



Five Things to Know About Supported Decision-Making

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1. What is Supported Decision-Making and how is it different from a Supported Decision-Making Agreement?

Supported Decision-Making is having people you trust help you when you need to make a decision. They help you think about your options, but you make the final decision and keep all your legal rights. This is something we all do when making a decision, regardless of disability or diagnosis.

Supported Decision-Making Agreements are a way to show in writing who you want to support (help) you, what areas of life you want help with, and how you want to be supported.

2. Why are Supported Decision-Making Agreements helpful?

Supported Decision-Making Agreements allow individuals with disabilities to get help with making decisions while keeping their legal rights and ability to make the final decision. They also help increase independence and the individual's control over their own life (**Self-Determination**). Self-Determination can lead to increased health, wellness, and safety, as well as higher rates of community belonging and employment at higher wages. Supported Decision-Making Agreements are free to create and considered to be the least restrictive option for getting help with making decisions.

3. Who is part of a Supported Decision-Making Agreement?

Supported Decision-Making Agreements are made up of at least two people: the person making decisions (i.e. the **Decision Maker**) and the person or people helping the Decision Maker understand their options in order to make an informed decision (i.e. the **Supporters**). There are no rules on who can and cannot be a Supporter or how many Supporters a Decision Maker can have.

4. How is a Supported Decision-Making Agreement created?

Supported Decision-Making Agreements are made by the individual with a disability and the people they trust to be their Supporters. They can use the [activity sheets](#) on the DBHDS website (Discovery Tools) to think about what help is needed, how to get that help, and who will give the help. Individuals and families can use [Virginia's Supported Decision-Making Agreement form](#) or create their own form. Self-made forms should include: the names of the Supporter(s), when the Supporter(s) will provide help, and how they will help. Make sure the Decision Maker and all the Supporter(s) agree to the information and sign the form. For help with this process, you can contact [DBHDS's Supported Decision-Making Community Resource Consultant Lead](#).

5. When should the Supported Decision-Making process start?

While you have to be at least 18 years old to create a Supported Decision-Making Agreement, you can use Supported Decision-Making at any age to help with making choices and increasing Self-Determination. You can also start the discovery process and talk about decision-making before someone turns 18. Learning to make choices takes time and should be practiced from an early age. There are tools that can help you start the discovery process and talk about Supported Decision-Making on the [DBHDS website](#).