School personnel who do not want to change their lessons to meet your needs.
- People in school or work situations who do not believe that your disability is interfering with your learning or work skills.
- Individuals who do not understand the unique characteristics of a person with ASD.
- People who are unfamiliar with disability law and the rights you have under the law.
- Noisy, poorly lit facilities that may exacerbate your sensory issues.
- Exclusion by your peers because you have ASD.

- School staff or family members who have sheltered you and not allowed you to become independent.

Now think about your own experience. List two external barriers to being an effective self-advocate that you have faced.

1. _____
2. _____

Personal Barriers to Being an Effective Self-Advocate

Personal barriers are characteristics about you that may prevent you from being able to do some things. They include barriers that are very obvious, such as not going to class because you do not have your assignment done. They also include less obvious barriers, such as assuming people will help you because you have a disability. There are some barriers that are common to most people with ASD, and other barriers that will be specific to you based on the activities you participate in.

Here is a list of some common personal barriers to being an effective self-advocate that are often faced by people with ASD:

- You may have poor communication skills, both using and interpreting language
- You may be embarrassed by your disability and therefore do not tell people you have a disability.
- You may not understand what your disability means to you.
- You may be unaware of what accommodations you need to be successful in school or work.
- You may assume people will help you because you have a disability.
- You may be unfamiliar with the rights you have as a person with a disability.

- You may be uncomfortable with new situations. This may prevent you from planning for your future.
- You may become overly emotional or shut-down when you are uncomfortable with a situation.
- Your mind may get stuck on a problem and have a hard time moving on to another topic.
- You may have difficulty taking the perspective of others.
- You may have poor organizational skills.
- Your ability to focus your attention may be inconsistent.
- You may have low self-esteem.
- You may be argumentative.
- It may be difficult for you to be honest with yourself about your weaknesses.

Again, think about your own experience. List two personal barriers you have to being an effective self-advocate.

1. _____
2. _____

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Being an Effective Self-Advocate

Although it may appear that the barriers to being an effective self-advocate are insurmountable, in reality, if you use the skills you have gained through this manual, then you may be better able to deal with these barriers. Most, if not all of the strategies described here will involve things that you need to do to overcome both external and personal barriers. This may seem unfair because you are not the cause of the external barriers. If you are prepared and informed about your disability and needed accommodations, then you will be better able to intervene on your own behalf to get your needs met.

This is a list of some of the positive strategies you can use to overcome barriers:

- Take time to learn about your disability and how it affects you.
- Make a list of accommodations that have been successful for you in the past.
- Keep current copies of your educational eligibility and evaluation report, medical diagnosis (if you have one), your most recent IEP, and your letter of introduction (you will write this in Unit 11). Be prepared to share them with post-secondary institutions or employers.
- Be proactive. If you have a problem and need help, find an appropriate person to talk to about your problem. You may want to identify a problem solving partner.
- Keep a record of who you talk to when you are requesting accommodations. This is important because you may have to talk to several people before your needs are addressed.
- Learn about the laws that apply to you as a person with a disability. Be prepared to share what you know about the laws with others if they ask you for information.
- Identify organizational strategies that will be helpful to you. Such systems may include highlighting, using a date book, making daily 'to do' lists, using color-coded files or papers, etc.
- Establish a comfortable, distraction-free place to do your studying and important work.
- Be open and honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses.

What strategies are you going to use to overcome barriers you may face?

1. _____
2. _____

UNIT 10: HOW DO I EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MYSELF AND MY NEEDS?

This part of your journey towards becoming an awesome self-advocate will include:

- Disclosure: Who should I communicate with about my disability and my needs?
- How should I communicate with others about my disability and my needs?
- Communication role play

Communicating effectively is often a problem for people with ASD. Because having ASD affects the way your brain processes information, you may have difficulty expressing your thoughts and understanding others. Communication difficulties can cause frustration for you and for people around you. In this unit we are going to focus specifically on communicating with people in authority such as teachers, school administrators, post-secondary instructors and employers. You may decide you want to share information about yourself with these people, so knowing how to communicate this information effectively will be very important. But before we talk about how to communicate, let's talk more in-depth about who to communicate with.

Disclosure: Who should I communicate with about my disability and my needs?

