

Supported Decision-Making: Informal and Formal

Everyone needs help making decisions. Supported Decision-Making (SDM) is a model for making choices with the help of others. SDM helps people with disabilities make decisions. You are the Decision-Maker. You may get help and advice from your Supporters. Anyone can use SDM. Supported Decision-Making can be informal or formal. You are at the center of the process.

When Might You Want Support?

There are many areas where you might want support. Consider the following:

Education:

- Do you know what resources 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 support at work?

Life Plan:

- Do you know where you want to live?
- Do you have a plan for emergencies?

Healthcare:

- Do you need help making doctor's appointments?
- Do you need help with your medicines?

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 where you might want support. Some of these may not apply to you. There may also be things you want help with that are not listed above.

There may be choices that you feel like making by yourself. There may be other choices where you want a little bit or a lot of support. It is important to know how much help you want, and where.

Choosing Your Supporters

Do you think you could use support? Think about whom you want as a Supporter. Your Supporters can be anyone. It could be a family member, a friend, a professional, or anyone else from whom you want help. Think about people you have a trusting relationship with.

You get to choose how you want to be supported. For example, you may want a lawyer to support you in legal matters and a family member to help with your life plan. Maybe your aunt makes good choices with money - she might be a good person to be a Supporter!

Once you've picked whom you want as your Supporters, ask if they will help you make choices. Tell them how you would like them to help you.



It is important they know what is involved so they can best support you. Remember, you can change your mind about whom you want to help you. Your Supporters can change their minds, too.

Informal and Formal Supports

Asking for advice is a regular part of life. No one has all the answers. Your family, friends, or community Supporters can help you make choices. This can be done informally or formally. Only you know what will work best for you.

The level of support that you want will guide you. Informal support is a good choice if you feel confident making choices. It is also good if you only want a little bit of help. Make sure to tell your Supporter how much help you want.

You may want more formal support. A Supported Decision-Making Agreement (SDMA) does this. An SDMA is a written agreement between you (the Decision-Maker) and your Supporter. It states how your Supporter will help you make choices.

Supported Decision-Making Agreements

Supported Decision-Making Agreements (SDMAs) are an example of formal support. There is no “right” way to create a SDMA. You can create what works best for you. Separate SDMAs should be created for every area you want help making choices in. An SDMA should include:

- Your Supporters
- How each Supporter will help
- Who will be a backup Supporter if yours is not available
- A way to handle situations when you and your Supporter don't agree

You and your Supporter can make this agreement together. In North Carolina there is no required layout for a Supported Decision-Making Agreement.

Resources

Here are examples of what you might want in your SDMA (<http://www.supporteddecisionmaking.org/sites/default/files/sample-supported-decision-making-model-agreements.pdf>).

You can find more resources about Supported Decision-Making here (<http://www.supporteddecisionmaking.org/>).

Getting Started with Supported Decision-Making

Step 1. Decide what types of decisions you want help with.

Step 2. Choose your supporter(s) and talk to them.

Step 3. Decide if you would like to make a formal plan for their support with your decision-making, or if you would like the arrangement to be informal.

Step 4. Look at examples of formal and informal Supported Decision-Making Agreements (see Resources, above).