

These Are My Needs How To Foster Self Advocacy Skills In Students With LDs and ADHD

[Kelly] It is now my pleasure to introduce today's webinar and our presenters. Transitions, we know, can bring both opportunity and uncertainty, particularly for students with learning disabilities and ADHD as they prepare for increasing independence and new academic expectations. One of the most important skills that supports student success during these transitions and throughout a student's educational journey, is the ability to self-advocate.

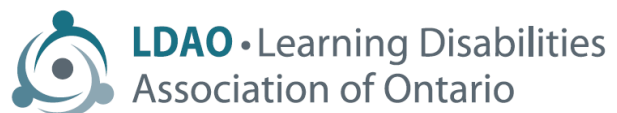
Today's session, entitled These Are My Needs: How to Foster Self-Advocacy Skills in Students with LDs and ADHD we'll explore how self advocacy develops over time and how educators, families, and other professionals support students in building the confidence and skills they need to understand their strengths, communicate their needs, and effectively access accommodations.

We are very pleased to be joined by Candice Daiken and Gillian Goldsmith, Transition Specialists with the Regional Assessment and Resource Center at Queen's University. Through their work at RARC they support students with neurodevelopmental disabilities in preparing for and succeeding in post-secondary education and bring extensive experience in transition planning and self-advocacy development.

In today's presentation, they will discuss the developmental stages of self-advocacy, share practical strategies educators can use to support students, and highlight sample activities that help build these essential skills across intermediate and secondary grades.

It is now my pleasure to welcome Candice and Gillian.

[Candice] Thank you so much for that lovely introduction. So we're very excited to be here and to be talking to you about self-advocacy. So as Kelly mentioned, my name is Candice, and I'm here with my colleague Gillian, and we are Transition Specialists at the Regional Assessment and Resource Center or RARC. We have a lot of acronyms that we're going to be saying in the presentation. And as mentioned, just to give a little bit of history about, kind of, what our office does; we're located in Kingston, Ontario at Queen's University. We're funded directly through the provincial Ministry of Colleges and



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Universities and Research Excellence and Security's and our office runs a variety of transition programming for students with learning disabilities, ADHD, ASD, and mental health disorders from grades 7 to 12 to help with students, their families, to really make them prepared for the transition into high school as well as into post-secondary education. So that's just a little bit about what our office does.

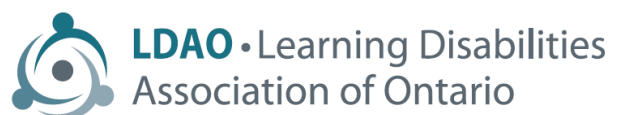
And so for our session today, these are kind of our key objectives that we'd like to look at. So we're going to be looking at how self esteem and self-understanding affects self-advocacy. We're going to look at the shared advocacy model and the roles that teachers and parents play within that model. And we're going to look at how we can integrate new strategies to help increase self-advocacy within your setting. And then we're also going to look at some of the activities that we do within our programming in Kingston, to help support self-advocacy.

So before we begin discussing self-advocacy we need to understand the needs of our students. So academically, we know that these students experience academic challenges, particularly in reading, writing, and math. We know that they struggle with attention, organization, staying on task, needing classroom accommodations to help support their success. But most importantly, we know that these students are bright and that they bring a lot of strengths to the table.

But we also need to understand the social emotional needs of these students as well. And so we know that students with learning disabilities and ADHD, they want to fit in. They want to blend in and feel like everybody else, that, that feeling of being different, it's uncomfortable and some students aren't even fully aware of what their diagnosis actually means, why they have it, or how to even talk about it. Others might even feel embarrassed or confused or frustrated by their disability. And often many of these students, they've had maybe some difficult interactions with teachers or peers, at school. So sometimes it's not a great place because it really highlights their challenges.

And so that as a result, really takes a toll on their self-esteem. So when we consider their academic needs alongside the social emotional needs, it becomes more clear that we can't deal with the academic until we dealt with the social emotional piece. And so we're here today to talk about teaching self-advocacy. But we can't do that effectively without first acknowledging and addressing, these underlying experiences.

