

Learning the Ropes: Employment Self- Advocacy



2025 Alabama APSE Conference
Association for Persons Supporting Employment First



**THE ALABAMA DISABILITIES
ADVOCACY PROGRAM**

Presenters

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What is CAP?

- The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is part of the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system
- CAP provides **free** legal advocacy services for people with disabilities
- The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) is the membership organization for both P&A systems and CAPs

WHAT DOES CAP DO?

- Explain your rights and responsibilities
- Provide advocacy or legal assistance
- Answer your questions about Vocational Rehab Services (VRS)
- Helps to resolve misunderstandings with VRS

CAP is not part of VR - CAP is a program of ADAP



How can ADAP help?



The Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program provides:

- High School/Transition Advocacy (Pre-ETS – Pre-employment Transition Services)
 - Advocacy assistance with Vocational Rehab Services (VRS)
 - Identifies and removes barriers to employment for SSI/SSDI recipients
 - Information on Work Incentives
 - Guidance and self-advocacy tools regarding school / employment accommodations
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The background of the slide is a close-up photograph of water with numerous small, concentric ripples. The water is a deep blue color, and the ripples create a complex, organic pattern of light and dark blue tones. The lighting appears to be coming from the upper left, creating highlights on the crests of the ripples and shadows in the troughs.

Am I a good self-advocate?

No pessimist ever sailed to an uncharted land
- *Helen Keller*

Using your sea legs



What does it mean to be a good self advocate?

- Know Yourself
- Be Involved
- Know Your Rights
- Stay Connected
- Be Organized
- Be Patient & Proactive
- Ask for Help

Self advocacy means understanding yourself

Know yourself

Needs

Job Goal

Timeline



Be involved

A man in a dark shirt is working on the side of a white boat in a large workshop. The boat has several circular portholes. The workshop has a high ceiling with wooden beams and large windows. Another boat is visible on the right side of the frame.

Know

Know Your Needs

Express

Express Your Rights

Ask

Ask Questions

Know your rights



Has the agency given me a copy of my rights?

If not, did I ask for them?

Do I know what to do when someone says no?

Do I know who to contact if I have questions about my rights?

Know your rights

Eligibility

Accommodations

IPE (Individual Plan of
Employment)

Case Closure

Stay connected

Communicate often with all of
your VR team members

Show up to all appointments and
meetings on time, reschedule
asap if you can't attend

Request necessary
accommodations to participate in
the meeting – in writing



Be organized



Prepare for your meetings
and calls with your VR team



Read everything you are
asked to sign and get copies
of all documents



Save your emails

Prepare for Meetings

- Prioritize: write down your three biggest concerns before a meeting
- Review communications you've had about your issue
- Keep a folder or notebook with important documents
- Consider the other party's perspective
- Identify some common areas of agreement
- Prepare possible solutions for your issue



Participate in Meetings

- Take notes
- Listen, even if you disagree
- Use clarifying questions
- Don't be afraid to ask for something to be repeated
- Request a list of all participants in the meeting and their role
- Ask for a break if you need it



Be patient

Allow time for the VRS team or employer to respond via phone or email

Stay calm if you disagree with the outcome and explain what you need



Be proactive

After meetings - *follow up in writing*

- Show courtesy and thank the other side for their time
- Review the points of agreement reached and issues still to be resolved
- Provide a timeline for follow up or regrouping if necessary

If an issue cannot be resolved:

Ask for the denial to be placed in writing as soon as possible,

“to preserve your right to appeal”

Remember This

*You may be entitled
to reasonable
accommodations at
your job (even if not a
VR client)*



EMPLOYMENT

When & How to Practice Self-Advocacy

Job Applications

Yes, or No?



- ☐ Yes, I have a disability (or previously had a disability).
- ☐ No, I don't have a disability.

Are You Able...?

“Will you require accommodations for the hiring process?”

“Are you able to perform your job duties with or without reasonable accommodations?”

The only way to get the accommodations you need for your job is to disclose your disability

What gives you the right to a reasonable accommodation?

The Americans with Disabilities Act: Title I: Employment 42 U.S.C. 12112

As an employee of a company who staffs more than 15 people, you have a right as a qualified person with a disability to request an reasonable accommodation in order to perform the essential duties of your job.

42 U.S.C. 12111

Qualified Person with a Disability: You have a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

42 U.S.C. 12102

Essential duties of your job are those that are your responsibility to complete and are often listed in a “job description.”

