

# Decision-Making Supports

## **What Supports Are Available To Help People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Make Decisions?**

People with IDD have the same right to make decisions about their lives as people without disabilities. It is important to recognize and respect that right.

### **INDEPENDENT DECISIONS**

Most people with IDD make day-to-day decisions on their own without supports. They decide what they want to wear. They decide what they want to eat. They decide where they want to go. They decide who they want to talk to and spend time with.

### **SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING**

Just like people without disabilities, sometimes people with IDD need support to make decisions.

- **They may need someone to explain their options.**
- **They may need someone to explain the good and bad things that can happen when they make a choice.**
- **They may need help understanding the information that doctors, lawyers, their providers, employers, and others are telling them.**
- **They may need help communicating what they want to people who don't understand them.**

Once they receive support, most people with IDD can make their own decision.

People with IDD can create a supported decision-making agreement that identifies the person or people they want to support them and the kinds of decisions they want support to make. See the National Resource Center on Supported Decision-Making and The Arc's [A Letter for My Doctors](#) for more information and examples of a supported decision-making agreement.

### **SUBSTITUTE DECISION-MAKING**

Sometimes, people with IDD want or need someone else to make a decision for them, because they cannot make it for themselves. Some examples of substitute decision-making include:

#### **Representative Payee**

The Social Security Administration appoints a person or organization to manage the person's SSI and other Social Security benefits.

#### **Power of Attorney (POA)**

A person chooses someone else to make decisions for them. The POA can be limited to one topic, like money or disability services. The POA can even be limited to one decision, like buying a house. A POA can also be very broad and cover all decisions, like homes, money, disability services, lawsuits, and more. However, a power of attorney for health care must be separate.

#### **Power of Attorney for Health Care**

A person chooses someone else to make health care decisions for them if they are later unable to make a decision themselves. The person authorized to make health care decisions may be known as a Health Care Agent, Health Care Representative, Health Care Surrogate, or Health Care Proxy.

#### **Guardianship/Conservatorship**

A court determines that a person is not able to make some or all decisions on their own and appoints a guardian or conservator to make some or all decisions for the person. A guardian is usually appointed to make decisions about a person's body or property. A conservator is usually appointed to make decisions about a person's money.

When a guardian is appointed, the person loses the authority to make those decisions for him or herself. Every state has its own process for appointing guardians. If guardianship is necessary, it is important to recognize the person's abilities and limit the guardianship to only those areas where the person cannot make their own decisions.