



## Understand your abilities and disabilities. Play to your strengths.

*The best way to prepare for life is to begin to live.*

— Elliot Hubbard —

*Understanding yourself* provides the foundation for taking self-determined actions. It is a key to success. To know yourself means to be aware of strengths, weaknesses, needs, interests and preferences. *Self-awareness* is essential for developing goals that reflect personal desires and for making informed decisions. *Valuing yourself* leads to *positive self-esteem*. The belief that you are part of something larger and more enduring than daily struggles can provide the strength required to persevere when life presents its inevitable challenges.

You can help young people gain an understanding of their abilities and disabilities and then learn to *play to their strengths*. This knowledge and skill can contribute to a successful life. For example, one successful college student who had a stroke at a young age wrote:

One example of how I understand my abilities and disabilities is that as much as I love science, I am more socially inclined. When I entered college I wanted to do biology and become a doctor or something to help people. When biology did not work out I switched to speech therapy, but that did not work either (even that was heavily science-based). Finally, many people told me that I should try counseling, so now I am in social work with the end goal of counseling and it is working out great for me. I

know there are many different things I can do as a social worker that will all involve counseling.



In studies of childhood risks and adversities it has been found that young people can minimize the effects of disabilities and other risk factors by “learning to see one’s adversities in a new light” (Katz, 1997). Successful individuals who overcome adversities are often able to define themselves more around their multiple talents than around their areas of vulnerability. Being able to show their talents and have them valued by those who are important to them helps them define their identities around that which they do best. It has even been found that children’s *perceptions of their competence* are stronger predictors of behavior and achievement than objective measures of their capabilities (Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990).



## E-Mentoring

How society labels individuals with disabilities as a group can also have an impact on how young people with disabilities view themselves. Responding to labels can test self-identity and self-value. Mentors can play a key role in shaping the self-perceptions of young people.

People with disabilities who consider themselves successful generally accept their disabilities as one aspect of who they are. They do not define themselves by their disabilities. They recognize that they are not responsible for their disabilities, and they know that they are not inherently impaired. They do not blame others for their situation, nor do they have a sense of entitlement. Instead, they take responsibility for their own happiness and future.

After completing the online activities in this chapter, young people will reach a greater understanding of their abilities and disabilities. These exercises will help students to

- know their strengths and weaknesses.
- understand their rights and responsibilities.
- know that their disabilities do not define them as individuals and have a limited impact on their lives.
- define their self-worth in terms other than the stereotypes of others.
- have high self-esteem.
- know their lives have meaning.
- make positive contributions to their families, schools, and communities.

The e-mentoring community administrator can select appropriate messages from the following examples and send the *Mentor Tip* messages to the mentors only and the *E-Community Activity* messages to the entire online mentoring community. Use these

examples to stimulate other ideas for online discussions. It is desirable that, ultimately, most discussion topics come from the mentors and protégés.





## Mentor Tip: Disability Acceptance

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on disability acceptance

People with disabilities who consider themselves successful generally accept their disabilities as simply one aspect of who they are. They do not define themselves by their disabilities. They recognize that they are not responsible for their disabilities; instead, they take responsibility for their own happiness and success. People with disabilities who responded to an online survey on this topic made the following statements:

- God makes each one of us with an ability; society creates the "dis." (adult with a visual impairment)
- My personal opinion about disabilities is that everyone is disabled. It just so happens that there is a certain group whose disabilities are more obvious than others. (high school student with mobility and visual impairments)
- Believe in who you are and what you want to achieve, and don't let anyone or anything stop you from reaching your goals. (college student with a mobility impairment).
- Sometimes you run into people who think it is extraordinary that you do what you do with a disability. The important people in your life (like your parents) expect you to earn your way in the world and be responsible just like everybody else. (college student who is blind)
- Don't allow anyone to convince you that your disability is disabling! Don't allow society to ban you from a certain profession simply because disabled individuals have traditionally avoided that field! Remember always that you and only you have control of your life. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- My mom, my grandma, and my aide at school are all responsible people and have taught me that characteristic. If you aren't responsible, you won't succeed. Not only should you take responsibility for the good things, but also for your mistakes. (young person with Muscular Dystrophy)

