

# The ABCs of Speaking Up for Yourself

A workbook to help families talk to their children about self-advocacy and have a voice in the IEP process

Early Elementary Level (Pre-K through 2)



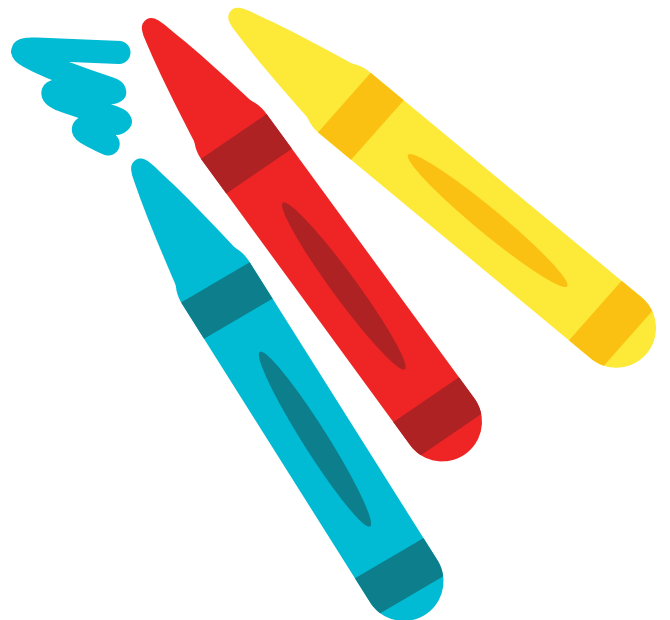
**R** | **RUTGERS HEALTH**  
**The Boggs Center**  
**on Disability and Human Development**  
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School



Developed by The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development with the NJ Department of Education, Office of Special Education, funded by IDEA Part B 2024-2025. May 2025.

**This book belongs to:**

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# Dear students and families,

This workbook was developed to support families in developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills that can support each child's path to a meaningful life.

The planning for a good adult life starts now. Self-advocacy skills are essential for all people and having them helps children express to educators and others what they need to succeed.

No matter the person's age, everyone has strengths and preferences that can be shared. If your child has a disability and is supported by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), they also have an IEP team. The IEP includes planning for adult life (transition planning) the year the student turns age 14, or younger if appropriate. Your family and your child are a key part of this team and with your input, an effective IEP can be developed.

## Directions:

This tool can be used in part or whole to help bring person-centered information into the IEP. You can share the information in these activities before and during the IEP meeting with your case manager.

For more information please visit the [New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education Policy](#) webpage.

## Terms we use and what they mean:

**IEP:** The **Individualized Education Program** is designed to meet each eligible child's unique education needs and when appropriate, includes planning for a successful adult life.

**IEP Team:** Includes the parent, the student when appropriate, the case manager, teachers and other educators, and others as appropriate.

**Person-Centered Planning:** Is a holistic strength-based process that involves supporting people in making well-informed choices and identifying respectful supports.

**Self-Advocacy:** Being able to express to others what you want, what you need, and what you don't want.

**Self-Determination:** A process by which a person controls their own life.

**Modifications:** A modification changes what the student is taught or expected to learn (e.g., the content of instruction).

**Accommodations:** An accommodation changes how the student is taught or expected to learn (e.g., instructional methods used, support strategies, environmental factors, etc.).



# Speaking up for me

When you speak up, you let people know what you need and want. Here are some examples of what it means to speak up.



