DEA IEP Goal Bank

18 original examples for student-centered planning

Educate. Empower. Advocate.

Use this resource to prepare a focused conversation about what a student wants to learn, which supports make learning accessible, and how the team will know whether instruction is helping.

1. Begin with the student. Ask about priorities, strengths, communication preferences, access needs, and what the student wants adults to understand.

2. Add actual baseline data. Use recent observations or work samples. Record the context, opportunity count, support provided, and current performance.

3. Adapt the example. Set an appropriate target date, observable skill, conditions, criteria, and measurement method. Sample criteria are illustrative, not recommendations for every student.

4. Plan instruction and adult support. Discuss teaching, responsible staff, access supports, practice opportunities, and how progress will be reviewed and reported.

5. Review together. These are discussion drafts, not adopted IEP goals or assessment findings. The team must individualize them. Keep agreed accommodations available; support is not something a student must earn.

Skill areas: self-advocacy; emotional awareness; communication; connection and boundaries; planning and flexibility; school-to-adult life.

Original educational content by Dickerson Education Advocates LLC. Speech, AAC, writing, gestures, and trusted-person communication are valid participation methods. Eye contact and appearing calm are not required outcomes.

Self-advocacy | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

1. Ask for the help that fits

Baseline prompt: How often does the student communicate a specific help request now, and with what support?

By [target date], during a familiar learning or work task, with the student's chosen communication tools available, [student] will identify the part that is unclear and communicate one specific help request, in 3 of 4 observed opportunities across 3 data-collection weeks, measured by dated work samples and a brief request-and-response log.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Identify one part of a task that needs clarification; 2) Choose a help phrase, symbol, or signal; 3) Use the request with two familiar adults in different activities.

Adult and environmental support: Keep communication tools accessible, allow response time, and respond to requests with useful assistance.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Self-advocacy | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

2. Communicate a need for a break

Baseline prompt: What does requesting support look like now, and which barriers make it difficult?

By [target date], when an early sign of overload is noticed, with an agreed break signal and break location available, [student] will communicate a break or support request using speech, AAC, writing, or another agreed signal, in 4 of 5 recorded opportunities across 2 settings over 3 weeks, measured by student check-ins and staff opportunity logs that record support provided.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Choose a break signal and a preferred place; 2) Practice the signal during a comfortable activity; 3) Use the signal when support is needed and review whether adults responded.

Adult and environmental support: Honor the signal promptly. Access to a needed break is not contingent on meeting the goal.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Self-advocacy | Middle & high school, Young adult

3. Share a support preference

Baseline prompt: Which preferences can the student already share, and how are those preferences acted on?

By [target date], before a planned classroom, meeting, or work activity, using a short visual or written menu if helpful, [student] will select and communicate one preferred access support and explain or indicate how it helps, during 3 consecutive planning conversations with no more than one invitation to respond, measured by a student preference sheet and a record of the support implemented.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Compare two access supports; 2) Identify a support that fits one activity; 3) Share the preference and check whether it was provided.

Adult and environmental support: Offer meaningful choices and accept a preference communicated without a spoken explanation.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Emotional awareness | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

4. Notice personal stress signals

Baseline prompt: Can the student describe or select a personal signal without an adult interpreting it for them?

By [target date], during a voluntary check-in with a visual scale or descriptive choices available, [student] will identify a personal sign of comfort or stress and select whether support is wanted, in 4 of 6 check-ins across at least 2 weeks, measured by student-selected check-in responses with the communication support recorded.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Explore comfortable and uncomfortable situations without guessing another person's feelings; 2) Choose a word, picture, or description for a personal signal; 3) Pair the signal with a preferred support or a choice to pass.

Adult and environmental support: Accept "not sure" or "pass"; never infer a feeling from appearance alone.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Emotional awareness | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

5. Try and evaluate a support strategy

Baseline prompt: Which supports does the student already choose, and can they indicate whether each helps?

By [target date], during a supported planning or reflection activity, with two student-approved options available, [student] will choose a support strategy, try it if willing, and indicate whether it was helpful, unhelpful, or uncertain, in 3 of 4 practice opportunities over 4 weeks, measured by a strategy trial log that includes the student's feedback.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Identify two comfortable support options; 2) Try one in a low-stress setting; 3) Keep, change, or decline the strategy based on the student's feedback.

