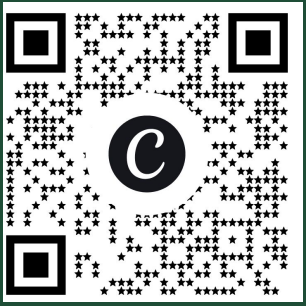


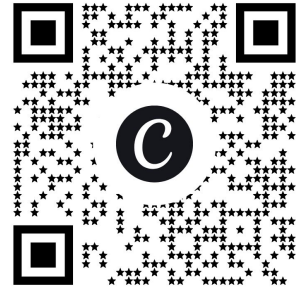
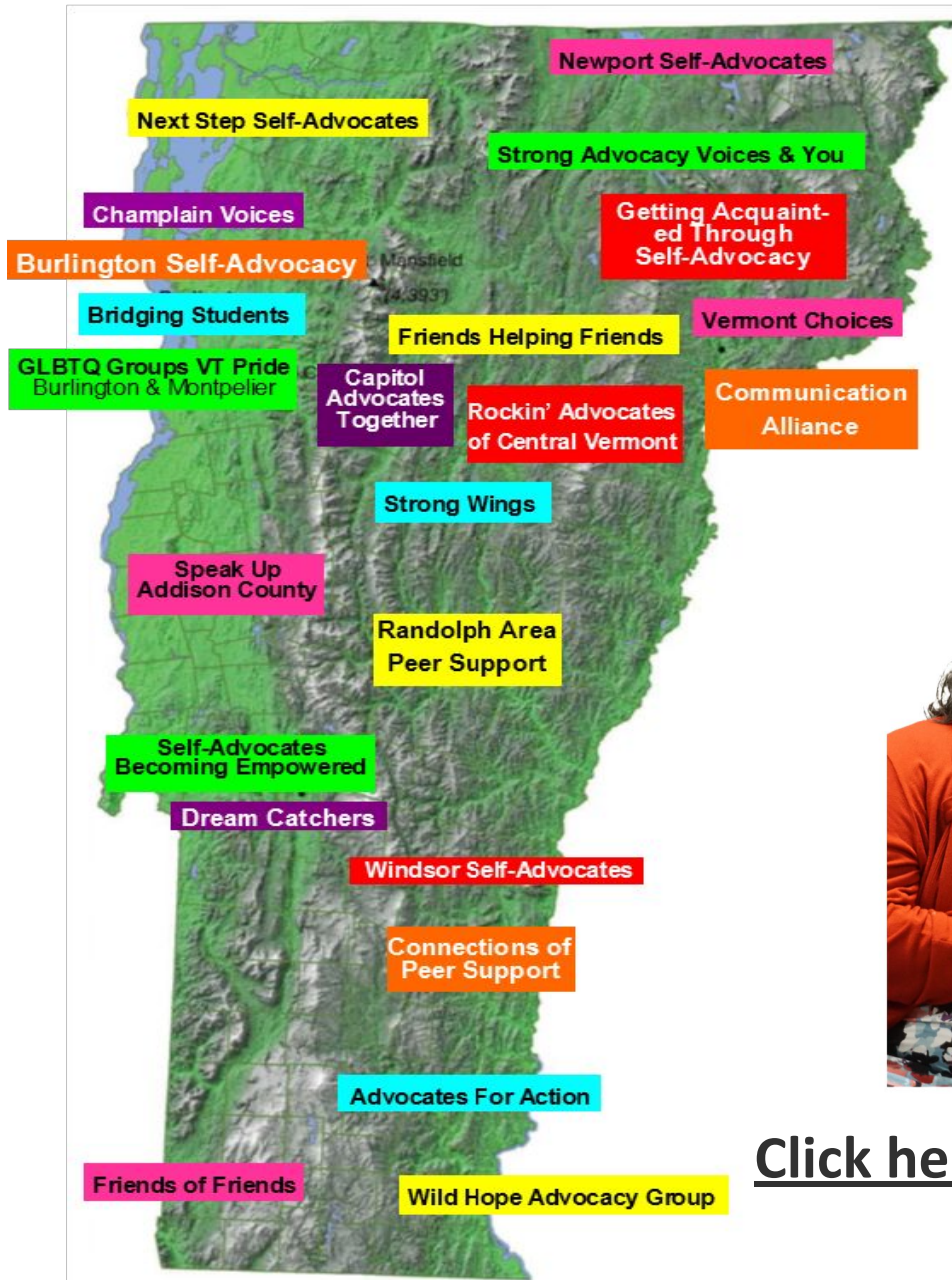


