

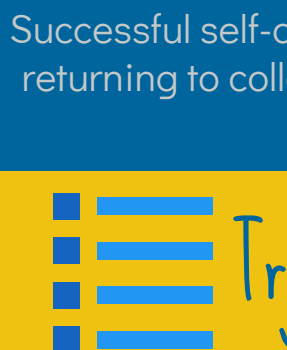
Self Advocacy

SELF-ADVOCACY IS UNDERSTANDING YOUR NEEDS

AND ACTING ON THAT INFORMATION TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

After concussion, students sometimes have a hard time

- recognizing that help is needed
- knowing how to get that help



Successful self-advocacy allows you to be proactive rather than reactive when returning to college after concussion. Below are helpful tools to communicate your needs and be a proactive self-advocate.

Try using the four-step B E R C model

BACKGROUND Introduce yourself, including your name and a brief recap of your injury experience.

EXPLAIN What are your current symptoms and needs?

REQUEST What can this person provide for you to be successful? This could be academic adjustments, other resources, or maybe just being understood.

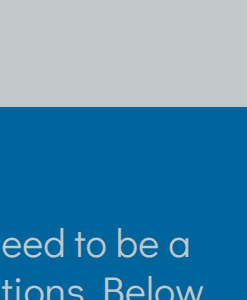
CLARIFY AND CLOSE Lay out next steps and show your appreciation for their time and efforts.

You can tailor this model to different audiences, and YOU choose how much personal information to disclose. It is okay to not share all the details about your concussion. If you can clearly communicate your needs and how this person can help you meet those needs, then no further personal information needs to be shared.

Use I-Statements

I-Statements focus on **your needs**, whereas You-Statements focus on the other person's behavior. You-Statements tend to put people on the defensive and can feel like they are being assigned blame. I-Statements instead keep responsibility on you and enlist your conversation partner to be part of the solution.

I-Statements can also help when it's hard to find the right words. Some people recovering from concussion can have a hard time coming up with phrasing that doesn't come across as aggressive or blameful, especially towards friends and family. I-Statements can shift the focus back to your needs, and away from creating conflict where none is needed or intended.



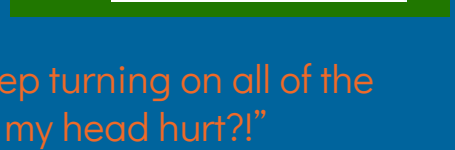
HOW TO USE SELF-ADVOCACY TOOLS

Part of what makes self-advocacy challenging is that you may need to be a good self-advocate with lots of different people in different situations. Below are some examples of how to use advocacy tools in real life.

Try using an effective I-statement like this

WHEN TALKING TO YOUR ROOMMATE ABOUT LIGHTS AND NOISE IN YOUR HOUSE OR APARTMENT...

“Noises and lights really make my head hurt. It would help me if you could keep the music and lights low when I am around.”



Instead of a **You-Statement** like:

“You always play loud music, and you keep turning on all of the lights! Don't you know that makes my head hurt?!”

IF YOU ARE FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO TELL A FRIEND TO STOP GIVING YOU A HARD TIME FOR NOT DRINKING OR STAYING OUT LATE, TRY AN I-STATEMENT SUCH AS:



“I feel bad when people give me a hard time about not hanging out as much or drinking. I wish I could, but I am still recovering. Give me some time. I'll get there.”

EVEN WITH PROFESSORS AND INSTRUCTORS, I-STATEMENTS CAN BE VERY USEFUL. TRY USING AN I-STATEMENT LIKE THIS IF YOUR PROFESSOR IS TALKING TOO FAST IN CLASS:

“I need extra time to understand what you are covering in the lecture. It would help me if I could record the lectures and get notes from a classmate. It's easier for me to keep up if I have the slides in advance.”



FOR TALKING TO YOUR FAMILY ABOUT FAMILY GATHERINGS AND EVENTS:



“It is hard for me to focus now when talking to a lot of people at one time. It would be better for me to have a quiet dinner with just our close family at home rather than go to busy place with a lot of people.”

USE THE BERC MODEL WHEN TALKING TO FELLOW STUDENTS ON A GROUP PROJECT:

“I am recovering from a recent sports injury, and being on the computer for a long time is hard for me right now. Could we meet in person instead of on Zoom the next time we work on our project? There is a covered park on campus that has wifi access so we can spread out. Or, could we limit our Zoom calls to 30 minutes for now? Thank you. I appreciate you considering changing the format of our next group meeting.”



FOR USING I-STATEMENTS WITH YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDERS:



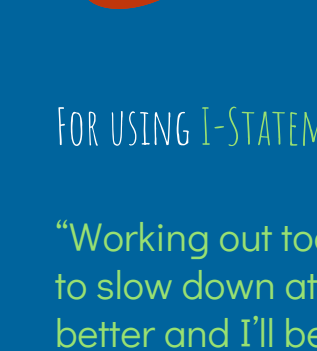
“It is harder for me to remember what you tell me after my appointment. It will help me if I can take notes or if you give me handouts with information that we talked about today.”

WHEN ASKING FOR SUPPORT FROM DISABILITY SERVICE COORDINATORS, YOU MIGHT FIND THE BERC MODEL HELPFUL:

“Hi. I'm _____. Last week I had a concussion, and I am having some headaches and slowed thinking. And so right now I need a little extra time when taking tests, But I'm having trouble working with one of my professors to get extra time to take my next test. It would help me if you could give me some suggestions for talking with my professor or let me know what additional steps I need to take to make sure I get extra time when taking my test.”



IF YOU NEED TO TALK TO YOUR COACH ABOUT SAFELY GETTING BACK INTO THE GAME:



“I'm not ready to go to full practices yet. My doctor said that right now I should only be doing light aerobic activity. I'm following her guidelines so I can get back to the game faster”.

FOR USING I-STATEMENTS WHEN TALKING TO YOUR TEAMMATES:

“Working out too hard makes me dizzy. I need to slow down at practices for now. I'm getting better and I'll be able to keep up with the team soon.”



Try using the handout “What I Want You to Know about Concussion” as another advocacy tool to let others know about concussion, what is working for you right now, and how they can help.