So there's a lot that needs to be in place before even beginning talking about self-advocacy, like I was saying. And these pieces really form a foundation. And you'll



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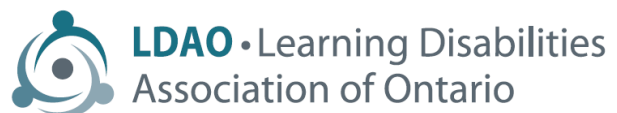
see on the screen here some of those key building blocks for making that strong foundation. And we'll talk about more of these as we go through the presentation. But just kind of briefly, for example, identifying strengths. This is a major challenge that we see in a lot of our students coming in. They really do struggle to see what they're good at. So they need that support, encouragement and repeated reinforcement.

Also too, understanding what their learning disability and ADHD actually is. What does that mean? How does it impact their learning? And even more importantly, knowing that it has nothing to do with their intelligence and that it's not their fault.

Another key piece is the IEP. This is an incredibly valuable tool yet so many of the students we work with don't even know it exists, or even what's in it. And so another important thing is having that supporter at school. Like I said, sometimes schools can be a negative place for students. They've had some bad experiences, but having a classroom teacher or SERT or just another adult at school, someone who believes in them, can really make that difference for that student. And so all of these contribute into building that self-confidence, building that self-esteem. And certainly this takes a lot of time and a lot of effort. This isn't going to happen overnight.

And so like I said, there's so much that goes into building that foundation in order to even start talking about moving towards self-advocacy. And so this image on the screen is helpful for thinking about self-advocacy as a continuum. And we want to get students from the left, where maybe a parent or teacher is, you know, making sure that the student has everything that they need and everything that's in place to ultimately being able to do it for themselves. So getting to that other end of the spectrum. And so for students in grade seven and eight, we want them to be working towards that sharing stage. So somewhere in the middle where they're starting to get a little bit more involved but still need the support of their parents or teachers. And so this is something that can be worked on, because even with those foundational skills, like, being reinforced, it's going to depend on the child, what their needs are and what supports and relationships they already have in place. And so it's a process of kind of figuring out what your role is as a teacher, as a parent. And this can be bit of a trial and error.

And so now to... As we try to move students to becoming more self-advocates, we also have to manage our own involvement and maybe pull back a little bit as teachers. And also encouraging parents to do the same, which is not going to be easy. Teachers, you know, you've been doing a lot of the advocating on behalf of students, making sure that they have everything that they need when they need it. And it's that bit of pulling back



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because we already know students are advocating for things that they want, like at home, for example, you know, staying over at a friend's house, staying up late. More screen time, that sort of thing. So we know that they can do it. They can advocate for something that they want, but it's expanding those skills into advocating for things that they need, which is, again, maybe not as fun.

So sometimes this is a team effort working with teachers, SERTs, students, parents. Working together in supporting those goals to moving along to becoming a self-advocate. And so actually, I'm going to pass it off to Gillian now, she's going to talk a little bit more of what that looks like.

[Gillian] Perfect. Thank you Candice.

So yeah, let's look at some shared advocacy goals first. And this is where we kind of hope our grade seven, eight and nine students are, kind of, going to be. And they're... These goals are all related to building the self-esteem, and the self-understanding. It's learning about their diagnosis and how it impacts their learning. So understanding the purpose of accommodations is a part of this and how they can be helpful, how to use them effectively. It's kind of talking about themselves, maybe privately. But being able to talk about their strengths, talk about their weaknesses. These are great, kind of, topics to start thinking about setting some goals around.

So we've got some specific goals here. And these are great to, to work on if you, if you want some, you know, measurable goals to do with students and have parents work on with students as well. Kind of moving everyone towards that shared advocacy. And I just do 1 or 2 of these at a time, until they're kind of a good habit. But a lot of them are really set around learning about what's in their IEP. So knowing their diagnosis, and a couple of their strengths, a couple of their weaknesses, naming the accommodations that are helpful to them. Using assistive technology independently most of the time. So, you know, being proactive, going to get it when they need it. Not waiting for somebody to notice and letting them know to get it. Seeking out a private quiet space or taking a body break, if that's something that's helpful. Maybe promoting ways for students to, kind of, share their input in advance of IEP meetings and including their voice in those meetings. It might be introducing themselves to a new teacher at the start of the term and letting them know that they have an IEP. I'm sure there's a lot of goals that we could add to this list, but these are just some guidelines to start with.

