

DECISION-MAKING

We make hundreds of decisions every day, ranging from the relatively minor, such as what to have for lunch, to very big, like where we will live or work. We take the ability to make decisions for granted, never thinking about being unable to make life decisions or what it would be like to have that right taken away.

Minor children have the ability to make some decisions and this ability usually increases as they mature. As minors, parents have the legal right to make major decisions for their children.

Adults are entitled to make their own decisions. Some adults may require help making some decisions, but can still make others on their own. Others are unable to make decisions at all. Ideally, people should be allowed to make as many life decisions as possible and rely on others for those decisions that are too large or complex for them to handle on their own.

Minor children and some adults with disabilities need others to make personal, financial and/or health care decisions on their behalf. This can be done through formal or informal means.

Tara is an active woman in her mid-thirties. She has held a job and participates in many community activities. Over the years she has had a number of support workers to assist her. Frequently the issue of transportation comes up. When Tara is asked if she can ride a bus on her own, she responds in the affirmative. In reality, Tara needs assistance locating the bus stop, boarding the bus, and her support worker must remain on the bus to remind her when to get off. When these issues are pointed out to her, she then admits that someone must join her on the bus.

When determining the appropriate level of support for the person with a disability, consider his or her strengths in personal decision-making and identify those areas needing support. The questions on the following page will assist you in that process.

The following tool may help you plan. Provide as much detail as you can. Add extra pages if you need to.

Tool

Decision-Making Questions

Decision-Making Questions

1. How does the person a disability make decisions regarding:

Health and medical needs?

Personal care needs?

Financial issues (monetary and property)?

Daily activities?

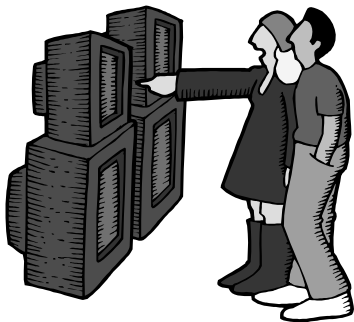
Food?

Clothing?

Shelter?

Safety?

Other issues?



Many decisions require help with understanding choices and the ramifications of those choices (such as selecting the correct size television for a certain size of room). Decisions like these can be made with the assistance of a friend or family member without formal authority.

2. What support does the person need to make decisions?

Detailed, repetitive instructions?

Comparative situations (choice between a limited number of options)?

Do questions need to be posed by specific individuals whom the person knows and trusts? By individuals that know specifically how to communicate with the person? Who are these individuals?

Through non-verbal communication? (Please describe.)

How should choices be presented?

3. Does the person have instances where his or her ability to make decisions does not equal his or her perception of a situation? For example, the individual believes he is capable of riding the bus independently, when in fact he cannot.

Do the perceptions tend to be specific to certain activities or more general in nature?

Are there any indications as to whether or not a perception reflects reality?

Do any types of questions assist in determining the accuracy of the perception?