**Speaking up for me means asking for what I need.**



**It means asking for help.**



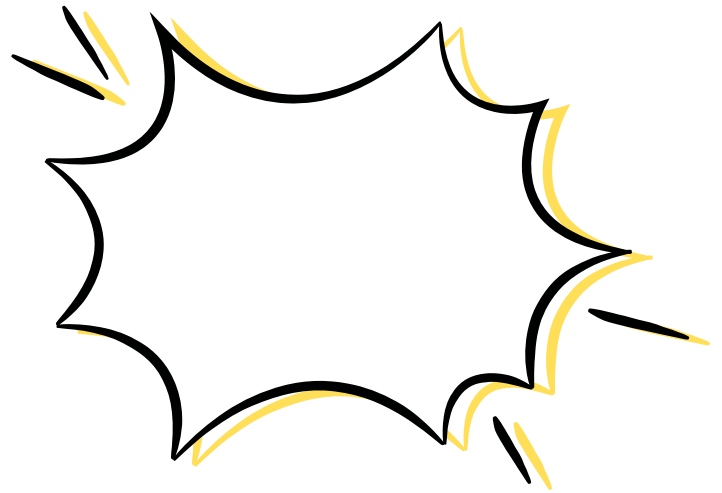
**It also means telling others what I don't want.**

# Speaking up for me

How could you speak up for yourself using the examples below?

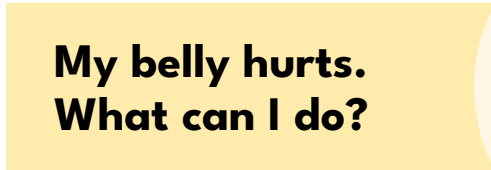
## At home:

**My toy is broken.  
What can I do?**



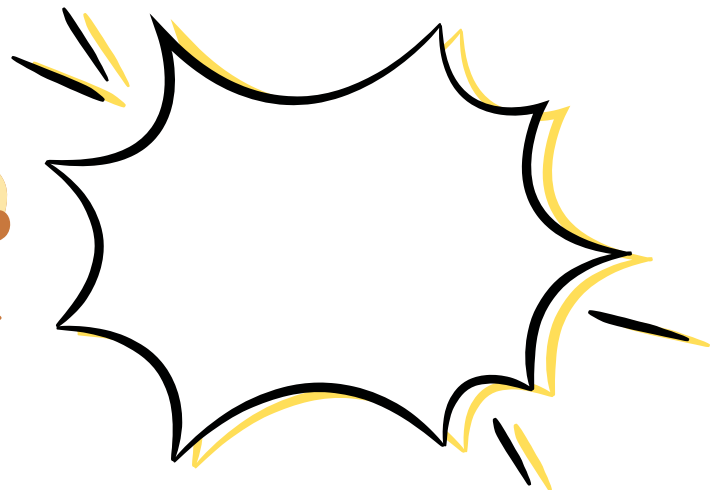
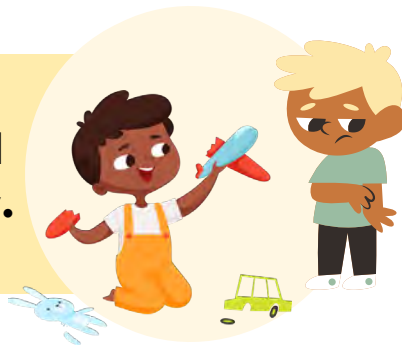
## At school:

**My belly hurts.  
What can I do?**



## With friends:

**A friend wants to  
play a game that I  
don't want to play.  
What can I say?**

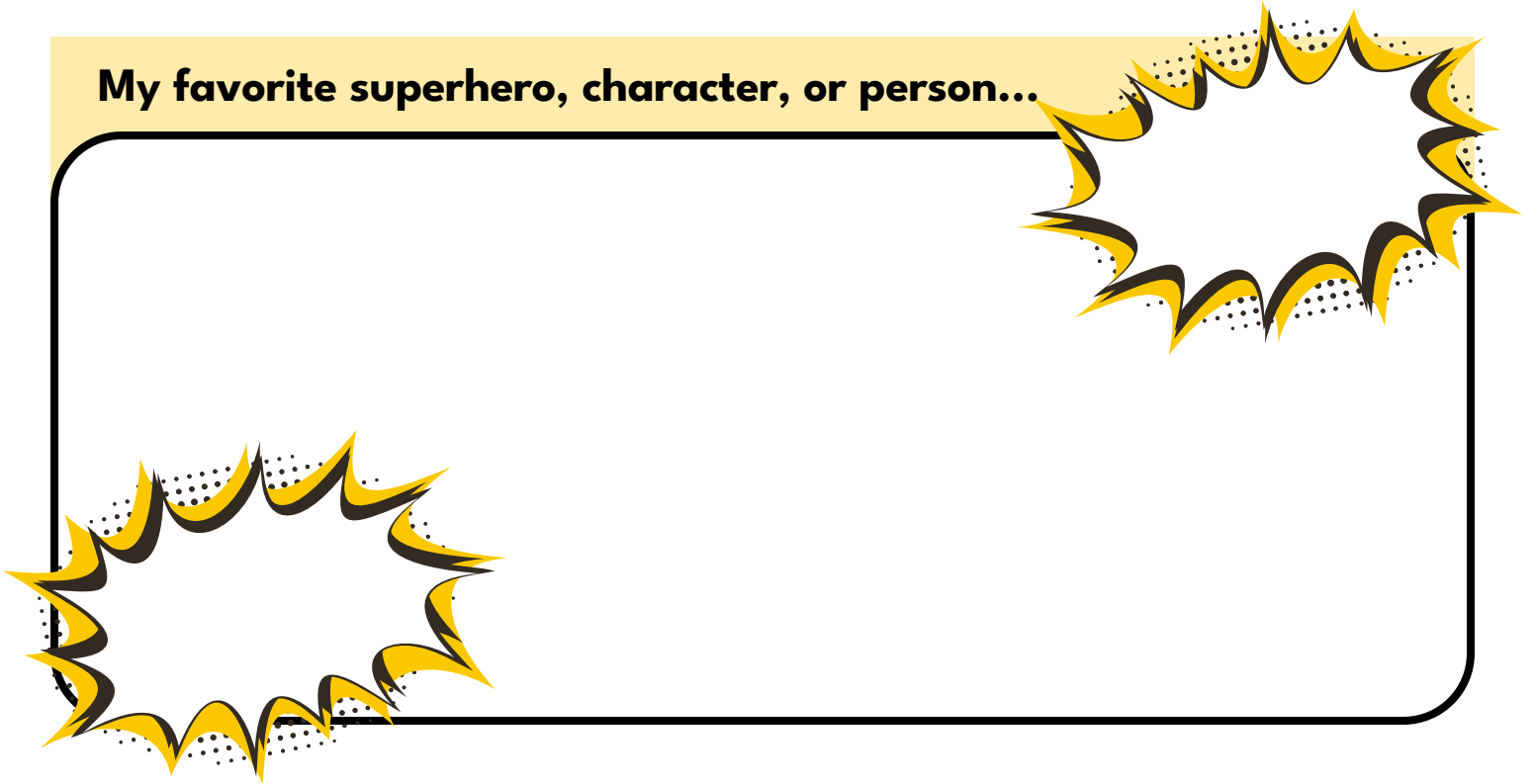


**Tip:** Self-advocacy is a skill that can be taught and learned. The more opportunities children have to practice self-advocacy, the more likely they will be able to use the skill in new situations. How can you support your child to share preferences at school or with new people? Is there something they use to effectively let others know what they need or want?