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## **Mentor Tip: Disability Acceptance** (continued)

- My parents helped me learn to accept responsibility for myself by treating me the same as my siblings. They gave me the same punishments and chores, and they expect me to do well in school. (high school student with speech, hearing, and mobility impairments)
- My mom gave me enough independence so that I could learn the consequences of my actions. This is how I developed good judgment. I also learned that constructive criticism is a good thing....It's how I learn to do things more efficiently the next time around. This is where mentors become a valuable resource. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- There was a teacher who opened my door to the world. She taught me to accept who I was. Early on, I began building self-confidence and self-esteem. To this day, those qualities allow me to stand up for my beliefs and to act on my own convictions. (college student with a hearing impairment)
- As people with disabilities we need to be assertive about what we need and don't need. We need to make our needs clearly, politely known. (adult with a mobility impairment)
- Do not make people feel sorry for you or pity you. Get people to view you as an able person who is capable of anything within your reach if the doors of opportunity are open. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- Clearly, disabilities can be obstacles. However, it's important to focus on obstacles that problem solving can surmount. Sometimes trade-offs do exist. I once wanted to go into biochemistry, but my lack of fine-motor skills and general distrust of lab partners made me realize that I wanted something I could do on my own—hence, history-philosophy. Admittedly, I rerouted, but for those who are determined to be biochemists and such, most obstacles can be overcome with abilities. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- We should focus on the ABILITY in disability more than the DIS. If we can do that, then we are more apt to succeed. Also, know your limits. If you don't know what you can or can't do, how do you expect other people to know? Plan for success by using more of the cans than the can'ts. (college student with mobility impairments)



## **E-Community Activity: Accepting Disability**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Accepting disability

A personal factor that has been identified as a characteristic of successful college students with disabilities is "acceptance of disability," suggesting that successful students understand the impact of their disabilities and accept them as something they must deal with in their daily life. This could apply to other challenges, such as financial limitations and family issues.

Share a challenge in your life that you have to overcome, or work around, in order to achieve success.



## Mentor Tip: Labels

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on labels

Our attitudes are reflected in the labels we use. How society labels individuals with disabilities as a group can have an impact on how young people with disabilities view themselves.

Responding to negative labels can test self-identity and self-value. Below is part of one conversation about terminology used to describe people with disabilities that took place in an online discussion of people with disabilities. These comments provide insights into how we as a society can best communicate about and with individuals who have disabilities, including the young people with whom we interact. Although specific opinions vary, they all promote using person-first language; describing a disability in a respectful, straightforward, and truthful way; and avoiding expressions that suggest that the disability implies anything beyond a specific functional limitation. Insights gained from reading these comments may be helpful as you mentor participants in our electronic community.

- The phrase "differently abled" annoys me. My belief is that there is nothing inherent in a disability that makes us better in something else. Besides, the "differently abled" term tends to evoke the "supercrip" image.
- The term "differently abled" drives me nuts. It strikes me as a phrase coined by nondisabled people who were trying to be politically correct but really had no idea what they were talking about. Some nondisabled people tend to think, also, that a term referring to a deficit, rather than a difference, is offensive to us. I don't know about everyone else, but I know I'm not offended by it. I do still prefer "disabled" to "handicapped;" however, my mom still uses "handicapped." I always tell her, "Handicaps are for bowlers and golfers."
- I really don't like the concept of being politically correct (PC). My personal guess is that PC was created by a bunch of people who felt guilty about how they treated others. Bottom line is as long as it shows respect for the person, that's cool. I prefer "person

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### **Mentor Tip: Labels** (continued)

with a disability." The point is that the person comes first and is separated from the disability.

