



The Right to Decide.

Everyone Has the Right to Make Choices

How would you feel if you had no say in where you live, who you spend time with, what you wear, what you eat, who you visit, or what you can spend your money on? That's what can happen to people with disabilities when someone else has the power to make choices and decisions for them.

We believe that everyone has the right to make choices, and we always assume that a person can make their own decisions. Supported decision-making is a way that people with disabilities can make their own decisions and stay in charge of their lives, while getting the help they need to do so.



Supported Decision-Making: How We All Make Choices

Supported decision-making is just another way of describing how we all make choices. Everyone needs help when they make decisions – think about it:

If the dentist says you have an impacted tooth, or the doctor says you have injured your mediate cruciate ligament, or something else that sounds like a foreign language, what do you do?

If you don't know the difference between a refundable and non-refundable tax credit, how do you complete your tax return?

If the mechanic says your car's alternator needs to be replaced, how do you know whether to pay for repairs?

In these situations, you might ask a friend or family member what to do, or if they know someone who can help you understand what's going on and what you might need to do. It's just common sense – when you don't know enough to make the right decision, you find people who can help you.

When you ask other people for help, you are using supported decision-making. You're getting the help you need and want so you can make the decisions you have to make, in a way that works for you.




Some people may need different types of help or more help than others. But that doesn't mean they can't make their own decisions. It just means they make their decisions using the help they need and want. Just like everyone.

It also means that in almost all cases, people who use supported decision-making do not need someone to make decisions for them. They just need help to make the choices and decisions that work for them.

How Does Supported Decision-Making Work?

The most important thing to remember is that we all have the right to make choices. Even if a person has a lot of trouble making decisions, it doesn't necessarily mean they need a guardian or other substitute decision-maker.

Supported decision-making includes three main things:

		
Help with understanding information, and what options are available to a person.	Help with choosing between different options, based on an understanding of the positives and negatives of each option.	Help with communicating a decision that has been made.

For example, maybe a person is thinking about moving out of their parent's house and into a home of their own. They can ask their aunt or uncle to weigh the costs of different options. They can talk to a social worker about how to get help with preparing meals or taking important medications at the right time. They can talk to friends about their experiences living on their own. They can ask their brother or sister to support them to communicate their decision to their parents.

Decision-making, and the support people need to make decisions, is always unique to the decision-maker. A person may need help with just one part, or all parts of decision-making. For some decisions, they may not need support at all.

Want to Learn More?

The National Resource Centre for Supported Decision-Making has many stories of successful supported decision-making, including the story of Ottawa's Justin Clark.

This resource was created as part of Community Living Ontario's Right to Decide project. To access all of the documents from the project, please visit our website.



The Right to Decide Project – Overview

‘Legal capacity’ refers to people’s experience of being recognized as persons before the law, exercising rights, accessing the civil and judicial system, entering into contracts, making decisions about their own life and property, and communicating on their own behalf.

In many situations (for example, in the case of guardianship) substitute decision-making removes people’s legal capacity, i.e., the right to direct their own lives, including managing their money, making health-related decisions, and deciding where and with whom they live.

From 2018 to 2023, Community Living Ontario worked with five front line service organizations to understand how people who have an intellectual disability exercise their right to legal capacity – that is, how they make choices and decisions, and the barriers they face in doing so.

Our collaborative work uncovered many enablers of legal capacity, as well as many barriers. This resource is part of a series of documents that address this important issue.

Our local partners in the project were Community Living Dryden & Sioux Lookout, Brockville & District Association for Community Involvement, Durham Family Resources, and Community Living Windsor in partnership with Windsor Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports.

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For more information and resources related to this project, please visit our Right to Decide resource page.