

# Unit 1: Self-Determination... the BIG Picture

## PURPOSE



The purpose of Unit 1 is to introduce you to the process and the value of self-determination: making informed decisions through reflecting on and building on your strengths. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand the topic of self-determination. A questionnaire will help you examine your strengths in the area of self-determination and to consider some skills you would like to enhance. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section on page 1-3.

## TERMINOLOGY



You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then, check your definitions against the glossary located in the back of this workbook. Here are the terms used in Unit 1:

Accommodation	Goals (long-term and short-term)
Informed choice	Respect
Self-determination	Values

Accommodation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Goals (long-term and short-term) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Informed choice** \_\_\_\_\_

**Respect** \_\_\_\_\_

**Self-determination** \_\_\_\_\_

**Values** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES**



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## DISCUSSION



One of the key ways that adults define themselves and develop a sense of identity is through the many choices they have made throughout their lives. Young people as well as adults often struggle with the responsibility of making good decisions, oftentimes without accurate and complete information.

Teenagers make important choices such as choosing a part-time job, deciding which classes to take, selecting someone to date, and deciding what to do in their free time. These decisions aren't always easy. Although some of these decisions may only have short-term effects, other decisions will affect your life in the long term. You will make some of these decisions on your own, while you'll make other decisions in partnership with parents, friends, teachers, or advisors. Remember that some decisions must be made without having all of the necessary information available. Not all decisions can be well supported, but it's important to try to make the most informed decision.

Youth are rarely taught about **informed choice** while in high school. **Informed choice is the process of making a decision after considering relevant facts and weighing the pros and cons (positives and negatives) of the decision.** Making informed choices is a skill that must be practiced, encouraged, reflected upon (or thought about), and then practiced some more in order to be acquired. This process requires you to collect information before making a decision. You may be given information or you may research information on your own (perhaps by going online or talking to people).

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**Self-determination is the desire, ability, and practice of directing one's own life. It is often referred to as "The BIG Picture" because it has so much to do with the person you are and the person you want to be.**

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Informed decision-making is a skill that you will benefit from many times in your life when you are required to make crucial decisions.

**Self-determination is the desire, ability, and practice of directing one's own life. It is often referred to as "The BIG Picture" because it has so much to do with the person you are and the person you want to be.** You can think of it as an umbrella that covers the very important and personal matters that make up you. A self-determined person can set goals, make decisions, see options, solve problems, speak for him or herself, understand required supports, and evaluate outcomes (Martin & Marshall, 1996). Being a self-determined person helps you to make important choices and informed decisions in your life based on your abilities, interests, and attitudes. Self-determined people accept themselves, respect themselves, and **value** themselves for who they are and what they have to offer to others.

When people are self-determined, they can more easily identify their short-term and long-term personal **goals**. Sometimes short-term

goals are steps you take to get to your long-term goal. In addition, self-determined individuals understand that some personal goals (whether short-term or long-term) can be reached independently, while also recognizing that all people seek out others to help them achieve all their goals. **Self-determination empowers people to seek assistance when needed.**

One important decision that many young people face is whether or not to disclose their disability. The decision to disclose a disability belongs solely to the person with the disability. Disability disclosure is a very personal choice and should definitely be an informed choice. If you have a disability, **there are no requirements that you disclose your disability to anyone at any time**, but in order to receive accommodations at work or in school, you must disclose.

If you do not require **accommodations**, it is generally not necessary to disclose. A self-determined person with skills in making informed choices will be better equipped to

make this important decision about disclosure after trying some of the strategies like weighing the pros and cons and considering all the facts. If you decide to disclose your disability after thoughtful reflection on the subject, it is important to practice disclosing effectively with people whom you **respect** and trust, and who know you and your strengths well.

It's not easy to share information about your disability with others. This workbook was created to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to disclose information about your disability and to prepare you to disclose information about yourself and your disability in an effective manner if necessary.

Complete the questionnaire on the following page to see just how much you know about yourself and your disability. Your answers can lead to an interesting discussion about your strengths and limitations, and how to accentuate and improve your skills in certain areas.



**ACTIVITY:**  
**JUST WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR DISABILITY?**



Complete the questionnaire below.

For each question, check the box (Yes, Sometimes, or No) that best describes yourself

Questions	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
1. Do you know what you do well in school?			
2. Do you know what you do well outside of school?			
3. Can you easily explain your skills and strengths to other people?			
4. Do you know how you learn best?			
5. Do you inform your teacher how you learn best?			
6. Do you inform your employer how you learn best?			
7. Do you ask for help when you need it?			
8. Do you take responsibility for your own behavior?			
9. Do you feel proud of yourself?			
10. Do you set long-term and short-term goals for yourself?			
11. Do you create lists for yourself to help you achieve your goals?			
12. Are you present at your own IEP or 504 meetings?			
13. Do you participate in your own IEP or 504 meetings?			
14. Do you disclose your disability to others?			
15. Do you like the reaction you get when you inform someone about your disability?			
16. Do you practice disclosing your disability to others?			
17. Do you describe your disability differently depending on the setting or the people?			
18. Are there times you choose not to tell someone about your disability?			
19. Do you know what "reasonable accommodation" means?			
20. Do you know what accommodations you need in school in order to be successful?			
21. Do you know what accommodations you need on the job in order to be successful?			