The First Time I Spoke Up

Creating Firsts That Build Self-Advocacy

Green Mountain Self-Advocates Peer Trainers





[Click here for Fact Sheet about Green Mountain Self-Advocates](#)

Meet a Few GMSA Peer Trainers



**Ocean
Streeter**



**Thad
Dutil**



**Tim
Ditchcos**

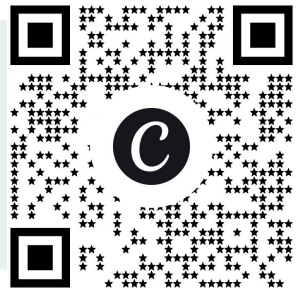


**Sean
Zapolski**



**Patrick
Sumner**

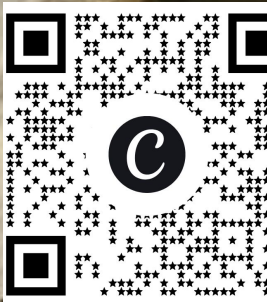
Why we care about teaching high school students



What You Will Take Away Today

Practical tools you can use to train paraprofessionals and direct support staff to help students:

- have a voice
- make real choices
- try new things
- take the lead in their lives

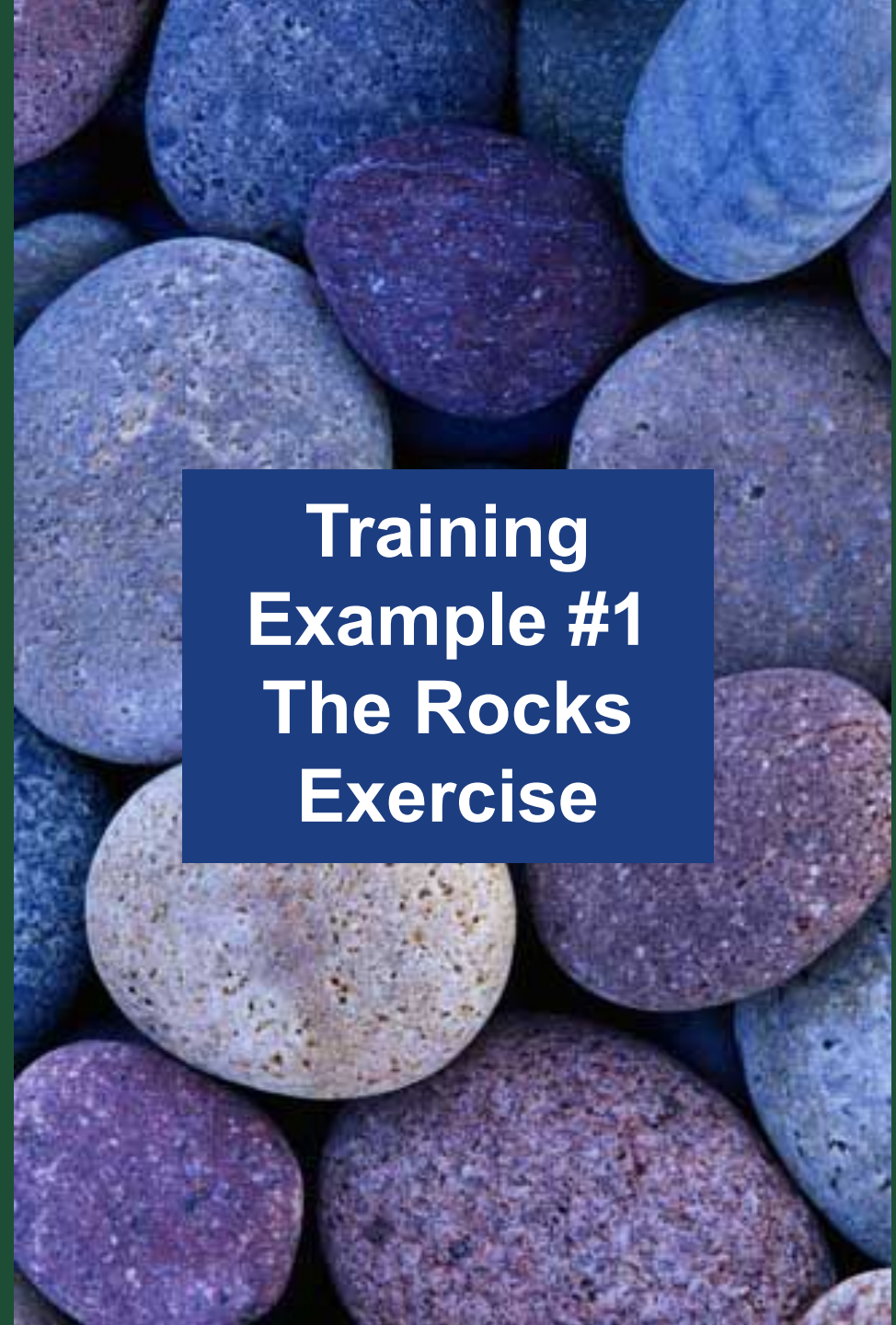