- The problem with these names is that they're to get us all into one group for convenience's sake. But for each of us, there is a term that's true. I'm blind, for example. If you say I'm blind, I say, "Yes I am." But physically challenged, disabled, handicapped....hmmmm.
- The world, as I know it today, thrives on labels. And this is one area where the world isn't prejudiced. We've got geek, nerd, grunge, cool, old, stupid, dude, poor, rich, straight, queer, black, Yankee, hick, redneck, deaf, dumb, etc., etc. It seems that if there weren't labels no one on this planet would know how to talk about someone else.
- A couple of conclusions that I've come to are these. First, we "label" things so that we CAN talk about them. That is the purpose of language—to identify people, places, things, ideas, and feelings. If we had no term to describe a person who has a disability, we would not have the Americans with Disabilities Act, this discussion list, or any of the other access instruments that we've all seen develop in the past several years. I don't think the problem is necessarily in the language, but rather in the negative feelings that may be behind the language. Humans have to communicate, and we do it most often through language. Identifying thoughts, objects, and even people as clearly as possible is a good thing. Using language to discriminate or be cruel is a bad thing.
- If people feel it's necessary to describe me, I prefer my name and "who is physically challenged." Too many people associate Cerebral Palsy with mental disabilities (which irritates me!).



## E-Community Activity: Trying New Things

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Trying new things

You can't learn about all of your abilities and interests if you don't try new things. Cook something new. Learn about a famous person. Plant a garden. Learn to play a musical instrument. Paint a picture. Write a poem. Join a club. Learn to sew. Plan a party.

Tell us about something you tried and then developed an interest in.





## E-Community Activity: Identifying Your Likes and Dislikes

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Identifying your likes and dislikes

You will spend a long time in school and at work. Building on things that you like to do and learn about is one step toward a fulfilling life. Give some thought to your likes and dislikes. Think about how you would complete each partial sentence below.

1. One thing I really like to do is:  
One thing I really dislike doing is:
2. One activity I really like at school is:  
One activity I don't like at school is:
3. The subject I like most at school is:  
The subject I like least at school is:
4. One activity I really like for recreation is:  
A recreational activity I don't like is:
5. Something I like to do with my friends is:  
One thing I don't like doing with my friends is:
6. An activity I like to do when I'm alone is:  
One activity I don't like to do alone is:

Share with the group a job you might enjoy because of your likes and dislikes.



## Mentor Tip: Incorrect Assumptions

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on incorrect assumptions

Successful people accept their disabilities as one aspect of who they are. They do not deny the existence of limitations, but they also do not allow their disabilities to define who they are. An important part of this self-awareness is learning to effectively deal with negative stereotypes and misunderstandings. The following comments were part of an online discussion about assumptions regarding people with disabilities, the topic for our next discussion in our e-community. They may provide you with valuable insights as you participate in our discussion.

- Having Cerebral Palsy, I find almost everyone assumes that I am mentally disabled, too. I get annoyed with this. For a long time, I yearned to "fit in." But young people today want to stand out by coloring their hair and by wearing the "in" thing. I realize that I'm already there, and I accept my uniqueness. (adult with Cerebral Palsy)
- People make a lot of false assumptions about the disabled. For example, they assume that just because I am blind I am not able to get around on my own. Someone will get hold of me and I don't have any idea who they are or where they are taking me. They assume that I don't know where I am going just because I can't see. (college student who is blind)
- I like to assume that people are just trying to help. People, for instance, tell me when it is OK to cross the street. Some may think I can't do it without their help. Others may just think that they might as well tell me the light is green since they happen to be there. This is like when someone helps someone else carry heavy shopping bags up the steps—not because they think the other person can't do it, but just because they want to help. (adult who is blind)
- I choose what people I want to take the time to explain my disability to. I communicate with an electronic device, so it would take all of my energy to explain it to everyone who looks cross-eyed at me. (adult with a mobility and speech impairment)