# My Power Card

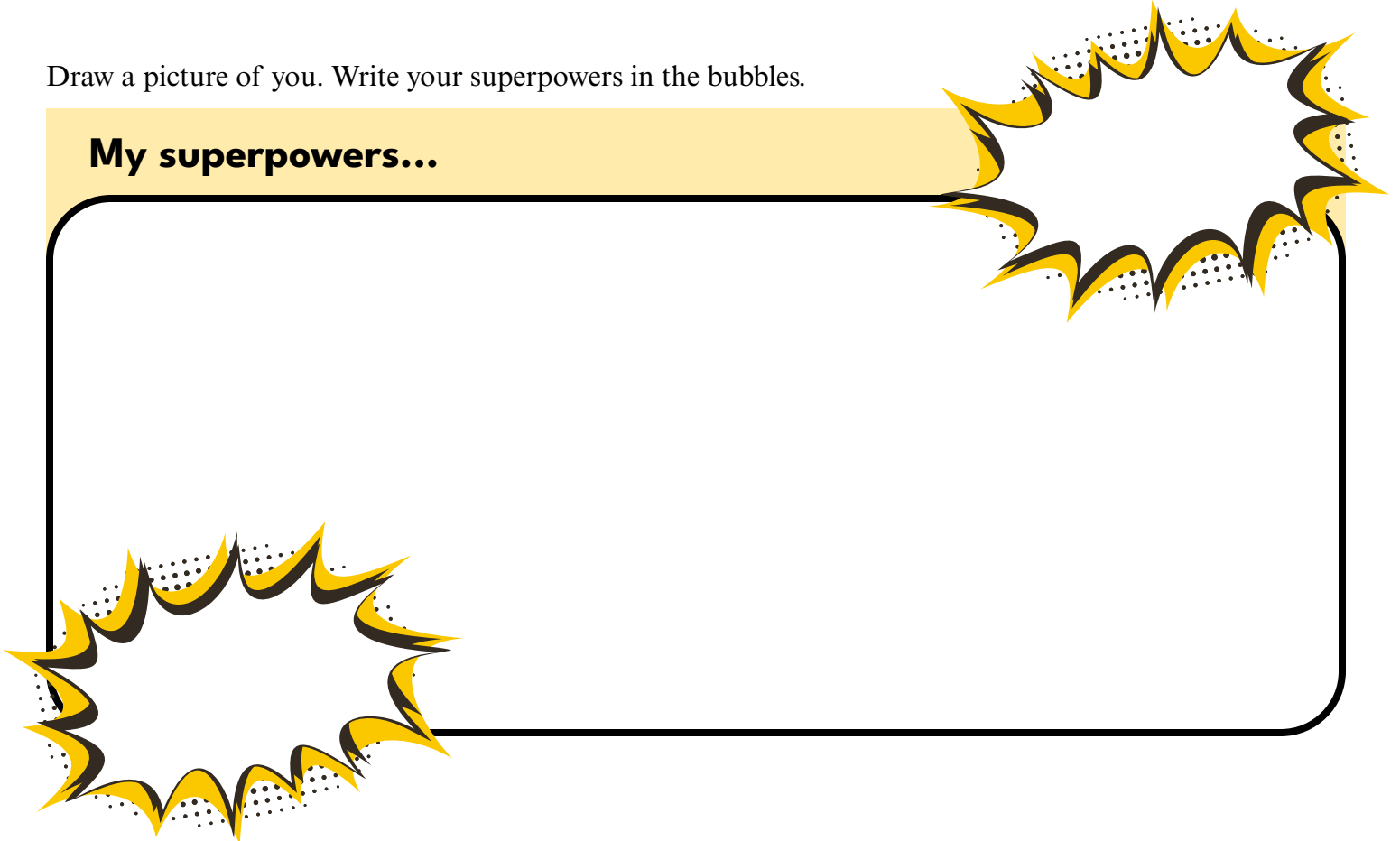
Draw or add a picture of your favorite superhero, character, or person. Write their superpowers in the bubbles.

**My favorite superhero, character, or person...**



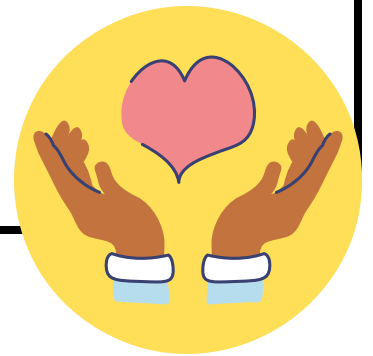
Draw a picture of you. Write your superpowers in the bubbles.