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Once they're kind of doing the shared advocacy and it's the new normal and it's consistent. That's when it's time to start thinking about setting some self-advocacy goals and moving more towards the right there.

And that's where we hope our older students our grade 10 to 12s are going to be. We want them to be advocating for themselves really well by the time they get to post-secondary, because at post-secondary, the schools aren't going to talk to the parents anymore. So it's really important to have that time to prepare the students for this as well as the parents for this. So, you know, the self-advocacy goals they're really... It's about getting a deeper understanding, deeper understanding of their diagnosis and their strengths and their weaknesses. Really explaining it to somebody else. So really having that idea and understanding of it. We want them to be asking for accommodations when there's somebody unfamiliar and setting themselves up for success in advance. And having that confidence to go ask for help from other teachers or staff when they need it.

So if we're looking at, setting some specific goals around that, explaining their needs. So to teachers, their diagnosis, their strengths, their weaknesses, the supports that they need. And doing it proactively. So if there's a supply teacher, for example, kind of being ready to have those conversations that aren't always comfortable, answering questions from peers about their diagnosis. And this is something, you know, not everyone wants to disclose to peers, which is perfectly valid, but just kind of thinking about that. These are questions that might start to come up at post-secondary. So kind of thinking about how they'll navigate those questions, as well as they are going to need to disclose their disability to accessibility services, in order to access accommodations down the road. So good to start practicing.

Another one is, noticing when something isn't working or something's going wrong and getting help to fix it right away. Not waiting till it's, kind of, past the point of no return. Taking more ownership over the IEP. So going to an IEP meeting, being a part of that conversation. If there's recommendations from an assessment report, reading them, knowing them, what's being recommended? And taking the initiative, to kind of help plan their transition. So, you know, reaching out to guidance, reaching out to resource teachers, and getting that support. And, and as I said, these are goals for somebody who is consistently doing the shared advocacy. And it would be one or two at a time, just sort of slowly trickled in.

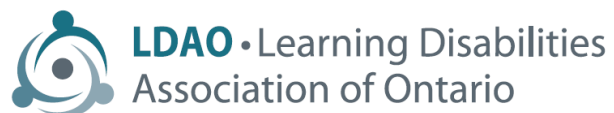
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How can teachers promote self-advocacy in the classroom? Use assistive technology. Let the class use it, too, and spend time teaching how to use the tools and giving time to practice those tools. Talking openly about learning challenges. The impacts of, you know, that come with learning challenges. Celebrating the wins, celebrating the strengths in the classroom. All of them. Picking battles. Right. If there's ten things that can be worked on just choosing one maybe at a time to, kind of, tackle. Building in time for things to... That kids can, kind of, play to their strengths and excel at. So maybe that's building in choice into assignments, modeling, self-talk, how you handle mistakes, how you handle failures. Modeling is such an effective way to teach. And students are always watching. They're always listening. Which kind of reminds me of a student we worked with recently. He had overheard some teachers chatting, just friendly chatting, I think it was overlunch duty or something. And they were comparing the numbers of IEPs that they had in their classroom. Totally innocent conversation. He internalized it. And he didn't want to add to anyone's workload. So he didn't want to burden anyone, he didn't want to ask for help anymore. So just, kind of, being aware there. Including students in conversations that are about them and validating their feelings.

And really important as well, is bringing awareness to students and to families about how accommodations are going to change. As they kind of move towards post-secondary, preparing them for those changes, because there's just so much that's going to be different. And the sooner they start to sort of build on that knowledge, and prepare for it, the better.

It's a bit like the advocacy continuum when it comes to accommodations. So the responsibility is really shifting from being a teacher-led system to student-led. So a lot of the ones that they're used to having in secondary and intermediate, they're not common in post-secondary. Many of them aren't common. For example, unlimited time. It's not a thing, even double time. No. Scribes? Not really. Memory aids? They're very, very different. So students can be left unprepared. They can really struggle. So really looking ahead to kind of what they're going to have access to and working backwards from there to kind of prepare them and focusing their accommodations on specific functional impairments. So, you know, for ones that can be reduced, they can't. I mean, there's always going to be something that they're going to need forever. But for ones that can be reduced and skills built up instead. It's a great strategy.