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## Mentor Tip: Incorrect Assumptions (continued)

- Human nature is to fear what you do not understand. This fear affects the way we are treated. My disability is Tourette's Syndrome, as well as some symptoms of various other disorders, including coordination problems. People assume that since I obsess and make facial movements and sounds that they consider strange, I am some sort of a freak of nature that must be avoided. Once people get to know me, they overcome these hang-ups. (high school student with Tourette's Syndrome)
- A professor once told me that I probably couldn't see the board very well from where I was sitting. Frankly, I can't see the board from wherever I sit. (adult who is blind)
- When people talk down to me, I usually ask some rather extreme question like "Do you think I am brain-dead?" Most people say that this is not a very good response. However, I think it is the way to go. (college student who is blind)
- Last year, I went on a cruise. One night, I went up on deck to write in my journal. A couple walked by and sat next to me. The husband asked, "Is this English?" pointing to my chicken scratches. I said "Yes!" He looked at his wife and whispered, "Mentally retarded." Instead of getting mad, I started to talk to him and his wife. He and his wife were from the Bay Area. I told him I was from the Bay Area as well and working for Intel. I think they got the message that the label they put on me wasn't true. (adult with Cerebral Palsy)
- I read lips and wear hearing aids. Sometimes people exaggerate their lip movements to the point where I can't understand them at all. Or sometimes they speak so slowly I fall asleep! Also, sometimes when I go tell someone that I'm deaf, they start signing to me. I'm sign language illiterate so that doesn't do me much good. But people are proud of their sign language skills, so I'm mostly amused and gently tell them thanks, but they just need to talk in their accustomed way and I'll understand them just fine—most of the time. But if a man has a droopy mustache, heaven help me! (adult with hearing impairment)
- The more people have positive interactions with a person with a disability, the higher the likelihood that they will forget that he/she is a person with a disability and think of him/her as a person first. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)



## **E-Community Activity: Dealing with Incorrect Assumptions**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Dealing with incorrect assumptions

Successful people accept their disabilities as one aspect of who they are. They do not deny the existence of limitations, but they also do not allow their disabilities to define who they are. An important part of this self-awareness is learning to effectively deal with negative stereotypes and misunderstandings related to their disabilities.

What is an assumption someone made about you because of your disability that was untrue? How did you feel? How did you handle the situation? Would you handle the situation in the same way if it happened again? If not, how would you handle it?



## E-Community Activity: Describing Your Disability

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Describing your disability

Self-knowledge can be reflected in how you describe yourself. For example, the way you describe your disability may suggest that you consider yourself strong and resilient, helpless and worthless, passive and dependent, or creative and productive.

During a rainy afternoon in a small lounge in McCarty Hall at the University of Washington, a group of high school students with disabilities viewed a collection of videos about people with disabilities. Their job was to come up with guidelines for context, style, and format for a new video on computer technology for people with disabilities. After showing one program that featured a boy riding a horse who used crutches to walk, a young woman who is blind suggested:

- I think we should make a list of words that we will never use in a DO-IT video. "Special," "heartwarming," and "inspirational" go to the top of the list. Why are kids with disabilities any more or less "special" than other kids? And why did the announcer say it was "inspirational" to see a kid with a disability ride a horse when we assume other kids ride horses just to have fun?

What words do you prefer not be used in describing your disability or people with disabilities as a group?



## E-Community Activity: Dealing with Rude People

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Dealing with rude people

You can't prevent people, with or without disabilities, from being rude. But you do have control of how you respond. You can develop a positive way of thinking about and dealing with the inevitable situations where you are labeled in a negative way. You can learn to separate your knowledge of the truth about yourself from the way you are described by others. In the following statements, individuals with disabilities articulate how these strategies play out in their lives.

