

Monthly tips and resources featured in **What's Next?** are created for young adults, their families, and supporters who are exploring options for life after high school in Indiana.

Self-Determination: Use It or Lose It!

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Self-determination: The process of shaping your own life in a satisfying and personally rewarding way. Being self-determined means you take an active role in shaping your own goals and dreams. Sounds simple, right? During high school, you probably used self-determination skills to do things such as leading your own IEP meetings, selecting employment goals, exploring your interests, and understanding what supports helped you to be successful. As you approach the end of high school, your ability to become self-determined is more important than ever—this is the rest of your life! Self-determination is like learning a foreign language: Practice it and use it ... or lose it. Take control now; take your dreams seriously.

What It Involves

Self-determination is all about directing your own life. According to Wehmeyer & Shogren (2017) and other researchers, self-determination skills include the following:

- **Choice-making:** This involves selecting based on information available about options and your preferences.
- **Self-awareness:** This involves recognizing and understanding your own abilities, limitations, and strengths in working toward your goals.
- **Problem-solving:** This involves your ability to identify a problem, generate possible solutions, consider possibilities, and choose a solution.
- **Decision-making:** This involves choosing the best alternative for yourself at any point after considering both positive and negative consequences.
- **Self-advocacy:** This involves your ability and confidence to stand up for yourself. Also involves using leadership and people skills to communicate effectively with others.
- **Goal setting:** This involves your ability to find something you want, plan to reach it, and follow through with that plan.
- **Self-regulation:** This involves being aware of, monitoring, and managing your behavior.

Why Is It Important?

You will not master the skills necessary for increased self-determination overnight. Being self-determined means you are actively and consistently practicing those skills. This can be challenging and frustrating at times, but it can also be rewarding and result in a more satisfying life. The collective research summarizes four primary benefits associated with being self-determined. They include:

- **Relatedness**—a sense of caring relationships in your life.
- **Increased personal competence**—feeling you can reach a desired goal.
- **Beneficence**—making positive contributions to others and your community.
- **Increased personal autonomy**—deciding what is best for oneself.

Self-determination means you are setting yourself up for the kind of life and success you want. Having self-determination skills will create positive results in areas like employment, education, community membership, and overall quality of life.

For most people, quality of life means happiness, financial security, job satisfaction, nurturing relationship, health, and safety. Only you can decide the quality of life you want, but whatever that means to you personally, self-determination will play a role.

Resources

Please take a look at the resources provided below. Use them to understand the connection between self-determination and community inclusion, social inclusion, working, healthy living, and self-advocacy. Understanding the connection will provide you with motivation to become more self-determined. This collection also features tools for families and educators wanting to facilitate and provide opportunities for growth in self-determination. Finally, you will find helpful self-determination strategies and activities shared by young people as they worked toward their own goals.

- [What Is Self-Determination and Why Is It Important](#)
- [I'm Determined](#)
- [Taking Charge: Stories of Success and Self-Determination](#)
- [21 Self-Determination Skills and Activities to Utilize Today](#)

What's Next? is a project of the Center on Community Living and Careers and the Indiana Department of Education.

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