



Five Things to Know About Supported Decision-Making

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1. What is Supported Decision-Making?

Supported decision-making is having people you trust help you when you need to make a decision. Decisions might be about:

- Financial planning
- Health and medical decisions
- Living situations
- Handling conflicts
- Employment decisions
- Managing leisure time and activities

You may find support from loved ones, professional experts, or knowledgeable acquaintances. Examples of legal documents that formalize supported decision-making plans include advance medical directives, power of attorney, and supported decision-making agreements.

Supported decision-making is different from substitute decision-making. In **substitute decision-making**, another person(s) is appointed to make decisions for you. You no longer have the right to make legal decisions; this affects lots of areas of your life. Examples of legal substitute decision-making arrangements include guardianship and conservatorship.

2. Why is supported decision-making helpful and important?

Supported decision-making increases a person's control over their own life and builds a person's independence through valuable life experiences. We call this **self-determination**. Self-determination can lead to increased mental wellness, physical health, personal safety, community belonging, and better compensation at work.

3. What is a Supported Decision-Making Agreement?

A **Supported Decision-Making Agreement** shows in writing who you would like to help you make decisions, how you would like to receive help, and in what situations specific kinds of help are most important to you. The agreement also shows that you have the right to make final decisions about your life.

4. How do I make a Supported Decision-Making Agreement?

You can make an agreement for free by using **Virginia's Supported Decision-Making Agreement** template or by making your own. Each SDMA names the Decision-Maker (you), the Supporter or Supporters, what kind of support you would like, and any other details that make the decision-making process clear.

There are no rules about who can and cannot be a Supporter or how many Supporters a Decision-Maker can have.

5. When should I make a Supported Decision-Making Agreement?

You can use supported decision-making at any age to get help making decisions and increase self-determination. You can begin thinking about how you best make decisions and how you like getting help. This is called the discovery process. What you learn during the discovery process will help you make your Supported Decision-Making Agreement.

You must be at least 18 to enter into a formal Supported Decision-Making Agreement. Supported Decision-Making Agreements can be used together with other legal tools like advance medical directives or power of attorney forms.

There are tools that can help you start the discovery process and talk about the supported decision-making process on the **DBHDS website**.