



SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING GIVES OLDER ADULTS, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, AND THEIR FAMILIES MORE CHOICES

What is Supported Decision Making?

Supported Decision Making (SDM) is an alternative to guardianship and conservatorship that empowers people with disabilities and older adults to make their own decisions. When people use SDM, they work with family members, friends, or professionals who help them understand their situations and choices so they can make decisions that are best for them. Think about what you do when you need to make a tough choice, or a decision about something you don't know much about or just want to "talk it out." You may ask a friend or family member for advice or a professional for information. They help you think through the issues and the pros and cons of your choices. That way, you can understand your options and choose the one that's best for you. When you do that, you're using SDM![1]

Does SDM Eliminate Guardianship and Conservatorship?

NO! People who need guardians or conservators should have them. SDM just gives people and their families another option, and a way to avoid the court system, if they choose it.

Can People who use SDM Receive SSI and SSDI Benefits?

YES! There is no law, regulation, or policy that says people must be in guardianship or conservatorship to receive SSI or SSDI. In fact, the Social Security Advisory Board has called for greater use of SDM and more research into the benefits of SDM for people who receive Social Security benefits![2]

What are the Benefits of SDM?

- **More Choice and Independence for Older Adults and People with Disabilities:** When people choose to use SDM, they make their own decisions instead of having someone else make decisions for them.
- **Better Quality of Life:** Research has repeatedly found that older adults and people with disabilities who make their own choices – who are more *self-determined* – can have a better quality of life.[3] For example: studies show that: people with disabilities who are more self-determined are better able to recognize and avoid abuse[4] and, among people with similar abilities and limitations, those who made their own decisions were more likely to live independently, work, be active members of their communities, date, and marry than those who had people making decisions for them.[5]
- **Less Taxpayer Spending and More Public Resources:** Every person and family who chooses to use SDM will save taxpayer funds and free up public resources that would have been used to establish and supervise their guardianship or conservatorship.

[1] e.g., Blanck, P., & Martinis, J. (2015). "The right to make choices": The national resource center for supported decision-making. *Inclusion*, 3(1), 24-33

[2] Social Security Board (n.d.) Statement on supplemental security income. Available at: www.ssa.gov/oact/ssir/SSI16/SSAB_Statement.pdf

[3] e.g., Shogren, et al. (2012). Relationships between self-determination and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities, *J. Special Educ.* 4. 256 (2015).

[4] e.g., Hickson, L. et al. (2015). Randomized control trial to evaluate an abuse prevention curriculum for women and men with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Am. J. on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 120(6), 490. Khemka, I. et al. (2005). Evaluation of a decision-making curriculum designed to empower women with mental retardation to resist abuse. *Am. J. Mental Retardation* 110,193.

[5] Bradley, V., et al. (2019). What does NCI data reveal about the guardianship status of people with IDD? Available at:

https://legacy.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NCI_Data_Brief_Aging_3_19_20.pdf



Connecticut Supported Decision-Making Coalition

Website: <https://ctsilc.org/supported-decision-making/> Phone: 860.681.7599

Five Steps - Tools To Explore And Start Using Supported Decision Making.



STEP 1 - LISTEN AND THINK

SDM should always be based on the person's strengths, needs, and interests. Therefore, start by encouraging them to think about the types of decisions where they would like support. The Missouri Stoplight Tool found at <https://bit.ly/3F7DwKC> can help people identify what they do well and the life areas where they want help.



STEP 2 - IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES

Now that you know where the person wants support, the next thing to do is identify how they want to be supported. The best way to do that is by exploring how they use support now and how they have been supported before. The Supported Decision Making Brainstorming Guide (<https://bit.ly/3XzCTQp>) can help people identify ways they have been supported before and new ways the persons would like to be supported.



STEP 3 - FIND SUPPORTERS

Next, connect with people and professionals who can provide the support the person wants. Don't forget to consider supports from state agencies or programs like Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Centers for Independent Living.

You can also watch videos at <https://bit.ly/3Xx65HK> that can help learn about SDM.



STEP 4 - PUT IT TOGETHER

Work with the person and their supporters to develop an SDM plan. The Setting the Wheels in Motion guide (<https://bit.ly/4bCakYn>) includes tips and worksheets that can help people identify areas where they want support, the types of support they want, people, professionals, and agencies that can provide support, and ways they can work together.

STEP 5 - PUT IT IN WRITING

We recommend that you put your SDM plan in writing. While you don't have to put your plan in writing we think it's helpful. People can show their SDM plans to friends, family members, and professionals like doctors to show how they make decisions and want to be treated. They can also review their plans from time to time to make sure things are working well or change things if they're not. You should create a plan that works best for the person. There are model forms found at <https://bit.ly/43snhlv>