- Yes, it's not nice when someone walks up to you and says, bluntly, "Hey, what's wrong with you?" But remember that this person is curious. My experience has been that if you tell them about your disability, they are sometimes actually interested....If you educate one person about your disability, dispel one rumor, isn't it worth the anger at the bluntness of the question?
- It is not impossible, but it is difficult to teach people to be more sensitive and understanding to how we feel when they give us different labels.
- I don't blame anybody if they don't treat me the way I want to be treated, because I know that they are not in my shoes. They can't see or feel what I see or feel, because they don't experience what I do, and this is their disability. I have so many goals to achieve and dreams to seize, I have no time to stop and hear what they think I am. What they think of me is none of my business.

Others may view you differently than what you know to be true about yourself. The ability to know and value yourself even when others suggest otherwise is key to leading a successful life.

If someone describes you or your disability in a way that you do not like, what are some positive ways to handle the situation?



## E-Community Activity: Thinking About Language

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Thinking about language

An interesting online conversation about labels emerged within a group of young people and adults with hearing impairments.

- As a hearing-impaired individual, I always found it uncomfortable when people would say I'm "deaf." I prefer "hard of hearing" or "hearing-impaired" over "deaf."
- I used to say I was "hard of hearing" and hated to be called "deaf." After losing more hearing, I became legally deaf. Even though I can talk and sing (badly), I am deaf.
- I prefer the term "hearing impaired" because people don't react as badly as they do when the term "deaf" is used. When I tell someone I'm deaf, he/she acts as though I can't communicate at all. But if I say I'm hearing impaired, people think I can communicate, but I just have some trouble. Some people associate the word "deaf" with being dumb, even if they don't mean to.
- "Deaf" simplifies things for me. The only problem that I've encountered over this terminology is that somebody heard me wrong and told another person that I was "death!"
- I became deaf as an adult and in the process went through a period when I was "hard of hearing," meaning if I really concentrated I could still get information from sounds. Then I became totally deaf and now rely completely on my vision and other senses for all my information. I am "deaf" and feel that gives a clear picture of me and how to communicate with me (i.e., no matter how loud you speak, I am still deaf....GRIN!)....The problem I have with the term "hearing impaired" is that it implies that hearing is still there and if we work hard enough it might kick in....It also labels me impaired, which "I ain't." I'm just deaf. The hearing isn't impaired either. It just isn't there.
- I sometimes forget I am deaf because the silence has become so "normal," and on those days I am startled to be labeled.

How do you like people to describe your disability? If wording is important to you, what can you do to let others know?



## E-Community Activity: Responding to Labels

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Responding to labels

Read the following email discussion between people with disabilities.

- Does anybody find that people who aren't disabled spend way too much time thinking up new terms to call "us?" In the '70s and earlier most of us were called "cripples." That seemed a little too cold, so throughout the '80s we were called "handicapped" or "disabled." But now we've gained the phrase "physically challenged." Do you guys feel any different when any of these names are used?
- When someone says, "What disease do YOU have?" it hurts like hell, no matter how much self-worth I have.
- No, it doesn't hurt or change anything when I'm called "handicapped," "physically challenged," or "disabled."
- I hate the word "cripple." I also don't like the word "normal" when it is used to describe people who don't have disabilities. Does this mean "abnormal" is the opposite of "normal?" I never thought of myself as "abnormal"—disabled, malfunctioning, or handicapped perhaps, but never "abnormal."
- An insight that people who get carried away with labeling need to catch is that we are all disabled, whether our disability is being hair growth impaired, having a crippled tolerance perspective, or just being blind to the feelings of fellow travelers.
- I believe everybody has a disability of one type or another. I'm right in there with everybody else. Look for people's strengths, not their weaknesses.
- I think that as with any minority group, there is an unfortunate tendency to assume that all disabled people are like the one or few that an outsider knows. Examples I have faced include assumptions that I must be cold, tired, incapable of comprehending, starved for touching (usually results in a pat on the head), uninterested in athletic events in which I cannot compete myself, destined for an early grave, financially needy, desirous of being approached by strangers, without appreciation of humor....I could go on ad nauseam.

