

Alternatives to Guardianship (Part 8): Supported Decision-Making

Hello there. I'm here to talk with you about supported decision-making, which is an alternative to guardianship. Alternatives are important because guardianship significantly interferes with a person's independence, and legal and human rights.

So, what exactly is supported decision-making?

CHAPTER HEADING: WHAT IS SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING?

It's an arrangement meant to help someone make and communicate decisions. Supported decision making is for people who are able make their own personal or financial decisions but need some assistance. Most of us use supported decision-making every day. I recently used it to buy a car.

I started by researching different brands and models. I then talked to friends, family, coworkers, my mechanic, and others about their experiences with the car buying process and with particular models. Those conversations helped me understand what kind of car I needed, which features to look for, what questions to ask, and even how to negotiate the price. I have friend who knows a ton about cars who went with me to the dealership and helped translate the salesperson's "car talk." Using all this information, I decided which car to buy.

This is supported decision-making. It can be used by anyone. But it might be a helpful accommodation for people with disabilities and older adults who want to live independently in the community where they are valued, where they live, work, and have family and friends. Most importantly, it protects their right to choose. This should not to be taken for granted. Think about it: The ability to choose where you eat, sleep, and who you spend time with is fundamental to your physical and emotional well-being and should be protected.

So, how does supported decision-making work?

CHAPTER HEADING: HOW DOES SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING WORK?

You rely on the assistance of another person or a group of people, called supporters, who help you make some or all decisions. They can assist with your health care, education, housing, finances, or social activities. It's up to you. A supporter's job is to help you understand situations and options. They can ask you questions, give advice, and explain things in a way that you understand. When you've made a decision, it's yours alone. Supporters can help you communicate that decision, but they do not decide for you. They don't even have to agree with you. It is their job to support, accept, and respect your choices.

Your supported decision-making arrangement can be informal or a formal agreement laid out in writing. It can identify your supporters, the type of assistance they will provide, and the type of decisions they will help you make. Your agreement can be updated at any time.

Who can be your supporters?

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CHAPTER HEADING: WHO CAN BE YOUR SUPPORTERS?

That's also up to you. You can have one or a network. They can be family members, friends, or professionals you trust. It's your choice, but they need to agree to serve in this role. It should be someone you know well and with whom you feel comfortable sharing personal information and ideas. It is important that you be able to communicate well together. Your supporters also need to understand and respect that you are the final decision-maker. Choose your supporters wisely.

Let's Review

CHAPTER HEADING: LET'S REVIEW

Supported decision-making is an arrangement that maximizes your decision-making ability through the use of trusted supporters. They help you research and consider options, answer questions, and offer advice, but they do not make decisions for you; you are in charge. Your supporters are only there to help you make and communicate *your* decision. Your arrangement can be informal or formal. You pick your supporters and decide how and when they'll assist you. It should be someone you trust to respect your wishes.

Supported decision-making, along with the other options covered in this series, are alternatives to guardianship. Guardianship is a complex and expensive process and results in someone losing fundamental rights. Learn about alternatives before you petition for guardianship of another person. The alternatives to guardianship discussed in this series can also be part of your estate plan.

I hope this information has been helpful. Thanks for watching.