

Self-Advocacy Sentence Starters for Social Situations

Self-advocacy is the ability to communicate your needs, rights, and preferences effectively. For neurodivergent individuals, this often involves bridging the gap created by the Double Empathy Problem. By using clear, direct language, you can set boundaries and ensure your social environment remains regulated and inclusive.

The following sentence starters are designed to be used in various settings, including schools, universities, and workplaces. They align with the principles of the **Dynamic Development Plan (DDP)** by focusing on environmental adaptation and personal agency.

1. Managing Sensory Needs and Regulation

As established by **Lane Anthony (2024)**, a regulated nervous system is the foundation for social interaction. Use these starters to adjust your environment before overwhelm occurs.

- "I am finding the background noise in this room quite draining, could we move to a quieter space to continue this conversation?"
- "The lighting in here is making it difficult for me to focus, would it be alright if I wore my tinted glasses or dimmed the lights?"
- "I need to use my fidget tool to help me process what you are saying, it helps me stay engaged in our discussion."
- "I am feeling a bit sensory-overloaded at the moment, I am going to step out for five minutes to regulate and then I will be back."
- "I process information best when I am moving, so I might pace or stretch while we talk."

2. Clarifying Communication and Information Processing

To avoid the confusion of the "hidden curriculum," use these phrases to request literal and explicit information.

- "I want to make sure I have understood you correctly, could you please provide that instruction in writing?"
- "I am a literal thinker, so I would appreciate it if you could be direct with your feedback rather than using metaphors."

- "I need a few moments of processing time to think about what you have just said before I respond."
- "When you say [term/phrase], could you explain exactly what you mean in this context?"
- "I find it difficult to follow multiple instructions at once, could we break this down into a step-by-step list?"

3. Navigating Social Energy and Boundaries

Social agency, as advocated by the **ASAN Plain Language Guide**, means having the right to choose how and when you socialise.

- "I am currently in a 'parallel play' headspace, so I am happy to work next to you, but I won't be able to chat while I do it."
- "I value our friendship, but I find large group settings very exhausting, could we meet one-on-one instead?"
- "I have reached my social limit for today, so I am going to head home now to recharge my battery."
- "I don't find small talk very comfortable, but I would love to hear more about your thoughts on [specific topic/interest]."
- "If I am looking away while you speak, please know that I am still listening intently, it just helps me concentrate on your words."

4. Direct Support and Workplace/Academic Adjustments

In professional settings, these starters help embed DDP principles into your daily routine.

- "To do my best work, I require a clear agenda for our meetings at least 24 hours in advance."
- "I find it helpful when feedback is specific and task-oriented rather than general."
- "During group projects, I prefer to take on a role that involves [specific strength, e.g., data analysis or writing] rather than verbal presenting."
- "Could we use a 'check-in' system via email so I can update you on my progress without the pressure of an unscheduled call?"

- "I work best in blocks of uninterrupted time, so I will be turning off my notifications for the next two hours."

5. Managing Misunderstandings (The Double Empathy Bridge)

When a mismatch occurs, these phrases help facilitate mutual translation.

- "I think we might be experiencing a communication mismatch, let me try to explain my perspective in a different way."
- "My directness isn't intended to be rude, I am simply sharing the facts as I see them to be as helpful as possible."
- "I noticed I may have misinterpreted the tone of that message, could you clarify the intent behind it for me?"
- "I am struggling to read the social cues in this situation, could you please tell me explicitly what you need from me right now?"

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