We have been collecting stories and comments from adults with disabilities. These are examples of the words and actions people face every day. Thanks for listening.

What kind of myths or wrong ideas did you hear about people with disabilities?

What is life really like for these Vermonters with disabilities?

**Training
Example #1
The Rocks
Exercise**



Some people say having a disability is a burden. We encourage people to be proud of who they are, and that includes having a disability.

The real burden is the words and actions of others toward us. That is what weighs us down.



**Training
Example #1
The Rocks
Exercise**

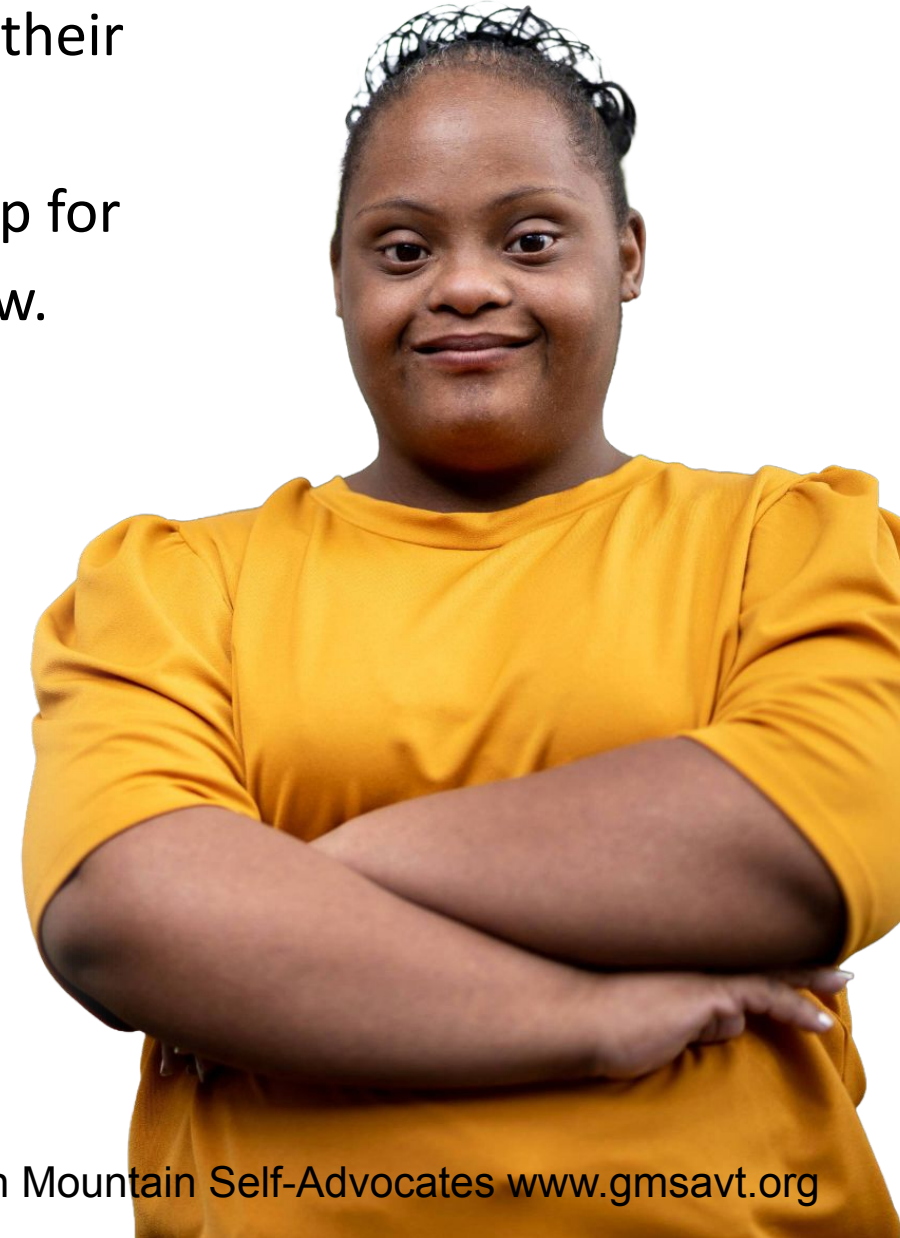
Turning the Big "No" into a "Yes"