**My superpowers...**

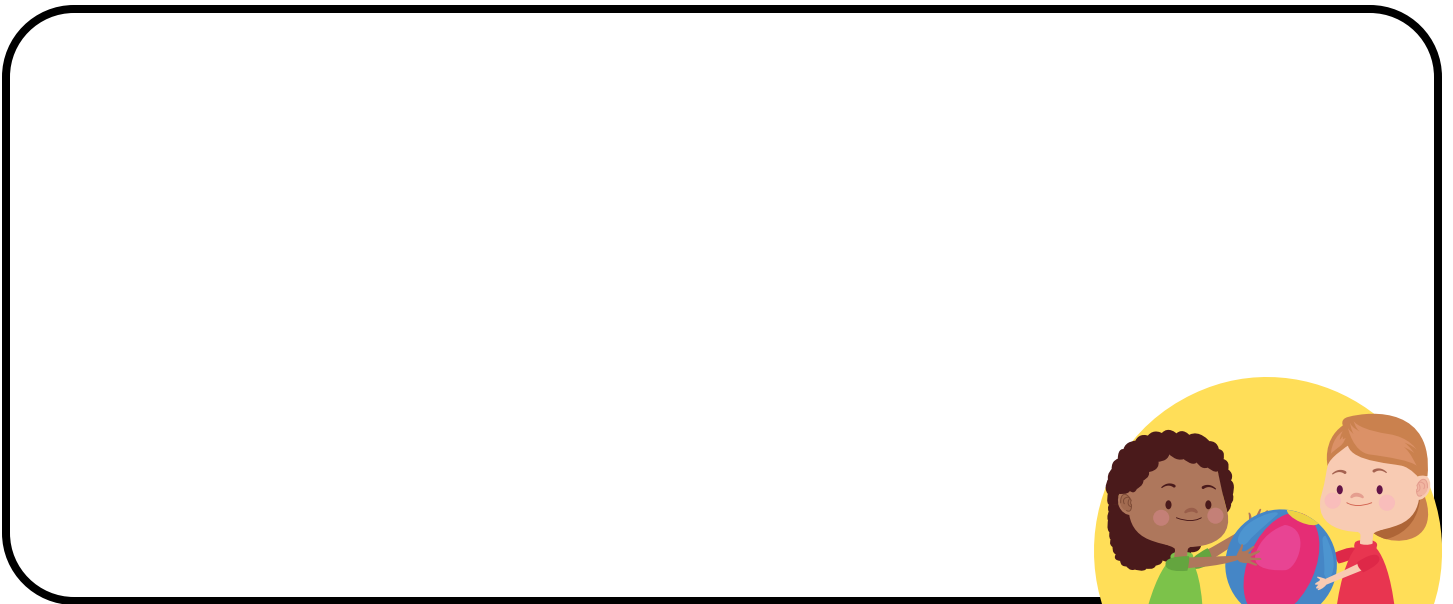


# I like you!

Draw or add a picture of an adult that cares about you at school.