Here's some examples of skills that a lot of the kids can learn and develop and improve on. Efficiency. So, you know, efficiency in test-taking, efficiency in studying, time management and organization, how to break an assignment down and get started on it.



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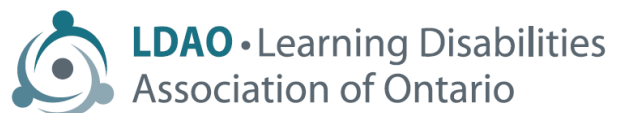
Using assistive technology like dictation and text to speech, learning how to study. How do you begin? How does it work? How do you do pre-learning? All of these things are skills that can be worked on. They can be developed and they can be incorporated into whole class activities. And that really helps all the learners in the room build really, really essential skills.

Over the next few slides I'll share some sample activities that we use in our programs here at RARC. We've separated them into activities for the grade kind of seven, eight, nine groups where they're more on the shared advocacy. And then, I'll pass things back over afterwards and Candice will share a few things for our older kids who are working more towards self-advocacy.

I'm going to start just by telling you a little bit about our curriculum for the STEPS program. And STEPS stands for Successful Transitions from Elementary to Post-Secondary. We run this program for students in grade eight as a way of kind of preparing for high school, with the ultimate goal of a successful transition to post-secondary. So kind of big picture thinking. And we work with parents. We work with students over the course of a year. And, and we develop self understanding, the self-esteem and ultimately self-advocacy. It's a super popular program that has led us to develop a curriculum that we now share province-wide with schools, with school boards for free. So anyone who wants to run it can have it. You can see just on the screen, we don't even get to self-advocacy until the sixth session. Because we're spending all that time before then building that foundation. It's just so important to have it in place for students to, kind of, grow into that self-advocacy, that they will get to.

I do have some activities that I'm going to share from the way we run our program here in Kingston. That you might take some for the classroom. So we always start with strengths. We really want these students to recognize what they're capable of, what they're good at, and feel good. A lot of them are not feeling great about themselves. They're kind of stuck at school where they're not always doing super well. They are struggling. It's so easy to lose sight of the other skills, the non-academic skills. So this is a really important starting place for a lot of our students. And it's difficult. We find every year for many of the students in the room to identify even one strength, which is really sad, but also really reinforces how important it is to talk about strengths and build up that self-esteem.

We also explore their strengths at school. And we do this as a whole group, and we pull these from their IEPs. They love this because it's what somebody else - teachers - have



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identified as strengths in them. And they take that more as fact than the ones they come up with themselves. But a lot of the terminology, it's hard to understand for them. So it's just a natural opportunity to kind of talk about what these mean, and how they can be helpful skills at school.

And that leads us to them looking at their own strengths on their IEP independently and they look at what's listed there. We give them some stickers and they use the stickers to mark the strengths that they're the most proud of. And then we get them to connect those back to how those strengths can help them at school. So making those connections.

We get them to do something similar with accommodations. They're looking at their IEPs. They're looking at the accommodations listed. But we want them to identify three accommodations that they find to be the most helpful to them. So we find this to be a great exercise. And they don't necessarily, choose the same ones we would choose for them. But it does provide insight into the ones that they find helpful. And the ones that they're willing to use. And so it kind of opens that conversation up a little bit about ones that they may not need any longer. Which kind of goes back to what we were just talking about the idea of, sort of, slowly reducing some of the accommodations where we can, and with the accommodations that they do identify to be the most helpful to them. We get them to connect it back to a need on their IEP and, sort of, make the connection to how that accommodation supports that need.

