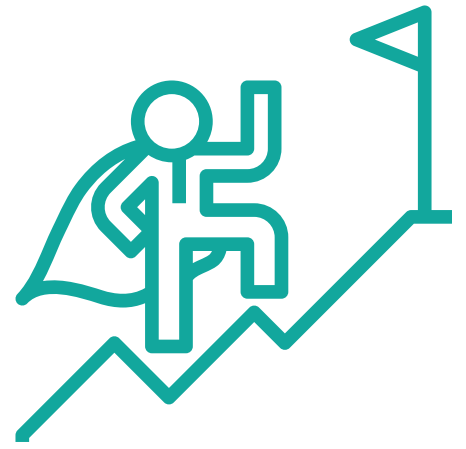


# Self-Determination for Deaf Youth

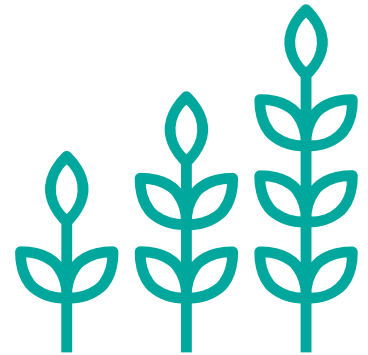


## Overview

Self-determination is when people make choices and decisions based on personal preferences and motivations. For students with disabilities, self-determination skills are an important predictor of outcomes after high school.<sup>1,2,3</sup> People who have stronger self-determination are able to make their own choices, manage their time, solve problems, advocate for themselves, set goals, and make plans to reach these goals. Young people with disabilities must also be aware of their rights, responsibilities, and protections under the law.<sup>4</sup> This resource will support the development of basic knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential to self-determination.

## Self-Determination and Deaf Youth

Deaf<sup>5</sup> people have to constantly advocate for their needs as they navigate inaccessible settings in schools, workplaces, and the community.<sup>6</sup> Because of this continual self-advocacy, self-determination skills are crucial for deaf youth and need to be an important component of transition planning.<sup>7,8</sup> Deaf youth with higher levels of self-determination and autonomous motivation during high school are more likely to enroll in college, live independently, have positive self-beliefs, make more money at work, and have more opportunities for career advancement.<sup>9,10</sup> While enrolled in college, deaf students with stronger self-determination skills also feel more integrated within their university, socially and academically.<sup>11</sup>



## Strengthening Self-Determination

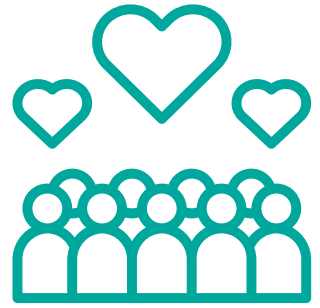
Deaf youth often have fewer opportunities to develop self-determination skills.<sup>6</sup> To develop self-determination skills, opportunities to exercise those skills must be available across a range of settings and interactions.<sup>12,13</sup> All people have potential for strong self-determined behavior but need intentional spaces to make their own choices and practice those skills.

Increased opportunities for deaf youth to develop and express self-determination should happen through structured programming and unstructured, ongoing interactions. Structured programming that is designed to strengthen self-determination is most effective when these programs are longer in duration, target many self-determination skills, and provide opportunities to develop these skills in a variety of settings.<sup>14,15,16</sup>



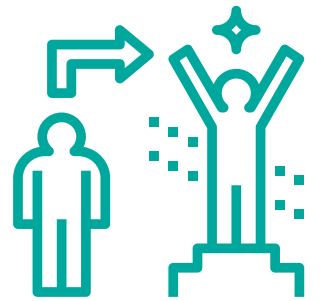
**Encourage autonomy** by creating conditions where deaf youth are expected to make their own decisions and allowing students to make mistakes. Low expectations of deaf youth are common across many settings and negatively affect the potential of developing autonomy and independence. For deaf youth, autonomous decision-making can involve things like looking for a job independently<sup>10</sup> or leading their individualized education program (IEP) meetings.<sup>17,18</sup>

**Strengthen social networks** to connect deaf youth with peers, role models, or mentors. Stronger social supports can increase confidence to try new things and take on new challenges. For deaf youth, the quality and number of friendships are connected to self-determination.<sup>19</sup> Deaf role models who share common experiences can help deaf youth learn about strategies to navigate life as a deaf person. Strategic connections with role models, mentors, and peers are important for deaf youth, who may have fewer incidental opportunities for social networking.<sup>20,21</sup>



**Increase knowledge** of self by creating opportunities for deaf youth to gain awareness about their rights, the range of available accommodations, and how to advocate for their needs.<sup>22</sup> This knowledge helps deaf youth make better decisions and advocate for themselves across a range of settings. This knowledge can be shared by deaf role models,<sup>23</sup> embedded in curriculum and training,<sup>24</sup> or in other resources like online games for deaf youth (e.g., Deafverse; see below).

**Facilitate goal-setting** by supporting deaf youth as they set their own goals, develop action plans, and evaluate their progress.<sup>12,16</sup> Deaf students should be encouraged to actively lead these activities, using their knowledge about themselves and their personal goals. Student involvement in curriculum and self-determined learning models of instruction can be used to support deaf youth as they set their goals and make plans to achieve these goals.<sup>25,26,27</sup>



## Recommended Resources

**Deafverse** is an interactive game designed to support the development of self-determination skills as players navigate typical challenges that are part of the deaf experience in a variety of settings, including community, school, and the workplace. Learn more at [deafverse.com](https://deafverse.com)

**The Self-Determination Inventory** is an ASL-accessible measure that gauges students' perception of their ability to initiate self-determined actions such as goal-setting, planning, and decision-making. Learn more at [nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/self-determination-inventory](https://nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/self-determination-inventory)

## Notes and References

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<sup>2</sup> Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Rifenbark, G. G., & Little, T. D. (2013). Relationships between self-determination and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education*, 48(4), 256–267.

<sup>3</sup> Test, D. W., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Fowler, C. H., Kortering, L., & Kohler, P. (2009). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32, 160–181.

<sup>4</sup> NDC uses the term *deaf* in an all-inclusive manner to include people who identify as deaf, deafblind, deafdisabled, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and hearing impaired. NDC recognizes that for many individuals, identity is fluid and can change over time or with setting. NDC has chosen

to use one term, *deaf*, with the goal of recognizing experiences that are shared by individuals from diverse deaf communities while also honoring their differences.

- <sup>5</sup> Laws that protect children and adults with disabilities from exclusion, discrimination, and unequal treatment include but are not limited to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Learn more at [www.nationaldeafcenter.org/lawsummary](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/lawsummary)
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