How do different labels for your disability affect or not affect you?





## E-Community Activity: Building on Strengths

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Building on strengths

Just like everyone else's, your life is a unique mix of strengths and challenges, abilities and disabilities. It is important to regularly take inventory of your strengths and limitations as you pursue a self-determined life. Then you can develop strategies for success that build on your strengths in your weaker areas, and develop strategies to minimize their impact.

What is one of your strengths and one of your challenges in completing schoolwork? Do you have an eye for good design? An excellent memory? A passion for history? Are you challenged by mathematics? Uninterested in business? Unable to manipulate small objects?



## **E-Community Activity: Redefining Limitations as Strengths**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Redefining limitations as strengths

Determining your strengths and limitations is not as black-and-white as it sounds. Sometimes, as noted by one teen who is a wheelchair user and quoted below, what others consider a weakness in your life you can actually choose to redefine as a strength.

- A characteristic I think is a strength is my ability to worry a lot. Some consider this a weakness. I do in fact worry a lot. I worry about something that I hear about or see or even read about. Then it sometimes comes out as a big issue that I and others around me can address together as a group. Worrying about something is like saying that you care about what the outcome of a certain situation could be.

Describe a characteristic that you have that could be considered a weakness by some people but, looked at another way, could be considered a strength in school or employment.



## E-Community Activity: Exploring Learning Strengths and Challenges

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Exploring learning strengths and challenges

Everyone has learning strengths and challenges; each person learns best in a unique way. Think about how you would complete the following sentences, considering factors that relate to you, your teacher, and your environment.

- I learn best when I ...  
I have difficulty learning when I ...  
An example of what I can do to help myself learn is ...
- I learn best when my teacher ...  
I have difficulty learning when my teacher ...  
An example of what I can do to help my teacher help me learn is ...
- I learn best in an environment where ...  
I have difficulty learning in an environment where ...  
An example of how I can create a positive learning environment for myself is ...

Think about your level of strength regarding the following characteristics.

- paying attention
- processing/understanding what I read
- processing/understanding what I hear
- remembering things
- expressing myself in writing
- expressing myself by speaking
- showing what I know
- physical strength
- ability to manipulate objects
- visual ability
- hearing ability

What is one of these characteristics that you consider a limitation of yours? How can you minimize its impact or even turn it into a strength?



## **E-Community Activity: Taking Inventory of Your Learning Style**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Taking inventory of your learning style

One aspect of who you are is your basic learning style. Knowing your learning style can help you understand yourself and how you can succeed.

Access the following website to explore your learning style:

[http://www.metamath.com/multiple/multiple\\_choice\\_questions.html](http://www.metamath.com/multiple/multiple_choice_questions.html)

What were the results? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?



## **E-Community Activity: Finding Careers That Use Your Skills**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Finding careers that use your skills

Access the website at

<http://online.onetcenter.org/>

Select "Skills Search," and complete the skills inventory by choosing skills you want to be part of your future career. Read the results.

Research two occupations suggested in the results of the skills inventory. Consider how interested you are in pursuing these fields. Find out what skills and personality traits of yours will help you pursue these occupations. Think about what challenges you might face.

Tell us one thing you learned from completing the activity about careers that suit you.



## E-Community Activity: Matching Skills with Careers

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Matching skills with careers

The Internet provides a rich collection of resources to prepare for a career. To match your skills with possible careers, access the website at

<http://www.iseek.org/sv/12403.jsp>

Rate how important it is for you to use specific skills in your future career.

Tell us what occupations were suggested as good matches for you. Do you agree? Why or why not?



## E-Community Activity: Identifying Your Career Interests and Work Style

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Identifying your career interests and work style

Imagine going to work each day and saying "I want to" instead of "I have to." This can happen if your job matches your interests and work style. The Princeton Review Quiz will help you find out what these are.