Disclosure means sharing information about your disability with other people. If you are in the public school system and are receiving special education services there are people who will have some information about your disability whether you personally disclose it or not. For example, the contents of your IEP are usually shared by your special education case manager with instructional staff who work with you so that they are aware of the goals you are working on and the accommodations you need.

Once you are out of high school, the decision to disclose a disability in either an educational or work setting is your choice. It is an individual decision, based on

the circumstances and how comfortable you feel about it. However, legal protection under ADA and Section 504 occurs only when the employer or educational institution knows about your disability. The following factors might influence your decision to disclose or not:

- The type of educational course or job being undertaken: Does the course or job take advantage of your strengths or does it accentuate your difficulties?
- Whether your disability is apparent or not: In the particular setting you are considering, is your disability visible or hidden? Is your disability affecting your job or classes?
- Your need for accommodations: Are there certain accommodations you must have in order to be successful? Employers and college professors are not responsible for providing accommodations if you have not disclosed your disability.
- The attitudes of the other people in the educational or work setting towards people with disabilities: Do you fear that disclosure may result in discrimination or opportunities being denied? Do you fear that you will be treated differently? Do you feel that you will not be believed or that you will be stereotyped as lazy or not smart?

To disclose or not to disclose? This is a big decision you will have to make. Even in high school when your teachers might know that you are on an IEP (and therefore have a disability), they probably won't know specifics about how your disability impacts you unless you share this information with them. Though the decision to disclose is personal and individual, it is a good idea to get input from other people you trust who know you well. And remember: the decision to disclose or not is usually not necessarily a final decision, but is one that might change over time and in different situations.

How should I communicate with others about my disability and my needs?

O.K., you decide to disclose information about your disability and your needs to certain people in your life. That's great, but it won't be effective to just present information about yourself and then demand supports. Research shows that when people make requests, positive outcomes are linked to the way in which the request is made (i.e. the style aspects of communication). These style elements include things such as timing of the request, body language, facial expression, and choice of words.

Following are some strategies on how to be an effective communicator with people in authority such as teachers, school administrators, post-secondary instructors and employers:

- Think through and rehearse what you want to say. Choose your words carefully. It helps some people to write down what they want to say. You could also practice with a friend or parent or by yourself in front of a mirror.
- Choose the right time and place to talk. When you do so, you are more likely to get the person's full attention. You are more likely to get your needs met. You also show you are being considerate of the other person's feelings. Don't try to talk when the other person is talking to someone else, busy or in a hurry. If you must interrupt, apologize for interrupting and give the reason for interrupting. It is best to make an appointment to meet with the person when you want to present information about your disability and/or ask for accommodations.
- Look at the person when he or she is talking. Nod while listening to show agreement or understanding. Use an interested facial expression. Really try to hear and think about what the person is saying. Rephrase what you hear to make sure you really understand. This is called active listening.
- Look at the person when you are talking. When talking to another person you should orient your body and face towards that person and look at his or her face (preferably the eyes) from time to time. It is not necessary to

maintain eye contact the whole time. In fact, doing this (staring) would probably make the other person uncomfortable.

- Keep your facial expression pleasant and your body posture relaxed. Body language plays a major role in the messages you send to other people. Fifty-five percent of the message comes from body language. The actual words make up only 7% of the message.
- Make sure you aren't standing too close to the other person when you're talking. Remember the old rule from elementary school about keeping an arm's length distance between you and the other person. When you are too close, it makes other people feel uncomfortable.
- Use the right voice volume for the situation. Obviously, if you speak too quietly, other people may not be able to hear what you are saying. On the other hand, speaking too loudly is likely to irritate the listener. Good volume control means speaking at, but not above, a volume that allows listeners to hear all the words clearly.
- Use a "neutral" or "friendly" tone of voice. Avoid sarcastic inflections. Even if you are upset about something, using an overly intense tone of voice can cause listeners to react negatively, or to totally stop listening to you. Thirty-eight percent of communication is through your tone of voice.
- Be respectful, diplomatic and tactful. Authority figures have feelings too. They are more likely to be responsive and willing to do what you are asking if you are polite and avoid confrontation. Ask; don't demand. It's OK to be assertive (to state your feelings in a firm, confident and respectful way). It's not OK to be aggressive or threatening. Don't forget to say "please" and "thank you".
- Be flexible and ready to compromise. To compromise means to come to an agreement that is acceptable to both people and is one in which each person gives in a little. Don't expect things to always go exactly the way you want them to.