Another... And our final IEP activity that we do with parents as well as students, we give out some coloured highlighters and they highlight things that they agree with on their IEP, things that they don't agree with, and things that they have questions about. And afterwards, the students and the parents have conversations. They talk to each other, they talk to their teachers, and they share their input, in the IEP process. So that sharing advocacy. One student we recently worked with, on the way home, he asked his parents, what are periodic breaks and how do I get those? That was the first time he'd heard that he had that as an accommodation. So, you know, having these conversations helps. And doing these activities, it helps build awareness. It helps them develop that self-knowledge and sharing that advocacy. So very important and very meaningful.

With parents, we have students work on self advocacy inventory. And this is something that could be done independently in the classroom. But they identify the ways that they're already advocating in everyday life. So the things like negotiating a later

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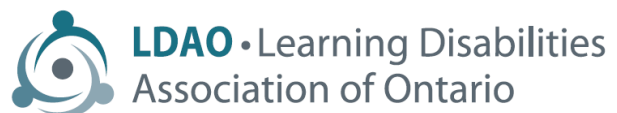
bedtime, getting some money to buy something, you know, getting a new phone, that sort of thing. And then they look at advocacy at school, and they start to reflect on who's doing it. Is it the parent? Is it the student? Is it the teacher? Is it a combination of everybody? And then from there they can start to identify some barriers to their advocacy. What is it specifically that's getting in their way? And then they can set a goal or two on kind of working around those barriers or removing those barriers to, kind of, keep moving forward on the self-advocacy journey.

This one. The students do not like this one. We do. It's so great. It's helpful. But, we know being, you know, self advocating - it's not easy going up talking to teachers. It can be intimidating for students, especially when you're asking for something you need. It's so easy to lose confidence. So we get the students to, kind of, role play scenarios and practice having those tricky conversations. We give them a template. We give them a script that they can tweak. They can take it with them to have these conversations. And it does help. It helps the conversation go smoother. It helps make sure that they address all the things that they want to talk about. With their, with their teacher.

In our final sessions with the students, we run a camp. And this is shortly before... Sorry, shortly after they graduate from grade eight. And it's in a local area high school. We practice the rotary system. Using locks and lockers, following a schedule, transitioning between classes. But we really focus here on assistive technology. Students need instruction on how to use these programs. They need time to practice, lots and lots of time to learn and practice. So we've created this games based assistive technology camp where students work on completing the activities on the bingo card. They get to win prizes. And all of the activities that we choose are based on technology that they have easy access to. So what the school boards, are providing them, or what's free and easy to get. So a lot of Office, Google, other technologies that are really common. It's just a fun way to practice. It's, you know, they get comfortable with it. And our hope is that ultimately they go back to high school and ask for them because they've had all this time to practice and they see the value in it. And this is something that you could incorporate into the classroom for all students. I think everyone can benefit from learning how to use these programs and the features that they offer.

But I will hand things back over to Candice now to share a little bit about some of the activities that we do with our older students.

[Candice] Right. Thanks, Gillian.



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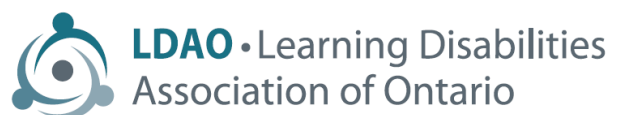
So, yeah, so we're just going to be looking at our transition program that we run for our older students and looking at the activities that we have within that program to, again, to help keep building on that advocacy, to get them moving along, that continuum to be self-advocates.

So our high school program is called Online to Success or OLTS, again another acronym. And this a free online transition program for grade 12 students with learning disabilities, ADHD, ASD, and mental health who are going towards diploma or degree programs at a college or university. And so the students work through nine modules online at their own pace. So it's great for, you know, doing it if they have a part time job or spare... It gives them that flexibility. And you can see on the screen there that the topics that we cover in the program are very similar to the STEPS program in looking at getting an understanding of self knowledge, that assistive technology study skills. And again, similar, it's about building on one another. To really get that good foundation and good groundwork before actually getting into advocacy.

So let's look at some of the activities and tools that we do within the program. So one tool that we share with our OLTS students is this fantastic website called AT Select. AT Select was developed by The Academic Intervention Lab at OISE. And it's great because it looks at different academic domains and then provides different assistive technology and strategies suggestions to help in those areas that are of challenge. So thinking about it as kind of a choose your own adventure for learning supports. So a student can identify their specific area need and then explore what types of supports are available for them. So they can see the cost of the different devices, device compatibility, and then make choices based off of their own unique circumstances.