Adult and environmental support: Do not require a student to look calm or finish a strategy before receiving help.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Emotional awareness | Middle & high school, Young adult

6. Connect a situation with a need

Baseline prompt: What information can the student currently share about situations that help or hinder participation?

By [target date], after a familiar situation and with a cause-and-need organizer if desired, [student] will describe one feature of the situation and communicate one change or support they would like, in 3 of 4 reflections across 3 weeks, measured by written, AAC, or adult-scribed reflections confirmed by the student.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Name or select what happened; 2) Identify one environmental demand or helpful feature; 3) Request a practical change.

Adult and environmental support: Focus on access and context rather than assigning blame for a stress response.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Communication | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

7. Repair an unclear message

Baseline prompt: How does the student currently respond when a partner does not understand?

By [target date], when a partner says a message was unclear, with usual communication supports available, [student] will clarify the message by adding a detail, rephrasing, showing, writing, or using another available method, in 3 of 4 naturally occurring or agreed practice opportunities across 3 weeks, measured by partner notes identifying the original message, repair, and outcome.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Identify a sign that the partner needs more information; 2) Choose one repair method; 3) Check whether the partner understood.

Adult and environmental support: Communication partners share responsibility; ask a specific clarifying question and allow time.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Communication | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

8. Build a shared exchange

Baseline prompt: What makes exchanges comfortable, and how many supported exchanges occur now?

By [target date], during an agreed conversation about a shared-interest topic, with AAC or written choices available, [student] will contribute a relevant comment or question and respond to the partner's contribution for two exchanges, in 3 separate conversation samples with 2 different willing partners, measured by a conversation sample checklist noting communication modes and prompts.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Choose a shared topic or activity; 2) Contribute one idea or question; 3) Build one more exchange while allowing either person to end.

Adult and environmental support: Accept different interaction styles, pauses, and a choice to end the conversation.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Communication | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

9. Share an event with useful details

Baseline prompt: Which details are included now and what support helps the listener understand?

By [target date], when sharing a chosen event using a visual organizer if desired, [student] will communicate who was involved, what happened, and one detail the listener needs to understand the event, in 4 of 5 collected samples over one instructional month, measured by oral, written, AAC, or picture-supported narrative samples.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Choose an event the student wants to share; 2) Select three details that help the listener; 3) Check what the listener understood and add a missing detail.

Adult and environmental support: Permit the student to omit private information and select a fictional event instead.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Connection & boundaries | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

10. Communicate a boundary

Baseline prompt: How does the student currently indicate "no," "stop," or a need for space?

By [target date], in agreed role-play or a naturally occurring interaction, with a boundary signal available, [student] will communicate a personal boundary or seek help when the boundary is not respected, in 3 of 4 practice situations across 2 different interaction types, measured by a role-play rubric and student-confirmed observations.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Choose a clear boundary phrase or signal; 2) Practice with a partner who stops immediately; 3) Identify how to reach support if someone ignores the signal.

Adult and environmental support: Adults respect boundaries immediately and intervene when others do not; the student is not responsible for stopping harassment.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Connection & boundaries | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

11. Offer or respond to an invitation

Baseline prompt: What kinds of invitations or responses are already comfortable for the student?

By [target date], during a shared-interest activity with a willing peer and communication choices available, [student] will offer an invitation or respond by accepting, declining, or proposing another option, in 3 of 4 opportunities across 3 activities, measured by a brief interaction log that records the student's chosen response.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Identify a preferred shared activity; 2) Practice both an invitation and a respectful decline; 3) Try an exchange with a willing partner.

Adult and environmental support: All responses, including declining, are valid. Do not make friendship or participation compulsory.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Connection & boundaries | Middle & high school, Young adult

12. Find a workable response to a disagreement

Baseline prompt: Which parts of a disagreement can the student describe or negotiate now?

By [target date], during an agreed low-stakes disagreement scenario and with a choice organizer available, [student] will state their own preference, identify a possible different preference, and choose a workable next step, in 3 of 4 scenarios across 3 teaching sessions, measured by a scenario rubric and student reflection.

