



Supported Decision-Making Position Statement

“Giving people the help they need and want, to understand the situations and choices they face, so they can make their own decisions”

All adults have the right to make decisions, to direct one’s life, to be treated with dignity, and to be respected as an autonomous adult. Adults seek advice and counsel when making important decisions. Many options, other than guardianship, are available to support decision-making. Person-Centered Planning and Self-Determination guidelines mandate that the choices of adults with disabilities are respected and honored so that they maintain autonomy. Multiple avenues are available to support individuals in making decisions and directing their own lives:

1. Person-Centered Planning and Self-Determination
 - b. Person-Centered Planning strengthens the supports around a person, both the counsel and the framework for preserving the person’s autonomy and decision-making, thereby rendering guardianship unnecessary.
 - c. Person-Centered Planning documents who the person has authorized to assist them in making life decisions (such as authorizations to share information, representation agreements, powers of attorney).
 - d. Self-Determination is a way for people with disabilities to hire and manage providers of publicly funded services and supports with the help and assistance they need.
2. Families, Friends and Allies (or Circle of Support)
 - a. Circles of Support can provide more protection for a person than guardianship can provide through their guidance, counsel and expertise.
 - b. The supports negate the need for evaluation of an individual’s competence, as the family, friends, and allies provide competent guidance and counsel to the individual.
 - c. Circles of Support enable multiple people to help a person rather than a single guardian.

3. Formal Systems of support

- a. Young adults in school, and their families, can use the individualized education planning process to support autonomy, decision-making, and self-determination.
- b. Support and education are provided by a variety of advocacy organizations.
- c. Community Mental Health programs must support and implement the principles and practices of Self-Determination.

4. Safeguards to Support Decision-Making Authority and Civil Rights Protections

- a. Guardianship is a restriction on a person's freedom to make decisions. It should be considered only as a last resort when no alternatives are available.
- b. Guardianship should be reviewed regularly to confirm its continued necessity.
- c. Family members should receive information about alternatives to guardianship to support people with disabilities to make decisions about health care, money, education, housing, relationships, or other areas.
- d. A court should only grant a guardianship after a full and fair court hearing that includes the person with a disability.
- e. Everyone's decision-making ability should be supported to the maximum extent possible.

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