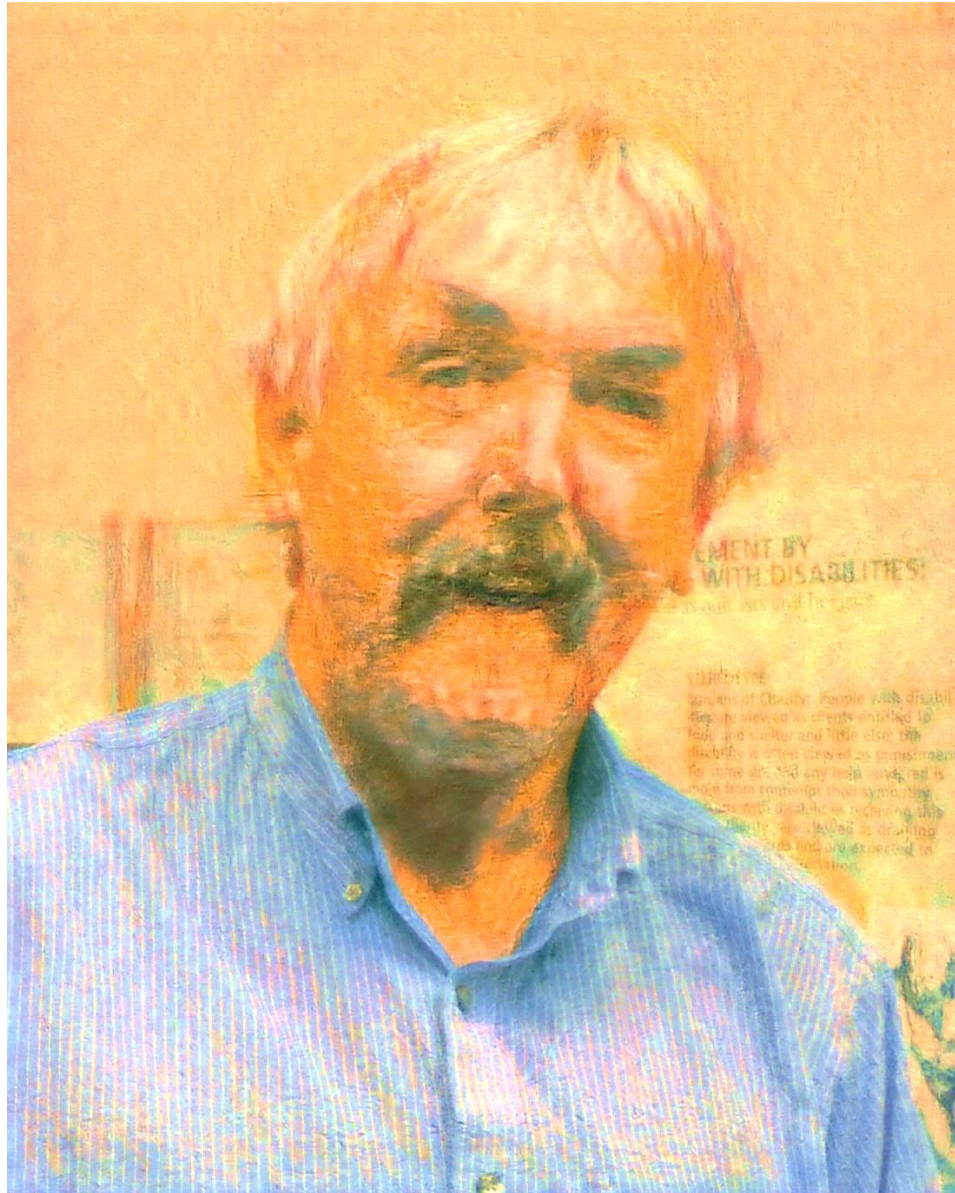




Making My Own Decisions



The Office of Developmental Disabilities Ombuds

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This booklet is available in alternative formats upon request.



Part 1. This Is Your Life

You have the right to make your own decisions.

Every day, you make choices—what to eat, where to go, who to spend time with, and what you want for your future. These choices help show who you are.