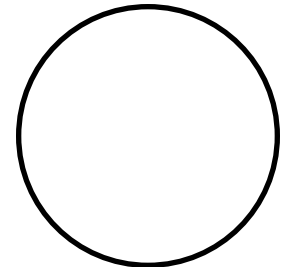
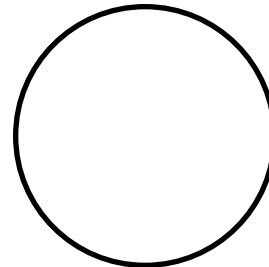
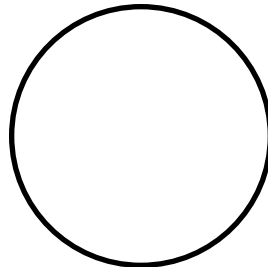
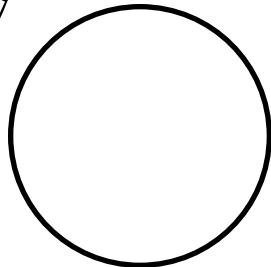
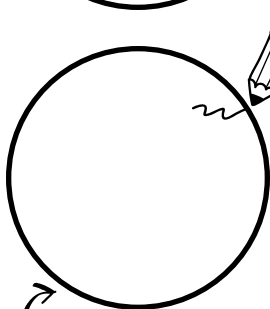
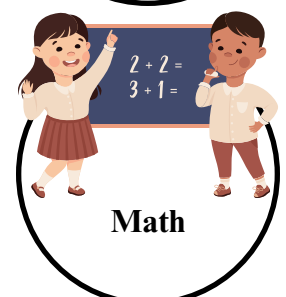
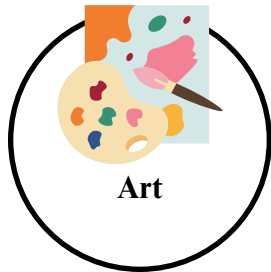
Draw a picture of you and one friend you like to play with.



**Tip:** Part of self-advocacy is knowing who to go to. As students get older, it is important that they develop a circle of support just for them. It should include those who will be trusted advisors in the future.

# Amazing me!

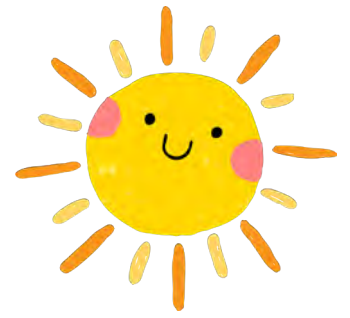
It is super important to tell others what you are good at. Have someone in your family check or color 3 things that make you awesome in green. You check or color in 3 things you like the best in your favorite color!



**Tip:** Write in your own! Help your child learn and own their gifts. They can be anything that makes them who they are!

# Good days!

Color or check the 5 bubbles that make you happiest.



I feel happiest when I get to:




Move around



Listen to music



Have a snack



Use a computer



Watch TV



Talk to the teacher



Play with my friends




Go outside



Play inside



Go to the playground



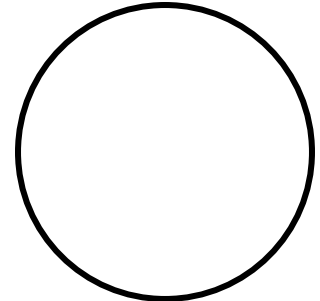
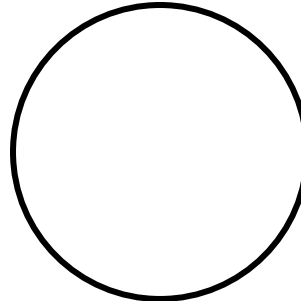
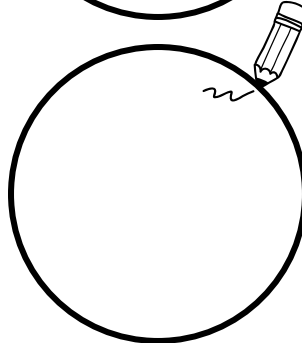
Blow bubbles



Go to the store



Make/build things

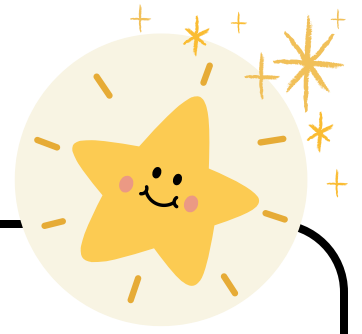


My favorite toys are:

A large rounded rectangular box for writing.