So this is really great for students who are transitioning into post-secondary because, as was mentioned before, as they move to post-secondary, human resource supports, they're going to be decreasing a bit and looking different. And being aware of what tools are actually available can really help them independently problem solve. And this is quite an essential skill for going off to post-secondary. So it's a nice starting point for them.

Another thing is task initiation. This is a very common struggle that we see with a lot of students that we work with. And this is something that is not accommodated for at post-secondary. But most schools do have an assignment planning tool that students can access independently. We showed this one, the one on the screen here is from Seneca. But it allows students to input their assignment details, so deadline, what type

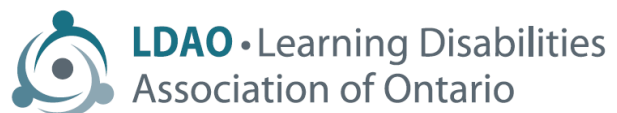


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of assignment, any additional details that they need. And then the tool will generate a timeline of steps for completing that assignment to meet that deadline goal. So a great thing with these is that many of them are open access, so anyone can freely use them. You don't have to be a student at that school. So even trying different styles and figuring out one that is, you know, maybe more personal that you like better. This is a great opportunity. And so having high school students begin to use these tools is a great starting point for students to be able to, you know, take that independence within their own studies.

We also talk about stigma and invisible disabilities with our students. So we have images like the ones on the screen as kind of conversation starters. And the students really get into sharing their thoughts and making connections to their own experiences and really supporting others. And it's really great to see and it's a very validating thing for them because they're seeing that they're not alone. And so many of our students who come to our program, it's often the first time that they're meeting other students with disabilities, and for some it is often the first time they're even talking about their disability. So it's, again, it's a very validating experience for them. And it goes back to that, again, needing to understand their diagnosis and being able to explain their needs. So conversations around disclosure is so important because this is something that they're going to have to do at post-secondary in order to be able to access accommodations.

Another activity that we do with our students is complete a researcher school worksheet. So students explore the website for their chosen post-secondary institution or school that they think they might want to go to, in kind of a scavenger hunt style. So looking for key information about that school. How do you access medical care? What's the name and contact information of the accessibility services on campus? What documentation is required to set up accommodations? Those types of things because we know transition in general, it's very overwhelming. A lot is changing. And so all of the students they're very nervous about this. It's on their mind. They're thinking about it constantly. And so we find by doing this research while they're still in high school, it really helps to calm those nerves before they actually get to post-secondary. And this activity not only helps to navigate a new environment, but it also helps to highlight of how their role is going to be changing. They're going to be the ones who need to take the lead and be their own advocates once they're at post-secondary. So they're going to need to know their rights and responsibilities and know that this is going to change after they leave high school. And by completing an activity like this, it just gets them one step closer to being able to do that.



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And even completing a course like this in general. It just gets them that one step closer.

And now, certainly we know and understand that building self-advocacy for students, it's not easy. It does not happen overnight. By any means. Unfortunately, there's no magic wand that we can just wave and, to make students become self-advocates. But really, the key is just, you know, keep encouraging students to try looking for opportunities to integrate any additional supports or programming wherever possible within your particular setting. It's an ongoing process, and it is going to look different for every student as well.

And so I'm just looking at our time. So just before we wrap up, I just wanted to share a quick resource with you. It's a website our office created called the Transition Resource Guide, or TRG, which was funded by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Securities. And we created it as a kind of a onestop shop for students, teachers, counselors to help with navigating that transition process out of high school.

So the TRG includes information about apprenticeship and skilled trades, community, workplace as well as post-secondary education. So really, it's a great resource to help teachers, help students, help families really plan and prepare for whatever pathway will follow after high school.

So thank you so much. And it was a lot of information in a short amount of time. Hopefully we have a few minutes for some questions, but if anyone is interested in learning more about the STEPS curriculum that Gillian was mentioning or the OLTS program, please feel free to send us an email or contact information is here. We're happy to chat over email or set up a meeting and answer any questions that you have.