- If you meet with resistance, ask to have a follow-up meeting and invite a support person. In a public school setting this person could be your special education case manager, your school counselor or your parent. In post-secondary settings this person could be a co-worker or another supervisor (in a job setting) or the disability services coordinator (in a college setting).

Communication Role Play

Now you get to practice using the communication tips you have learned about. Following are several situations involving you and various authority figures. Your instructor will play the part of the authority figure. After hearing and thinking about the situation, decide how you should communicate in that situation.

Situation #1: You are in an English class where the teacher does a lot of lecturing. You are having a hard time concentrating and understanding what he says. He talks too fast for you to take notes. What would you say to your teacher in this situation?

Situation #2: At your new job your boss often gives you a long verbal list of things you need to get done. You're having a hard time remembering everything on the list and you keep doing things out of order. What could you do in this situation?

Situation #3: It's the beginning of a new school year and you would like to disclose some information about yourself and your disability with your new counselor. What do you do?

Situation #4: Your supervisor at work has a certain way he likes to have the job done. You think you have a better way. How would you communicate this to your supervisor?

Situation #5: In your math class you sit next to some students who like to chat a lot and it's really hard for you to concentrate on your work. They don't quiet down when you ask them to. How would you communicate about this problem with your math instructor?

Situation #6: Your science teacher assigns your class a project that needs to be done in small groups. Working in small groups is really difficult for you and you would rather work on your own. How do you communicate with your teacher about this?

Situation #7: Your psychology class teacher has assigned a long written paper. Having alternatives to written assignments is an accommodation on your IEP. You asked if you could do an oral report instead of the paper and your teacher said no. What do you say to your teacher now?

UNIT 11: MY LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

This part of your journey will cover:

- What is a letter of introduction?
- Why write a letter of introduction?
- Who do I share my letter of introduction with?
- The components of a letter of introduction
- Writing my letter of introduction
- How do I share my letter of Introduction?

What is a letter of introduction?

As we are using the term here, a letter of introduction is a letter you write that presents information about your disability, your strengths and areas of interest, how you learn and work best, and accommodations you think might help you be successful. A person might have several different versions of the letter: one for high school teachers, one for a work supervisor and another version for college professors.

Why write a letter of introduction?

Writing this letter may seem like a lot of work, but most students who have used this strategy feel it is a great way to share information about themselves. One student said that his work supervisor told him the letter was really helpful. The student felt it was a lot easier to present the information in writing, rather than talking about it. Teachers have also had very positive things to say about letters students have given them. They are always impressed that the students took the time to compile and share this information with them. It shows that the students know themselves, value themselves and want to be successful.

Who do I share my letter of introduction with?

As you will see from reading the sample letters, your letter of introduction will be a very personal document and is not intended to be handed out to everyone you meet. Sharing your letter is a form of disclosure (see Unit 10). It is an individual decision based on the circumstances. The people you share your letter with are those people in your life who are in a position to provide you with those things you need to learn and work successfully. It is necessary for them to have information about your disability and the specific accommodations that work for you so that they can be truly supportive of you. The people most students would consider sharing their letters of introduction with include:

- Classroom teachers
- School counselor
- Athletic coaches
- Post-secondary instructors
- The Disability Services Coordinator at their college
- Employer
- Work supervisor
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

At this point in your life, who do you think you will share your letter of introduction with?

_____

_____

The components of a letter of introduction

There are various forms that a letter of introduction could take. Presented here is just one model that you could choose to use. Its components are:

- Greeting
- Introduction and disability statement

- The characteristics of ASD that are present in you in the four main areas: communicating with others, relating to other people, thinking and acting flexibly and sensory processing.
- Your strengths and areas of interest
- Things that help you be successful at school and/or work
- Who to contact for more information
- Closing

Most students try to keep their letters to one page (front and back) because most people you will share your letter with won't want to read more than that.

Now turn to pages **72-75** of your manual to see two different letters written by students with ASD that use this format.

Writing my letter of introduction

The initial draft of your letter will be handwritten using the letter template that begins on page **76** of your manual. Once it is written, you should share it with people you trust (like your parents) for editing. Then you will type a final version. Let's get started!