42 U.S.C. 12102

Reasonable Accommodations may include:

(A) making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; and

(B) job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, acquisition or modification of equipment or devices, appropriate adjustment or modifications of examinations, training materials or policies, the provision of qualified readers or interpreters, and other similar accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

What I Did...

Tammy has a disability – she is hearing impaired and cannot recognize speech or use a telephone in a traditional way. She applied to a job where she had all the requirements and experience for the role.

She decided NOT to disclose her disability during the initial hiring process, and did not click “Yes” to needing accommodations during the hiring process. (*She was not working with VRS*).

When it was time for the interview, the hiring manager scheduled a phone call – she felt she would be able to manage to “hide” her disability.

During the call, she could barely make out any of the questions she was asked and failed the interview. She was not hired.

Tammy did not practice good self-advocacy

What I Should Have Done...

If Tammy had requested accommodations for the hiring process, she would have had a successful interview and would have likely gotten the job.

Later – Tammy applied for her dream job and ***disclosed immediately*** that she had a disability and would need accommodations for the hiring process AND to perform her job.

Her interviews were conducted via Zoom (with captions), and she successfully nailed the interview.

Immediately upon being hired, she inquired about the process to request accommodations to perform her job duties – and received them.

Request Accommodations – In Writing

- Identify yourself as a person with a disability
- State that you are requesting accommodations under the ADA
- Identify your specific problematic AND essential job tasks
- Identify your accommodation needs and ideas
- Refer to attached medical documentation if appropriate*
- Ask that your employer respond to your request in a reasonable amount of time



Example of Accommodations Request

I have been having medical issues that effect my mood, sleep schedule, concentration and focus. I would like to request accommodations so that I might be able to perform my job effectively before my performance starts to suffer.

Workplace distractions interfere with my concentration and focus so I would like to try noise canceling headphones to minimize sound distractions. In addition, having a list of what I might need to do for the workday/week could also help me keep track on my work.

Please let me know if you need additional information or would like to discuss additional ideas. Would you be able to let me know in the next week? Thank you for considering my request.

<https://askjan.org/ariticles/Sample-Language-for-Accommodation-Request-Letters.cfm>

Job Accommodations Request

- If you have a job coach, do not expect them to make a request for an accommodation. It is **your responsibility** to request an accommodation.
- Ask for an accommodation **as soon** as you think you will need one to perform the essential functions of the job.
- If your accommodation request is DENIED, **follow-up in writing** with your employer for a specific reason.

*Employers do not have to provide accommodations that would result in “**undue hardship**” for the employer*

What are you waiting for?

Tell – Don't “Ask”

Never let anyone choose your accommodations – express what you need!

Do the Research

Understand your rights - but learn the rules!


Look Ahead

Services and accommodations take time – it's **never too early** to advocate for yourself!



***“Better three hours too soon
than a minute too late.”***

William Shakespeare

A dramatic photograph taken from the deck of a sailboat, looking out over a turbulent sea. The boat's wooden deck and rigging are visible in the foreground, while the white sails are partially unfurled. The ocean is dark and choppy, with white foam from the waves crashing against the hull. The sky is overcast and grey, contributing to a sense of danger and urgency.

What to Do When You Feel You're Sailing into a Storm

Ask for help

Contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at **ADAP** if you need help





Resource for Accommodations

JAN – Job Accommodation Network

<https://askjan.org/>

Filing a Charge with the EEOC

If you believe you have been discriminated against at work because of your disability, ADAP can assess whether we can help you file a charge with the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – EEOC](#).

In general, you need to file a charge within **180 calendar days** from the day the discrimination took place.

Denial of Reasonable Accommodation(s):

- Harassment
- Retaliation
- Termination



Self-Advocacy for Life

Remember -

Self-advocacy skills are needed for every aspect of our lives, not just work!

Learn – Practice - Improve

We need you!

ADAP Priority Survey



MORE OPTIONS:

Call us or write to us!

Call our intake line and provide your views over the phone at [800-826-1675](tel:800-826-1675)

OR

Send us your information in writing using this printable version of our survey:

tinyurl.com/PrintADAP2025



YOU CAN ALSO:

Participate in a **Focus Group!**

Participate in a focus group in-person or virtually.

Head here for more:

tinyurl.com/ADAPFocus2025



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COMMUNITY INPUT

We need you!

As a Protection & Advocacy agency, it's our job to find out what YOU - people with disabilities, their loved ones, and community members - want us to focus on in the upcoming year!

You can take our Community Input Survey here: tinyurl.com/CommunityInput2025



Q&A

Contact Us

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