Possible teaching steps: 1) State their preference without judging the other person; 2) Ask or suggest what the other person might want; 3) Choose to negotiate, take a break, or request help.

Adult and environmental support: Do not require compromise about safety, personal boundaries, or access needs.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Planning & flexibility | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

13. Begin with a clear first step

Baseline prompt: How long does beginning currently take, with which supports and task conditions?

By [target date], after receiving accessible directions and a short task checklist, [student] will identify the first action, gather the needed materials, and begin the action or request clarification, within an individually agreed start window in 4 of 5 samples across 2 weeks, measured by a task-start log recording the start window, supports, and barriers.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Separate one task into short actions; 2) Choose the first action and materials; 3) Begin or ask for a change when a barrier is present.

Adult and environmental support: Set the start window from baseline and check access barriers before treating a delay as a skill deficit.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Planning & flexibility | Elementary, Middle & high school, Young adult

14. Plan for a change

Baseline prompt: What notice and planning supports are needed when a routine changes?

By [target date], after accessible advance notice of a routine change and with a visual plan available, [student] will identify what changed, one part that stays the same, and a support or next action, in 3 of 4 supported planning opportunities across one month, measured by change-plan organizers and student feedback.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Compare the original and revised plan; 2) Identify something predictable in the revised plan; 3) Choose a support for the transition.

Adult and environmental support: Provide notice when possible, adequate processing time, and ongoing accommodations.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

Planning & flexibility | Middle & high school, Young adult

15. Check a plan and choose a next step

Baseline prompt: Which tracking steps can the student complete now, and what adult support remains necessary?

By [target date], at an agreed check-in time with a short assignment or project tracker, [student] will record one completed item, identify a remaining barrier, and choose a next action or support request, in 4 of 5 scheduled check-ins over 3 weeks, measured by a dated tracker reviewed with the student.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Mark one completed action; 2) Identify what is still needed without labeling it a failure; 3) Choose one next step or request.

Adult and environmental support: Keep adult check-ins and reminders in place as agreed; do not withdraw them automatically.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

School-to-adult life | Middle & high school, Young adult

16. Contribute to an education or transition meeting

Baseline prompt: Which meeting formats help the student communicate preferences and priorities?

By [target date], before and during a planned meeting, with preparation time and a preferred participation format, [student] will share one strength, one priority, and one requested support through live or prepared communication, across 2 planned meetings or rehearsals with the participation support documented, measured by student-approved notes, a prepared statement, or a participation checklist.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Identify one strength and one priority; 2) Prepare a message in the preferred format; 3) Share it personally or authorize a trusted person to share it.

Adult and environmental support: Offer prerecorded, written, AAC, live, and trusted-person options; attendance is not the only form of participation.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

School-to-adult life | Middle & high school, Young adult

17. Clarify a work or community task

Baseline prompt: What does the student already confirm when receiving a new work or community task?

By [target date], when a new school-based work, volunteer, or community task is introduced with accessible directions, [student] will confirm the expected task outcome and ask one question about a missing step, material, or support, in 3 consecutive task introductions across at least 2 task types, measured by a task clarification checklist and student feedback.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Identify what "finished" will look like; 2) Locate one missing piece of information; 3) Ask a question and confirm the answer.

Adult and environmental support: Use realistic tasks, provide accessible instructions, and support accommodation requests.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.

School-to-adult life | Middle & high school, Young adult

18. Prepare a community activity plan

Baseline prompt: Which planning elements are independent now and which require support?

By [target date], when planning a student-selected community activity with a map, schedule, or checklist as needed, [student] will identify the destination, a practical access need, and a way to contact support if plans change, for 3 different planned activities using the agreed level of assistance, measured by completed planning sheets and a student-led debrief.

Possible teaching steps: 1) Choose an activity and how to get information about it; 2) Plan one access support and a communication option; 3) Review the plan and identify who can help.

Adult and environmental support: Practice with appropriate supervision; completing a worksheet does not establish independent travel readiness.

Progress notes: record the context, communication method, prompt level, actual opportunities, and whether agreed supports were provided.