

“We’re All Leaders!”

Kentucky
Peer Support
Network
Project

Modules on Leadership for Students with Significant Disabilities

Throughout middle and high school, most students have opportunities to serve in leadership roles within the classroom, clubs, sport teams, and the community. Being a leader can be fulfilling—it places students in valued roles in the eyes of others and instills a sense of pride and accomplishment. It also has long-term benefits. Leadership experiences can help people get into college, find jobs, and become successful, contributing members of society.

For students with significant disabilities, leadership does not come quite so easily. Perhaps the primary barrier here is the limited opportunities we provide students with disabilities to serve in leadership roles. Rarely are students with significant disabilities thought of as having important contributions to make—and skills to learn—by serving as a leader. Yet leadership can be crucial in developing self-determination (the ability to set important goals, develop plans to reach those goals, and keep track of your progress toward achieving them; Test et al., 2005). Leadership qualities are important for everyone.



By completing this module, you will learn how you can support students with significant disabilities to develop their leadership skills, as well as how to develop your own leadership skills. Everyone has the potential to be a leader. Sometimes we just have to show each other how! You may choose to read the specific section that addresses your role (as teacher, student, or parent) or choose to read about *all* of the roles—each perspective is equally important.

What is leadership?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Leadership is:

- A position as a leader of a group, organization, etc.
- The time when a person holds the position of leader
- The power or ability to lead other people
- The capacity to lead

What does this mean for students? Do they have to be the president of a club to be considered a leader? Can having a positive influence on others be a form of leadership too? Can leadership be demonstrated in multiple ways?

As part of the *Natural Supports Project*, Carter and colleagues (2010) asked youth and young adults with disabilities what leadership meant to them. They described leadership as:

- ⇒ Having an open mind
- ⇒ Wanting to make a difference
- ⇒ Mobilizing others
- ⇒ Being trustworthy
- ⇒ Putting others first
- ⇒ Sticking to your principles
- ⇒ Overcoming stigma
- ⇒ Working well with others
- ⇒ Knowing yourself
- ⇒ Advocating for others

And many more traits! You can help youth with disabilities develop these qualities. This module will give you examples of how to do that.

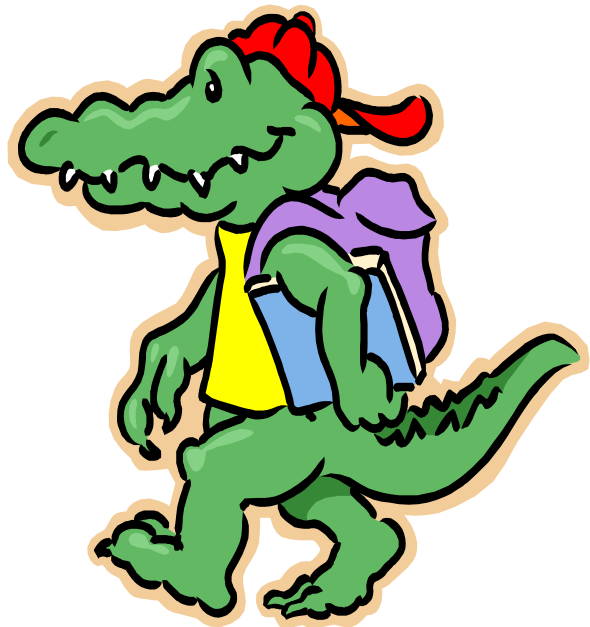


References

Carter, E. W., Moss, C. K., Swedeen, B., Walter, M., & Zimmerman, L. (2010). *Leadership: a guide for promoting leadership skills in youth with disabilities*. Madison, WI: Natural Supports Project, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Available at <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/pdfs/YouthLeadershipTipSheet.pdf>

Test, D. W., Fowler, C. H., Wood, W. M., Brewer, D. M., & Eddy, S. (2005). A conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*, 43-54.

Now you can
move on to
the modules!



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