

Supported Decision-Making: Informal and Formal

Everyone needs help making decisions sometimes. Supported Decision-Making (SDM) is a model for making decisions with the help of others. It is a series of relationships and agreements between people, designed to help people with disabilities make decisions with more self-reliance. You are the Decision-Maker, but you can get help and advice from your Supporters. Anyone can set up family, friends, and community supports for decision-making. These relationships may be informal or formal. Remember, you are at the center of the Supported Decision-Making process.

When might you want support in making decisions?

There are many areas of life where you might want support when making decisions. Before you begin to think about setting up family, friends, and community supports, consider the following:

Education:

- Do you know what accommodations are available in your school?
- Do you need help applying to college?

Work:

- Do you need help finding a job?
- Do you know how to request accommodations at work?

Life Plan:

- Do you know where you want to live?
- Do you have a plan in case of an emergency?

Healthcare:

- Do you need help scheduling doctor's appointments?
- Do you need help understanding your medication?

Finances:

- Do you need help understanding your bills?
- Do you need help buying items?

Legal Matters:

- Do you understand your rights?
- Do you know what to do if you think someone is violating your rights?

These are just examples of areas of life where you may want support in making decisions. Some of these may not apply to you, and there may be areas of life that you want support in that are not listed above.

You also may want more support in some areas of life and less in others. There may be decisions you feel confident making by yourself. There may be others that you need a little bit of support or advice about. There might also be decisions that you want a lot of support making. No matter the case, it is important to know what areas of life you want support in and how much support you need.

Identifying Your Supporters

Once you know what types of decisions you might want help making, it's time to think about who you want as a Supporter. Your Supporters can be anyone -- a family member, a friend, a service provider, a professional, or anyone else who you want to be involved. Think about people you have a good relationship with and who you trust.

You get to decide how you want to be supported. For example, you may

want your friend to support your life plan, a lawyer to support you in legal matters, and a family member to support your financial decisions. Maybe you've noticed that your aunt makes really good financial decisions - she might be a good person to act as a Supporter!

Once you've decided who you want to act as your Supporters, ask if they are willing to help. Share with them the areas where you would like their support and how you would like them to support you. It is important that the potential Supporter understands what is involved so that they can best support you, the Decision-Maker. Remember, you can change your mind about who you want supporting you, and your Supporters can change their minds, too.



Informal vs. Formal Supports

Asking for advice is a natural part of life -- no one has all the answers. Your family, friends, or community Supporters can help you make decisions informally or formally. Only you can decide what will work best for you.

The level of support that you want when making decisions will guide whether you want those agreements to be informal or formal. Informal support is a good choice if you feel confident in your ability to make decisions or only want a little bit of help. You should clearly communicate to your Supporter how you want to be supported.

Sometimes, you may want a formal Supported Decision-Making Agreement. A Supported Decision-Making Agreement is a written agreement between you, the Decision-Maker, and your Supporter. It outlines what role your Supporter will play in helping you make decisions.

Supported Decision-Making Agreements

Supported Decision-Making Agreements are an example of formal support. There is no “right” way to create a Supported Decision-Making Agreement (SDMA), but separate agreements should be created for every area that you want support in. Supported Decision-Making Agreements should be initiated by you, the Decision-Maker. It should be based on your experiences, preferences, and values. An SDMA should outline:

- ✓ Your Supporters
- ✓ Each Supporter’s responsibilities
- ✓ Who will speak on behalf of your Supporter if they are unavailable
- ✓ A process to handle disagreements

You and your Supporter can draft this agreement together. There is no required format for an SDMA in North Carolina, but here is an example of what you may want to include in yours:

Supported Decision-Making Agreement Example

This is the Supported Decision-Making Agreement of:

First and Last Name of Decision-Maker

I understand that this agreement takes effect as soon as it is signed by myself and my Supporter(s). It will be reviewed each year with my Supporter(s) on or before the anniversary of the date signed and may be revised by me then or at other times if I wish. Today’s date is MM/DD/YYYY and my preferred way to communicate is: Your preferred method of communication

Purpose of the Agreement:

The reasons I (Decision-Maker) want to have an Advisor (Supporter) help me with some decisions are because I: Why do you want support when making decisions?

My Supporter(s):

You can name as many supporters as you'd like, but you must name at least one.

Supporter #1: First and Last Name of Supporter #1.

Supporter #2 (optional): First and Last Name of Supporter #2.

Alternate Supporter (Optional)

If my Supporters above are unable or unavailable to help me, I want the following person to help me as my Supporter:

Alternate Supporter: First and Last Name of Alternate Supporter.

Areas in which I want my Supporter(s) to help me:

I would like my Supporter(s) to help me make decisions in the following areas:

Write what areas you would like Support in and what kind of support you want. For example, if you want help making decisions in financial or money matters, you may list that you would like support: buying things that cost more than \$50; investing money; paying bills; not spending too much, or budgeting; using the bank.

If I have more than one Supporter, then I want my Supporters to act (choose one):

Jointly (work together to help me)

or

Successively (Supporter #2 helps me only if Supporter #1 is not available)

Supported Decision-Making Agreement Signatures

(You, your Supporters, and a Witness must sign together at the same time)

Signature

Day/Month/Year

Decision Maker: I understand what this agreement is for.

Signature

Day/Month/Year

Supporter #1

Signature

Day/Month/Year

Supporter #2

Witness CANNOT be a Supporter, or an Employee, Spouse, Child, Parent of a Supporter.

Signature

Day/Month/Year

I certify that I witnessed the signing of this agreement

Who has a copy of this agreement? List the people here. If you want to end this agreement, be sure to ask these people to give the copies back so you can destroy them. Your Supporters or someone else can help you get the copies back.

This is just an example of the parts you may want to include in your Supported Decision-Making Agreement if you decide that is what's right for you. Here are other examples of what you might want in your SDMA.

You can find more resources about Supported Decision-Making here.



Rethinking Guardianship is a North Carolina initiative promoting less restrictive alternatives to guardianship, and creating long-term changes in the state's guardianship system.

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