When someone says “no,” students need to practice making their case. Teach staff how to role-play these situations with their students. Students can build confidence and learn to speak up for themselves when someone says "no" to trying something new.

Make sure your students understand that it is a role-play.

Sample Questions a challenger can ask a student:

- "Can you really do that?"
- "Can you give me an example?"
- "When did you last do that?"
- "What makes you good at it?"
- "What's the hardest part of doing that?"
- "How did you learn to do that?"
- "What if it doesn't go right?"



What could
“assume that I can”
look like in an
IEP meeting,
classroom,
job experience, or
transition plan?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qLCjgfJbol&t=1s>

Supporting Students to Make Their Own Decisions

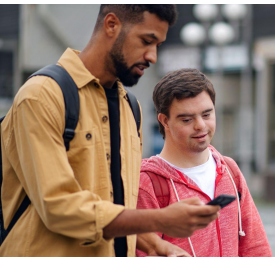
How to Answer Questions Without Telling Students What to Do



Give information about our choices
without telling us what you think we should do

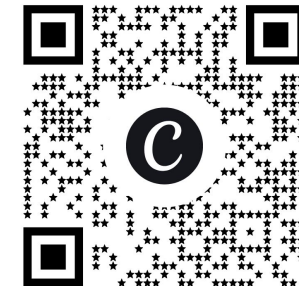
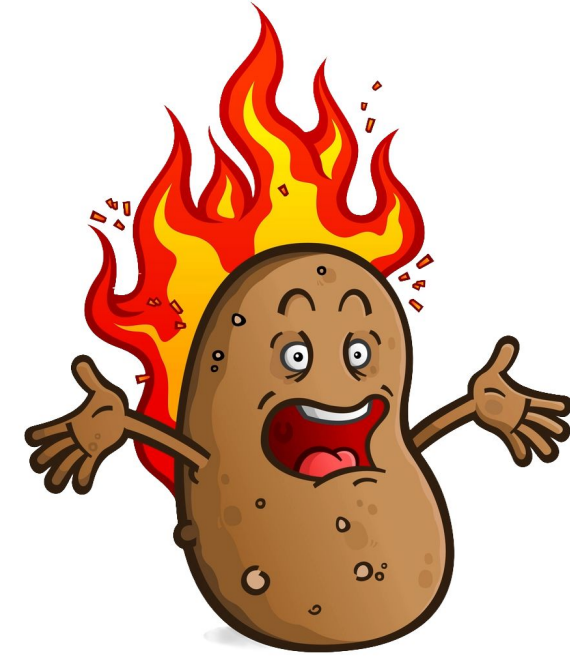


