

From the Learning Disabilities Association of America:

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How College Students with Learning Disabilities Can Advocate for Themselves

By Linda G. Tessler

Through grade school and high school, your parents and your special education teachers fought for you. With your interests at heart, they spoke up on your behalf, helping you get the services you needed to thrive with a learning disability.

Now it is time for you to learn how to advocate for yourself, to support yourself, and to reach your full potential in college, where there are large classes, less instruction with professors, and the expectation that you will manage your own study time. You must speak up! Here are some suggestions for easing the transition from depending on others to being your own advocate.

1. Know Your Rights

- Remember that you are not asking for a favor; you are asking for a right that is guaranteed by the federal government.
- As a person with learning disabilities, you are entitled to receive certain accommodations. In fact, the Americans with Disabilities Act says no discrimination should take place against anybody who is disabled. This includes persons with learning disabilities.
- Colleges are required to allow you an equal opportunity for success. Your job is to work hard to take advantage of that opportunity.

2. Know Yourself

- The list of accommodations that the other students with learning disabilities have received is not a shopping list from which you can choose.
- You are entitled only to the help that allows you to use your accommodating techniques in order to overcome your disability.

3. Develop Your Support System from the Beginning

- As soon as possible, or before school begins, make yourself official, register with the college's Office for Students with Disabilities. Bring required documentation describing your learning disability to the appointment.
- Find out where the tutoring and additional services are, introduce yourself, and create your supports.
- Make friends in class. Other students are excellent supports.
- Schedule an appointment to meet with your professors to discuss your needs. Be able to explain what kind of perceptual difference you have which inhibits your learning. Speak in terms of strengths and weaknesses.
- Professors want to help responsible students. From the first day in class be dependable. Attend all classes, arrive on time, and complete work by its due date. There's no substitute for hard work.