Greeting: Decide on the greeting you want to use. If you want to use the same letter for different people, you might choose to use a greeting such as "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Teachers". You may choose to save an electronic copy of your letter and change the greeting each time you use it to make it more personal.

Introduction and disability statement: In this section you will present two to three general statements about your disability (ASD). If you have other conditions that might impact your performance at work or school (such as Attention Deficit

Disorder or a learning disability), you can mention those as well. Look at the two sample letters for examples of how to write this section.

The characteristics of ASD that are present in you: As you can see in the sample letters, the information about personal ASD characteristics is broken down into the four main areas in which people with ASD have difficulty: communicating with others, relating to other people, thinking and acting flexibly, and sensory processing. For this section of your letter you will draw from the lists you developed in Unit 3 **WHAT DOES ASD LOOK LIKE IN ME?** and from what you learned in Unit 4 **WHAT IS MY LEARNING STYLE?** In your letter you will not need to share all of the characteristics you identified in the Unit 3 activity. For example, most people do not need to know that you are an extremely picky eater and will only eat soft foods. However, it would probably be helpful for a teacher or work supervisor to know that you are a visual learner and work better with information presented in writing. Think about how to word these statements. Though you are addressing difficulties you have, you don't want to paint a negative picture of yourself.

Your strengths and areas of interest: This is the section where you get to say some positive things about yourself. It is OK to brag a little bit but not too much. If you can't think of things to put in this section, ask other people (such as your instructor) for input.

Things that could help you be more successful at school and/or work: For this section of your letter you will draw from the list of accommodations that you developed in Unit 5 beginning on page **28** of your manual. This is a very important part of your letter. This is where you are asking for the reader's help and support. Keep this section relatively short: 5 or 6 statements at most. Make

sure the suggested accommodations you ask for are reasonable and appropriate. Make sure your language is polite. Ask; don't demand.

Who to contact for more information: Start this section with a statement requesting that the reader talk to YOU first if they have any questions about the contents of the letter. You could also list other trusted people who know you well and who would be willing and able to talk about you. Make sure these people are aware you are including their names in your letter. Also include their title and phone number. Some people you might consider listing include:

- your parents or other family members
- your special education case manager
- a regular class teacher who knows you well (current or former)
- your school counselor
- the Autism Specialist who serves your school

Closing: In one or two sentences, thank the person for their time, support and understanding. Your letter should end with a professional closing such as Sincerely or Respectfully.

The first draft of your letter is done! Now share your draft with someone you trust (like your parents) to get their input.

How do I share my letter of introduction?

You've decided to disclose information about your disability to some of your teachers and you want to do so using a letter of introduction. First let's talk about how NOT to share your letter of introduction. You do NOT want to just leave it on your teacher's desk. You do NOT want to send it in the mail. You do NOT want your mom to hand it out at parent/teacher conferences.

You DO want to deliver the letter in person. The best way to share your letter is to set up an appointment with the person you want to share it with. When setting the appointment, tell the person that you'd like 15-20 minutes of their time to share some information about yourself. Some brave students, with help from their special education case manager, have set up a short meeting with all of their teachers present at the same time so they only have to go through the process once.

Here is an outline of what this meeting could look like:

1. Introduction: Greet the person, give your name and the class or classes that you are in.
2. Disclosure: Give the person a copy of your letter of introduction. (Also bring a copy of the letter for yourself.) Using the letter as a guide, explain your disability and your strengths to the individual.
3. Request: Using the letter as a guide, inform the person of the accommodations that have been beneficial to you and explain what accommodations you think you will need in the current situation.
4. Agreement: Ask the educator if your request for accommodations is acceptable.
5. Closure: Finish the meeting with a friendly statement of appreciation for the person's cooperation.

This has been a long, labor-intensive unit but you now have a valuable product as a result. Hang in there! One more session to go.

