

5 PRINCIPLES OF SELF-DETERMINATION

Topic

In this video, BJ Stasio and Carol Blessing offer a brief introduction to self-determination. Self-determination is an idea that supports a person in choosing and setting their own goals and to take action, especially with regard to life-defining areas such as employment, education, community living, meaningful contribution and quality of life. True self-determination gives the person the ultimate authority over the decisions (large and small) that affect their life.

In the disability service system, the concept of self-determination is a formal program a person may choose to access. Although the Self-Determination program is built around the basic ideals of self-determination, there are specific rules and regulations associated with the program that a person must follow. BJ underscores that when this is the case, the system, rather than the person, has the ultimate authority.

Relevance of Topic to System-Involved Youth

- It is important that young people returning to community life after being placed in restrictive environments are given the support they need to take charge of their lives.
- People who are afforded a self-determined life experience a higher quality of life and higher personal satisfaction.
- There is a positive correlation between self-determination and better post-secondary outcomes, employment, independent living, and community inclusion.

Relevance to Youth with Disabilities

- The mantra for self-determination is “nothing about me without me,” which emphasizes that individuals are the authority for and in their own lives.
- Young people with disabilities benefit from supports that encourage personal authority as these experiences build skills and create opportunities for growth and development.
- Self-determination is part of a disability rights movement that demands equitable access to resources, fair treatment, and opportunities to live a good life, the same as anyone else.

Recommendations for Systems Change

- Listen without judgement.
- Make sure the person has a good person-centered plan that identifies their interests, skills, hopes for the future and drives the support and service they receive.
- Offer real choice. Real choice is asking, listening, and responding to someone. Most things a person would like for their life are not pre-formatted in a drop-down menu in a computer program.

Questions to Consider

- How are the policies, rules, and procedures you use helping people to be self-determined?



- How do you support a young person's authority to exercise choice in their life, and in the supports and services they receive?
- What strategies are you using to help youth plan for their future? Do they build on the person's strengths and hopes for the future?

Learn More

- [The Center for Self-Determination](#)
- [Association of University Centers on Disability \(AUCD\)](#)

Presenter Information

BJ Stasio is the President of the Board of Directors of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS). He has been employed by the New York State Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (NYS OPWDD) for over 20 years, working on person-centered planning, voting issues, and self-determination training and education. Additionally, he has served on numerous boards in Western NY, and has a non-profit organization, Buffalo Racin', that gets people with disabilities involved in 5K races. BJ has represented the voices of self-advocates across New York State during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Carol Blessing is a senior extension associate with the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University's ILR School where she leads systems impact projects aimed at supporting the full inclusion of people with disabilities in typical community life. She developed the landmark [Citizen-Centered Leadership online series](#), an international leadership development theory-to-practice program. Carol is the Training Coordinator for the Y-ReCONNECTS project, working closely with youth and professional Reentry Ambassadors who serve on country level teams.