# Great day!

A great day for me looks like...



**Tip:** Be specific. What makes a great day for your child? At home? At school? Who are they with? Where are they going? What are they doing?

# Red light, yellow light, green light

Check the circles that apply to your child and write in others as needed.



## When I feel upset:



My face gets hot and red



I cry



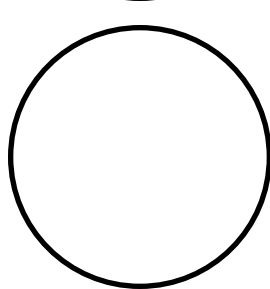
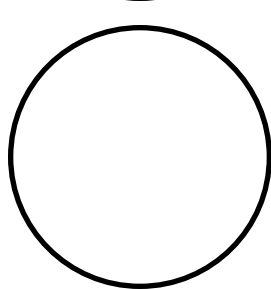
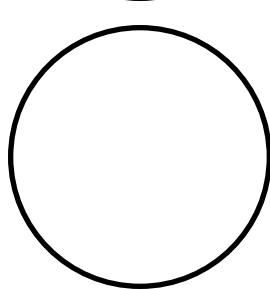
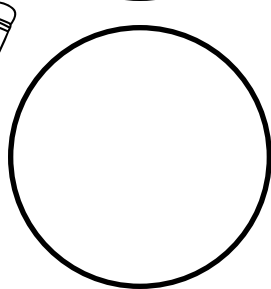
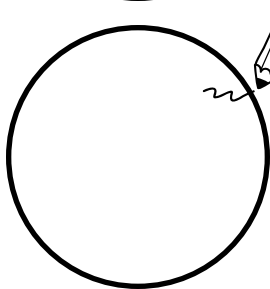
I yell



I put my head down



I whisper



## Things that I dislike:



Fire alarm




When my teacher is out



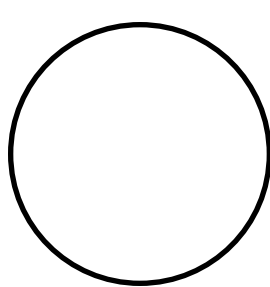
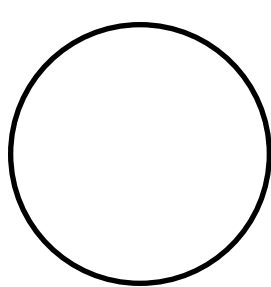
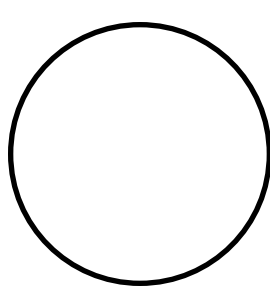
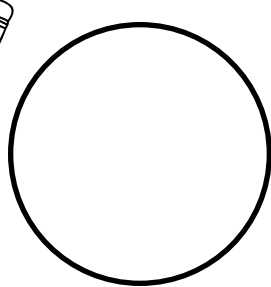
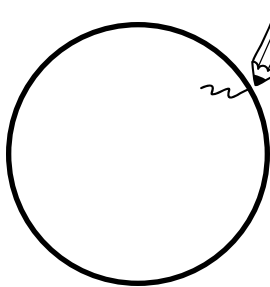
Thunderstorms



Feeling tired



Change in routine



## Things that make me feel better when I'm upset:

Large rounded rectangular box for writing.

# Big kid dreams

Places I like going now:



## Things I want to do when I am bigger:

Check “yes” for things you want to do when you are bigger. Check “no” for things you don’t want to do when you are bigger.



**Yes**



**No**

**Do things by myself**

**Ride a bike**

**Go to work**

**Go to a dance**

**Play a sport**

**Learn to cook**

**Have a pet**

**Have friends**

## In the future...

What are some experiences you would like your child to have in the next school year and further into the future?