Access the website at

<http://www.princetonreview.com/cte/quiz>

Select "Take the Princeton Review Quiz." Read each pair of statements, and select the one that most describes you. As you make choices, assume all jobs are of equal pay and prestige. Click "CONTINUE" after each page.

The results will give you a short description of your career interests and work style. Do these descriptions seem accurate to you? Why or why not?



## E-Community Activity: Healthy Self-Esteem

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Healthy self-esteem

"Self-esteem" refers to judgements about yourself. If you don't like yourself very much and feel like most of your actions are stupid, you have low self-esteem; being teased and criticized a lot may contribute to poor self-esteem. If you think you are better than other people and are considered conceited, your self-esteem may be too high; you may feel that any time something goes wrong it must be someone else's fault. If you basically like yourself and you consider yourself to have a fairly typical mix of strengths and limitations, you probably have pretty healthy self-esteem.

What advice would you give to a friend who has poor self-esteem, in part because he or she is teased by other students?





## E-Community Activity: Valuing Yourself

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Valuing yourself

Think about how the following advice from young people and adults who have disabilities does or does not apply to your life. Then share advice you have for members of our e-community.

- Always remember that it's OK to be unusual.
- Don't be afraid to express and stand up for what you believe just because it may be different from everyone else's beliefs.
- Trust in who you are. No one can take that from you. If you don't stand up for yourself, you'll get trampled.
- Learn to think for yourself and not follow the "herd." Be tough; be assertive; do not get discouraged. Accept life as it is, NOT as you would like it to be.
- Live in the world of reality, but allow yourself moments of meditation and reflection on the nature of things. Whenever possible, enjoy good music, good food, good companionship.
- Remind yourself that every life makes a difference. Make as large a difference as you can.
- Do not think of yourself as more "special" than other people. You may have a few more hurdles, and higher hurdles, to deal with than others, but life is learning to clear the hurdles no matter what they are. If you want something, earn it like everybody else.
- Never, never (did I say never?) use your disability as an excuse for not doing something. Remember, there is a whole world out there ready and willing to make excuses for you, and if you yourself make an excuse, others will happily accept the excuse. But every time such an excuse is given and accepted, you've limited what those around you will be prepared to let you do.



## **E-Community Activity: Learning to Value Yourself**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Learning to value yourself

To be a self-determined adult, you must understand and value yourself.

How could you help a younger child learn to value himself?



## E-Community Activity: Affirming Self-Value

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Affirming Self-Value

Some positive statements of successful people who value themselves are listed below. Read each statement and think about your level of agreement about whether it applies to you.

- I take good care of myself physically.
- I take good care of myself emotionally.
- I admire the strengths that come from my uniqueness.
- I accept myself.
- I have high self-esteem.
- I have dignity and self-respect.
- I have a sense of purpose in my life.
- I trust my own judgment.
- I make a positive contribution to my family, school, and community.
- I feel comfortable around people with different characteristics.
- I respect other people.

Describe yourself (age, interests, personality traits, abilities and disabilities) using only affirmative (positive) statements, with a focus on qualities you like and/or value about yourself.



## E-Community Activity: Affirming Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Affirming success

Some positive affirmations from successful people with disabilities are listed below. Read each statement and think about your level of agreement with it.

- I know my strengths and challenges.
- I know what is important to me.
- I know what I need versus what I prefer.
- I know what options I have.
- I am an independent thinker.
- I am optimistic about my future.
- I care about my school, my community, and other people.
- I act on my own convictions.
- I recognize and respect my rights and responsibilities.
- I can resist negative peer pressure.
- I am comfortable with my disability.
- I take my disability into account when I set goals and develop strategies, but I realize that it is only a small part of my identity.
- I can deal with the negative stereotypes of others in a constructive way.

Share with us an additional affirmation statement that is true about you now or that you would like to be true about yourself in the future.