Help us understand
what might happen with each choice



Ask what matters to us
what is important in our life

Support our decision
even if YOU would choose something different



Supporting Students to Make Their Own Decisions

How to Answer Questions Without Telling Students What to Do



Role Play: Hot Potato Exercise

Watch for:

- Reassuring the person that their question is a good one
- Asking questions to get them involved
- Checking for more questions
- **Resisting the temptation to give an opinion**

Information Questions - “What is...?”



**Keep it simple.
Answer the question,
then ask one back.**

A student asks:

“What is a job coach?”

SAY

“Someone who helps you learn your job and get comfortable at work.”

ASK

“What could a job coach help you with?”

“How Do I...” Questions



Give information, but ask questions to get them involved right away.

A student asks:

“How do I get a job?”

ASK

“Is there a job you’re interested in?”

OR

“What have you tried so far?”

“What Do You Think” Questions - Asking for your opinion



They're asking for your opinion. Help them find their own instead.

A student asks:

“Should I go to college or get a job?”

SAY

“Some people go to college, some work first, some do both.”

ASK

“What do you think? What's important to you?”

Personal Questions - Asking about your life



**They usually want to know what's "normal."
Keep it about them,
not your story.**

A student asks:

"Did you go to college?"

SAY

"That's something for you to figure out for yourself."

ASK

"What do you want to do after high school?"

What Presuming Competence Means

Starting with the belief that a student can learn, communicate, make choices, and grow when given the right opportunities and support.



It does NOT mean

Pretending a student doesn't have a disability or doesn't need support.

It is not "every student can do everything if we just believe in them."



It DOES mean

We don't decide what a student cannot learn or do before giving them real chances to try, with good instruction, accommodations, support, and time.

What to Do and Say (1 of 2)

Instead of...

Doing it for the student because it's faster

Assuming the student doesn't understand

Stepping in right away when a student struggles

Making choices for them

Asking only yes/no questions

Talking to the staff instead of the student

Speaking for the student

DO

Give the student time to try first.

Explain it another way and check for understanding.

Wait. Let the student problem-solve first.

Offer meaningful choices.

Ask questions that invite an opinion.

Speak directly to the student.

Give time and a way to communicate.

SAY

"Give it a try. I'm here if you need help."

"Let me explain that another way."

"What do you think you could try next?"

"What do you want to do?"

"What do you think? What would you choose?"

"I want to hear what you think."

"Take your time. I'll wait."

What to Do and Say (2 of 2)

Instead of...

Assuming silence means nothing to say

Avoiding challenging activities

Preventing mistakes

Helping automatically

Deciding the student's goals

Focusing mostly on deficits

Making decisions without the student

DO

Give communication supports & time to process

Provide support so the student can take part.

Create safe chances to try and try again.

Ask before helping.

Help the student name their own goals.

Notice strengths, interests, and progress.

Include the student in meetings and planning.

SAY

"You can tell me, point, type, use your device, or show me."

"Let's figure out what support will help you do this."

"It's okay if it doesn't work the first time."

"Would you like help, or do you want to try it yourself?"

"What is important to you?"

"You figured that out. What helped you do it?"

"This meeting is about you. What do you want people to know?"

Habits That Make a Big Difference



Wait longer

Silence does not always mean “I don’t know.”



Ask before helping

Support should build independence, not dependence.



Give real choices

Self-determination grows with practice.



Teach how to ask for help

Knowing when, how, and who to ask is a skill.



Allow reasonable risk

Protecting from every mistake protects from learning.



Talk to the student

Not about them. Start with the student.

Ask yourself before stepping in, making a decision, or saying “They can’t do that.”

“Does this student truly need me to do this for them, or could I support them to do more of it themselves?”

“Would I make this same decision if this student did not have a disability?”