# For students and families

What will make you most comfortable at the IEP meeting?



What would make you feel uncomfortable at the IEP meeting?

If you only had 2 minutes to tell educators what they need to know about your child, what would you share?

Would you feel comfortable having your child join the IEP meeting room? If not, why?

How could the IEP team accommodate your child so you would be comfortable with them sitting in? For example, provide coloring books and toys off to the side of the room.

What can you share on your child's behalf?

**Tip:** Think about some ways that you can support and prepare your child to attend the IEP meeting. Also consider sharing your responses to these questions with your case manager before the IEP meeting.

# Notes & questions I have:



# References & Additional Resources



New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education Policy  
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/policy/index.shtml>

NJ Transition Toolkit  
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/programs/njtransition/>

PCAST Webpage  
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/programs/pcast.shtml>

SPAN Parent Advocacy Network  
<https://spanadvocacy.org>

The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development: *Act Early Resilience Toolkit*  
<https://boggscenter.rwjms.rutgers.edu/resources/act-early-resilience-toolkit>

The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development: *The Next Steps: Addressing Concerns about Your Child's Development Quick Guide*  
<https://boggscenter.rwjms.rutgers.edu/resources/publications/the-next-steps-addressing-concerns-about-your-childs-development>

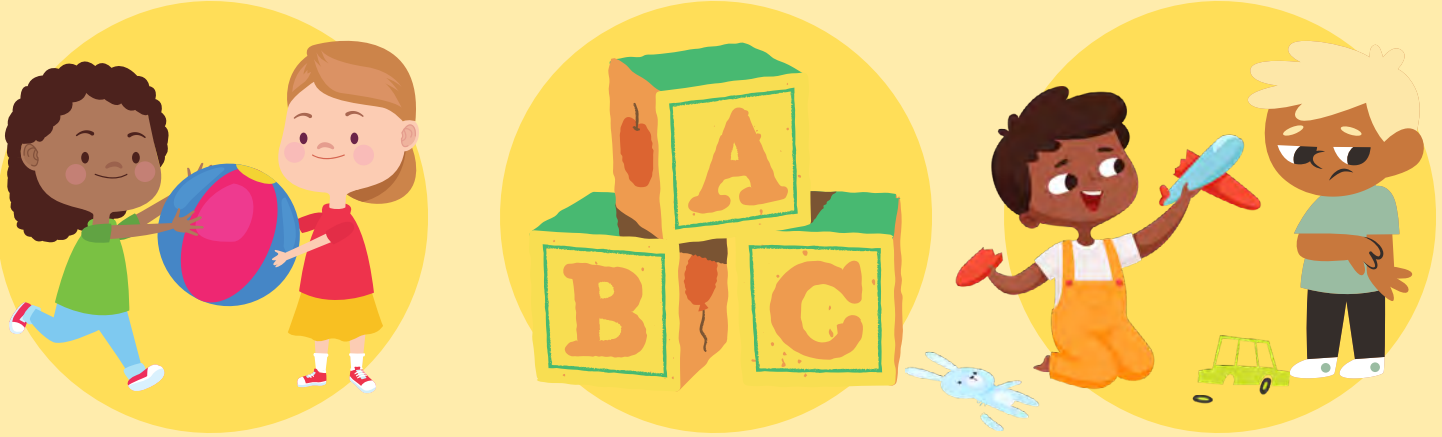
## Special Thanks

The Person-Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition Project (PCAST) would like to thank our partners at the NJ Department of Education, Office of Special Education, all of our educators, students, and their families in New Jersey for making this learning possible.

A special thanks to Brick Township High School, Eastern Regional High School, Haddon Heights School District, Hammonton School District, Lindenwold School District, and Pennsville School District, for their lesson development which contributed greatly to this workbook.

# The ABCs of Speaking Up for Yourself

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After piloting this tool, please provide feedback by scanning or clicking this QR code.