SAMPLE LETTER #1

Dear Teachers,

My name is _____ and I have been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, a neurological disorder in the autism spectrum. I am receiving special education services as a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Having ASD affects the way my brain processes information. I see and experience the world differently from people who do not have ASD. People with ASD have difficulties:

- Communicating with other people
- Relating to other people
- Thinking and acting flexibly
- Processing sensory information

I personally have difficulties with the following things in these categories:

Communicating with other people

- Expressing myself clearly, especially my feelings
- Using sarcasm and jokes at the right time and place
- Having a conversation
- Understanding long verbal directions

Relating to other people

- Working cooperatively with peers in group situations; some people say I can be too directive
- Knowing how to react to others, especially in new, unfamiliar or highly emotional settings
- Taking the perspective of others

Thinking and acting flexibly

- Handling sudden changes in my routine
- Switching from one activity to another
- Accepting that sometimes things don't go the way I think they should go
- Being organized and getting work turned in on time

Sensory Processing

- Working in noisy environments
- Writing for long periods of time

I also have strengths and things I'm good at:

- I have a good memory for facts and details
- I'm good with computers
- I like working with animals
- I like to draw

Here are some things that help me be successful in school:

- Getting information in writing, not just verbally (like assignments, due dates and directions)
- Reminder notes to turn things in
- Being allowed to sometimes do projects by myself and not in a group
- Being warned ahead of time when there are changes in the schedule
- Being able to go to a quiet place outside he classroom sometimes to get work done (the SRC, the library)
- Being able to sometimes have alternative ways to complete written assignments (do them on the computer, do an oral presentation)

Thank you for your time and support. I really appreciate it.

Please talk to me if you have any questions about this letter. You can also talk with _____ (my school counselor), my mom _____ (phone number), or _____ (phone number).

Sincerely,

SAMPLE LETTER #2

To Whom It May Concern:
My name is _____ and I have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Having ASD affects the way my brain processes information. My brain functions in a different way from the brains of people without ASD. People with ASD usually have difficulties:

--- Communicating with other people
--- Thinking and acting flexibly
--- Relating to other people
--- Processing sensory information

I personally have the following difficulties in these categories:

Communicating with other people

- Sometimes I talk too much about my favorite topics.
- Listening to and understanding lots of verbal input is hard for me. I get confused or stressed when there is too much talking.
- I sometimes take what other people say too literally. Sometimes I don't understand what other people mean.
- Understanding facial expression and body language is hard for me.

Relating to other people

- I am shy and it is hard for me to make friends.
- I can get stressed and overwhelmed when I don't know what is expected of me.
- When there are a lot of people around me I get anxious. I don't like other people too close to me. I prefer working alone or with one or two others.
- Conversation skills are hard for me, especially with people I don't know very well. Making eye contact with others when talking is hard.

Thinking and acting flexibly

- I like routines and to know in advance what is going to happen. Changes and new things bother me.
- I can get stuck on topics or problems and have a hard time moving on.
- I like to finish one thing before moving on to another.

- I need systems to help me be organized (for example; checklists and written directions).

Sensory Processing

- I am bothered by certain sounds and easily distracted auditorily.
- I am overly sensitive to certain smells (for example; bananas, perfume).

I also have strengths and things I'm good at:

- I have a good memory for facts and details
- I love to read
- My teachers tell me I'm good at sticking to a project until it is done
- I'm a hard worker and want to do the best work I can

Here are some things that help me be successful in work situations:

- Working by myself, or with only one or two other people
- Having my own quiet, personal work space
- Having written lists of expectations and job 'to dos'
- Having a written work schedule and notification of changes in that schedule
- Being able to take short 'cool down' breaks when I'm feeling stressed or overwhelmed

Thank you for your support and understanding.

Please talk to me if you have any questions about this letter. You can also talk with my former teacher, _____ (phone number) or my brother, _____ (phone number).

Sincerely,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TEMPLATE

(greeting)_____,

(introduction & disability statement) My name is

_____.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

People with ASD have difficulties:

- Communicating with other people
- Relating to other people
- Thinking and acting flexibly
- Processing sensory information

I personally have the following difficulties in these categories:

Communicating with other people

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Relating to other people

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

- _____

Thinking and acting flexibly

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Sensory Processing

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

I also have strengths and things I'm good at:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Following are some things that can help me be successful in_____.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

(who to contact) Please talk to me if you have any questions about this letter. You can also talk with _____, (**their role)** _____ at **(their phone #)** _____ or _____, (**their role)** _____ at **(their phone #)** _____.

(closing) Thank you for _____ _____

_____,

Your signature

UNIT 12: CELEBRATING SUCCESSFUL SELF-ADVOCATES

Congratulations! You made it. We know this has been a challenging journey, but the skills you have learned are truly valuable. Good luck advocating for yourself in the future!

“Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So... get on your way." (Seuss, 1990).