

Self-Determination Defined

Although the self-determination construct has been used in various disciplines for centuries, its application in special education has been relatively recent. Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) defined *self-determination as a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations, together with a belief of oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society (p. 2).*

Martin and Marshall (1995) described self-determined people as individuals who know how to choose—they know what they want and how to get it. From an awareness of personal needs, self-determined individuals choose goals, then doggedly pursue them. This involves asserting an individual's presence, making his or her needs known, evaluating progress toward meeting goals, adjusting performance, and creating unique approaches to solve problems (p. 147).

Self-determined people are causal agents; they make things happen in their lives. They are goal oriented and apply problem-solving and decision-making skills to guide their actions. They know what they do well and where they need assistance. Self-determined people are actors in their own lives instead of being acted upon by others.

Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M, & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). A practical guide for teaching self-determination. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Martin, J. E., & Marshall, L. H. (1995). ChoiceMaker: A comprehensive self-determination transition program. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 30, 147-156.