



About Supported Decision Making

Does my family member need guardianship?

Families throughout South Carolina are often told to seek guardianship without a thorough explanation of the costs, long-term impact, or alternatives. We would encourage you to explore ALL the options before taking a step that is often costly and intended to be permanent, when there may be alternatives that will address any support needed. Remember that professionals are typically trained in their field of expertise and may not understand the support systems that exist outside of their arena that can support individuals with disabilities. Studies show people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who do not have a guardian are more likely to:

- Have a paid job
- Live independently
- Have friends other than staff or family
- Go on dates and socialize in the community
- Practice the religion of their choice

The South Carolina Supported Decision Making Project aims to educate parents, professionals, and individuals with disabilities about alternatives to guardianship that promote self-determination and value quality of life.

About Supported Decision Making

Almost everyone has relied on someone else to help them make a decision. For example, we may consult someone for a second opinion if we think our auto mechanic is overcharging us, we allow a real estate agent to help us navigate the home-buying process, or we reach out to friends for input on their experiences before contacting a plumber or electrician. People with and without disabilities occasionally need support in the decision making process. Supported Decision Making is “a recognized alternative to guardianship through which people with disabilities use friends, family members, and professionals to help them understand the situations and choices they face, so they may make their own decisions without the ‘need’ for a guardian.”[2] In Supported Decision Making, individuals can choose “Supporters” to assist them in different areas of their lives—employment, education, services, finances, health, etc. The Supporters and their duties are listed in an agreement that is shared with all of the individual’s service providers to ensure the Supporters are included in discussions surrounding important decisions. The Supporter does NOT make decisions for the individual or discuss matters without the individual present. Instead, the Supporter helps explain information in an understandable way, guides the individual in weighing the courses of action, and advises the individual on the consequences of the decision. Some benefits of Supported Decision Making include:

- Individual is always at the center of decision-making
- Individual decides who offers support
- Individual retains legal rights
- No expensive attorney fees or court fees
- Teaches individual about decision making, self-determination, and details of his or her affairs

Supported Decision Making can be combined with other assistance when needed to fully support an individual’s success.

Additional Information:

Values

Information obtained from home page of South Carolina’s Supported Decision Making Project’s

Website: <http://scsupporteddecisionmaking.org/>

Additional information can be found on the National Supported Decision Making Information Website:

<http://supporteddecisions.org/>

All adults, including individuals with disabilities, have will and preferences, and therefore have the right to make their own decisions, including life decisions about their health care, their finances, their relationships, where they work, where they travel, who they vote for, and where they live and with whom.

- Individuals with disabilities sometimes need support from people they trust to make decisions.
- The people they trust know their values, their goals, their will, and their preferences.
- The people they trust present the pros and cons of a pending issue and help them understand the ramifications of their choices.
- The people they trust help them express their decisions based on their will and preferences.
- The people they trust respect their autonomy, their right to make their own decisions, and their right to have those decisions honored.
- When individuals with disabilities and their supporters create decision-making networks, they are connected to the greater world of commerce, medicine, education, and community.
- Through supported decision-making, community leaders, merchants, bankers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and school administrators will learn to understand and respect the capacity of individuals with disabilities and their right to self-determination.
- Supported decision-making maximizes independence and promotes self-advocacy and self-determination for individuals with disabilities. They are agents of their own change.

How does supported decision-making work?

1. The individual identifies the areas where he or she needs decision-making assistance — health care, employment, relationships, finances, etc — and the type of support he or she needs.
2. The individual chooses supporters he or she trusts.
3. Supporters commit to providing information to the individual so that he or she can make his or her own decisions. Supporters commit to honoring the individual's decisions.
4. Individual and supporters execute a Supported Decision-Making agreement.