Making decisions is a basic human right. People with disabilities have the same right to make decisions as anyone else.

- You are the expert on your own life
- Your preferences matter
- Your goals matter
- Your voice must be heard

Even if you need help, the decision should still be yours.

Part 2: What Is a Decision?

A decision is a choice.

Some decisions are small:

- What to wear
- What to eat
- What to do today

Some decisions are big:

- Where to live
- What job to have
- What medical care to get
- How to manage money

All decisions, big or small, are important because they shape your life.



Part 3. Learning to Make Decisions

Decision-making is a skill. You can learn it and get better at it.

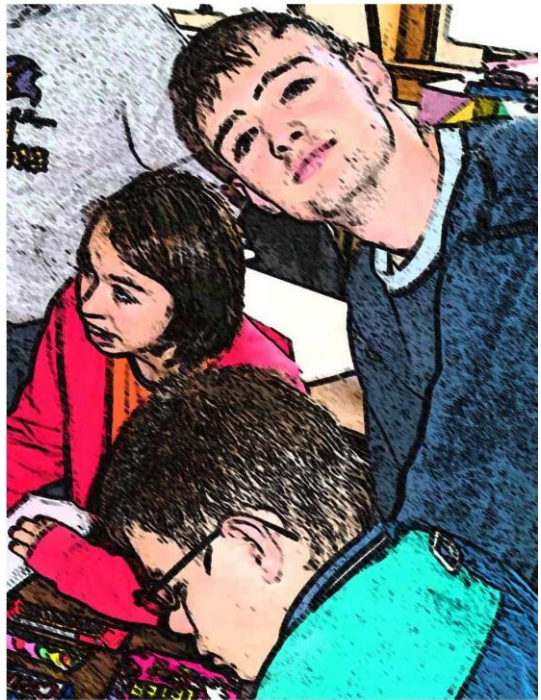
It's okay to:

- Take your time
- Ask questions
- Make mistakes
- Change your mind

Making mistakes is part of learning. **Everyone makes mistakes.**

When you practice making decisions:

- You build confidence
- You learn what works for you
- You become more independent



Part 4. Getting Support to Make Decisions

Sometimes people need help to make decisions. That's normal.

Everyone uses support in some way. For example:

- Talking to friends before making a big choice
- Asking a doctor for advice
- Looking things up online

Getting support does NOT mean giving up control.

Support can include:

- Explaining information in a way you understand
- Helping you compare options
- Talking through pros and cons
- Helping you communicate your decision

The goal is to help you understand and decide, not to decide for you.

Part 5. How I Know Someone Supports Me

A person is supporting you when that person:

- Answers your questions
- Suggests ideas, but you direct the decisions
- Makes sure you understand the decision
- Listens closely to what you say you want
- Helps you do what you say you want
- Mostly talks about things you can do well

A person is not supporting you when that person:

- Is impatient or unwilling to answer your questions
- Speaks about you with words you don't understand
- Talks too much or talks over you
- Criticizes or dismisses all your ideas
- Talks to others about your life without your permission
- Makes your decisions for you
- Doesn't ask you what you want

Part 6. Types of Decision-Making Support

There are many ways to get support:

Informal Supports

- Family
- Friends
- Teachers
- Support workers
- Doctors or Therapists

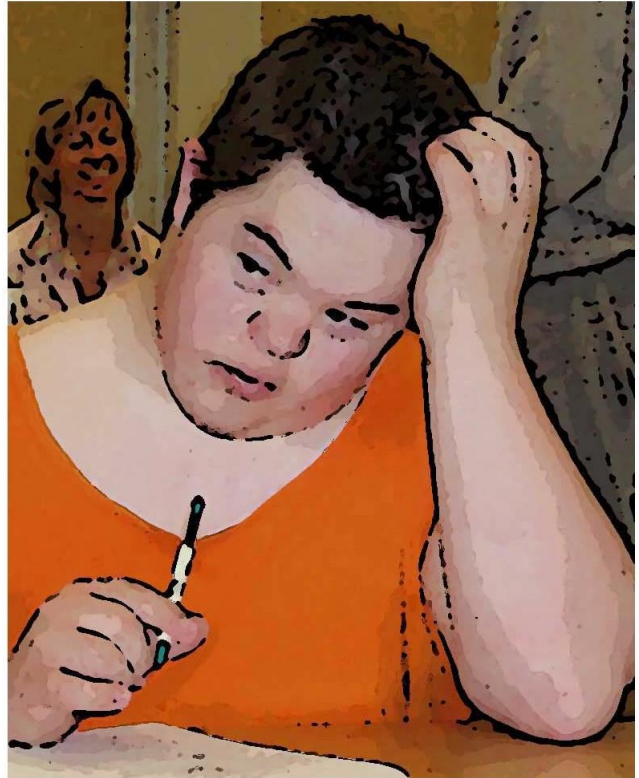
Tools and Services

- Interpreters
- Easy-read materials
- Assistive technology

Legal Tools

- Power of Attorney
- Release of information forms
- Representative payees

Each tool gives different levels of support. Some give others more power than others, so it's important to understand your options.



Part 7. Guardianship and Conservatorship

Guardianship or Conservatorship is a legal process where a judge gives someone else the power to make decisions for you.

This person is called a guardian or conservator.

If you have a guardian, they get to make decisions about your care. They can:

- Decide where you live
- Make medical decisions
- Sign legal documents

If you have a conservator, they get to make decisions about your money and your property instead.

These are very restrictive. They can take away important rights.

Because of this, many people now look for **less restrictive options first**.

Even if you have a guardian or conservator, they should always do what YOU want.

Part 8. Supported Decision-Making (SDM)

A Supported Decision-Making agreement is a modern alternative to guardianship.

It says:

- Who supports you
- What kind of help they give
- What decisions that you want help with

You choose your supporters. They might be:

- Family members
- Friends
- Advocates
- Professionals

Supporters help you:

- Understand information
- Think through choices
- Communicate your decisions

But they do NOT make decisions for you.



Part 9. Your Decision-Making Rights

You have the right to:

- Be included in decisions about your life
- Get information in a way you understand
- Ask for support
- Say yes or no
- Change your mind

“Nothing about me without me.”

Some common ways people get help making decisions are:

- A person asks a friend to help understand medical choices
- A young adult works with a parent to review a lease before signing
- Someone uses a support person to help manage a budget



Part 10. Practice Making Decisions

You can build your skills by practicing.

Try:

- Making a daily choice (what to eat, what to wear)
- Talking through a bigger decision with someone you trust
- Writing down pros and cons

Ask yourself:

- What do I want?
- What are my options?
- What might happen next?

Remember:

You are always in charge of your own life.



Part 11. Tips for Supporters and Final Thoughts

If you support someone:

- Listen first
- Respect their choices
- Don't pressure or control
- Help explain, not decide
- Be patient

Good support builds independence—not dependence.

Everyone needs help sometimes.

But needing help does not mean giving up your rights.

With the right support:

- You can make your own decisions
- You can learn and grow
- You can live the life you choose

Part 12. Resources

- **Developmental Disabilities Ombuds**

The Office of Developmental Disabilities Ombuds advocates for the rights, dignity, and humanity of people with developmental disabilities living in Washington-State.

<https://ddombuds.org/>

- **Disability Rights Washington**

Disability Rights Washington is a private non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities statewide. We work to pursue justice on matters related to human and legal rights.

<https://disabilityrightswa.org/>

- **People First of Washington**

The purpose and mission of People First of Washington is to assist all people to realize and appreciate that we are PEOPLE FIRST and our disabilities are secondary.

<https://www.peoplefirstofwashington.org/>

- **Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center**

The mission of SARTAC is to strengthen the self-advocacy movement by supporting self-advocacy organizations to grow leadership opportunities for all their members.

<https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/>

- **Supported Decisions**

Supported Decisions helps people learn how to make and use their own Supported Decision Making (SDM) plan.

<https://supporteddecisions.org/getting-started-with-supported-decision-making/>