Questions	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
22. Do you practice asking for the accommodations you need in school?			
23. Do you practice asking for the accommodations you need on the job?			

If you answered **YES** to many of the questions, you should be very proud of yourself! You definitely have a good sense of yourself and your disability. This means you're on the road to being a very self-determined individual! Of course you realize that there will always be room for improvement. Reflect on the questions you answered with a **NO**, and create some short-term goals designed to strengthen your areas of limitations.

If you answered **SOMETIMES** to many of the questions, you possess some very good skills in understanding yourself and your disability, but you have some specific areas that need to be developed. Once you have identified your strengths (the questions you answered with a **YES**), list the other areas that

need work (the questions you answered with a **NO**) and prioritize them. Decide which areas of need are most important to focus on right now, and create some short-term goals to begin to strengthen your weaker spots.

If you answered **NO** to many of the questions, you are at the beginning stage of understanding yourself and your disability. Take the next step and seek out others whom you trust and who know you well; ask them to help you sort out your areas of strengths and needs (you probably have more strengths than you realize). Share the results of the questionnaire with these individuals and ask them for assistance in developing some short-term goals for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of yourself.

**NOTES** 

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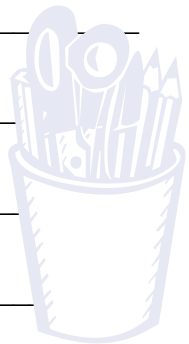
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## ACTIVITY: SELF-DETERMINED SHORT-TERM GOALS



**A**reas of need can be turned into areas of strength if you make a conscious effort and understand that this transformation won't happen overnight. Look over the results on the questionnaire and determine the areas you need to work on. Then develop three short-term goals that address these areas of need. Read the example below before completing the activity.

**Remember, the only goal you can't achieve is the one you don't attempt!**

### Example:

If you answered NO to Question #1 ("Do you know what you do well (what your strengths are) in school?"), you may need to reflect on your areas of strengths and get input about your strengths from others who are familiar with you, such as your friends, parents, coaches, teachers, and employers. Make a list of the strengths they mention and select three of these strengths to develop goals around.

*For example, Mira has identified her strengths in the areas of math, computers, and art. She has also identified her area of need as explaining her disability.*

Now, keeping these strengths in mind (for example, math, computers, and art) answer the following questions:

### **Question 1: How can I use my strengths to improve my areas of need?**

*Answer #1: Mira has difficulty describing her disability in writing or words (area of need), but she can use her artistic abilities to explain her disability through images. This would also show people that while she has a disability in some*

*areas, she still excels in other areas such as art.*

### **Question #2: What short-term goals can I develop to highlight these strengths?**

*Answer #2: Mira can join an extracurricular activity, such as the school newspaper or volunteer to maintain the school website, or design sets for school plays.*

### **Question #3: How can I use these strengths to reach my employment goals?**

*Answer #3: She can research which careers need people with strong skills in math, computers, and art. She may look into the graphic arts career field that interests her and highlights her skills. Maybe she can find a part-time job or internship in an art store or information technology firm.*

### **Question #4: How can I use these strengths to reach my social goals?**

*Answer #4: Mira would like to broaden her circle of friends, but she finds it difficult to meet new people. She will try to meet a few new people in her extracurricular activities and at her part-time job who have similar interests. She could also invite someone to an art exhibit.*

### **Question #5: How can I use these strengths to reach my academic/educational goals?**

*Answer #5: Mira wants to improve her grades in English class this semester. She could improve her grade by talking to her teacher about using her artistic or technical skills to supplement her writing assignments or using these skills to aid in writing her final assignment.*

### **Now, you try:**

List your strengths noted on the questionnaire and any other strength you have identified.

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Talk with others and list the strengths that they mention. \_\_\_\_\_

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Select three of these strengths to focus on in this activity.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Focusing on these three strengths, answer the following questions:*

**Question 1: How can I use my strengths to improve my areas of need?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #2: What short-term goals can I develop to highlight these strengths?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #3: How can I use these strengths to reach my employment goals?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #4: How can I use these strengths to reach my social goals?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #5: How can I use these strengths to reach my academic and educational goals?** \_\_\_\_\_

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