



# **Making My Own Decisions**

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Disability Rights

WASHINGTON

Washington's protection and advocacy system

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# Making My Own Decisions

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# Chapter One

It's Your Life:  
You have the  
right to make  
your own  
decisions



This is an exciting time in your life. You have the freedom of being young. The world is in front of you. You also have more adult concerns and responsibilities as you grow.

As you move from the teenage years into adulthood, it is sometimes a challenge to convince the people around you that you can make your own decisions.

**You have a right to make your own decisions about your life.**

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As you become a “grownup” you will need support in making decisions. You may need a lot of support at first. As you have more success with your own decisions and your responsibilities, you will need less support.

One of the ways to have more decision-making power is to show that you can make good decisions. As you make strong decisions and take more of your own responsibilities, you will need less supports in life.

You will want to work with the adults you trust to figure out what decisions you can make on your own and what decisions still need some support.

Unfortunately, sometimes people with disabilities aren’t given a chance to make their own decisions.

You will run into people who believe they know what is best for you.

You will run into times when others want to make your decisions for you.

You will run into situations where people made decisions for you, good or bad, without asking what you wanted.

You are your own expert. You know what your dreams and hopes and challenges are. You will need to use your voice to let others know this is your life, and you have a right to give input to decisions that concern you.

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# Chapter Two

## Getting the Support You Need to Make Your Own Decisions

You will want to find a few adults you trust to help you with your decisions. These people can be counselors, parents, teachers, church members, friends, care providers, or others. You will want someone you trust.

There will be hard decisions, and you need someone you can talk to openly. You may have to talk about difficult things like sex and relationships, or how to stop abuse. Finding someone trustworthy who makes you comfortable is important.

You will also want to find someone who supports you. This can be tricky, because sometimes people close to you say they support you when they don't. When a person assumes s/he knows what is best for you, but never asks you what you want, that is not support. That does not help you make your own decisions.

# How can I tell if someone supports my decision making?

## A person is supporting you when that person

- answers your questions
- suggests ideas, but you direct the decisions
- makes sure you understand the decision and what might happen
- listens closely to what you say you want
- helps you do what you say you want
- talks about things you can do well, not just things you can't do
- waits to give advice until you ask for it

## A person is not supporting you when that person

- is impatient or unwilling to answer your questions
- speaks about your decisions with language 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
- doesn't include you in decisions about you

# Chapter Three



What Happens When I  
Turn 18?



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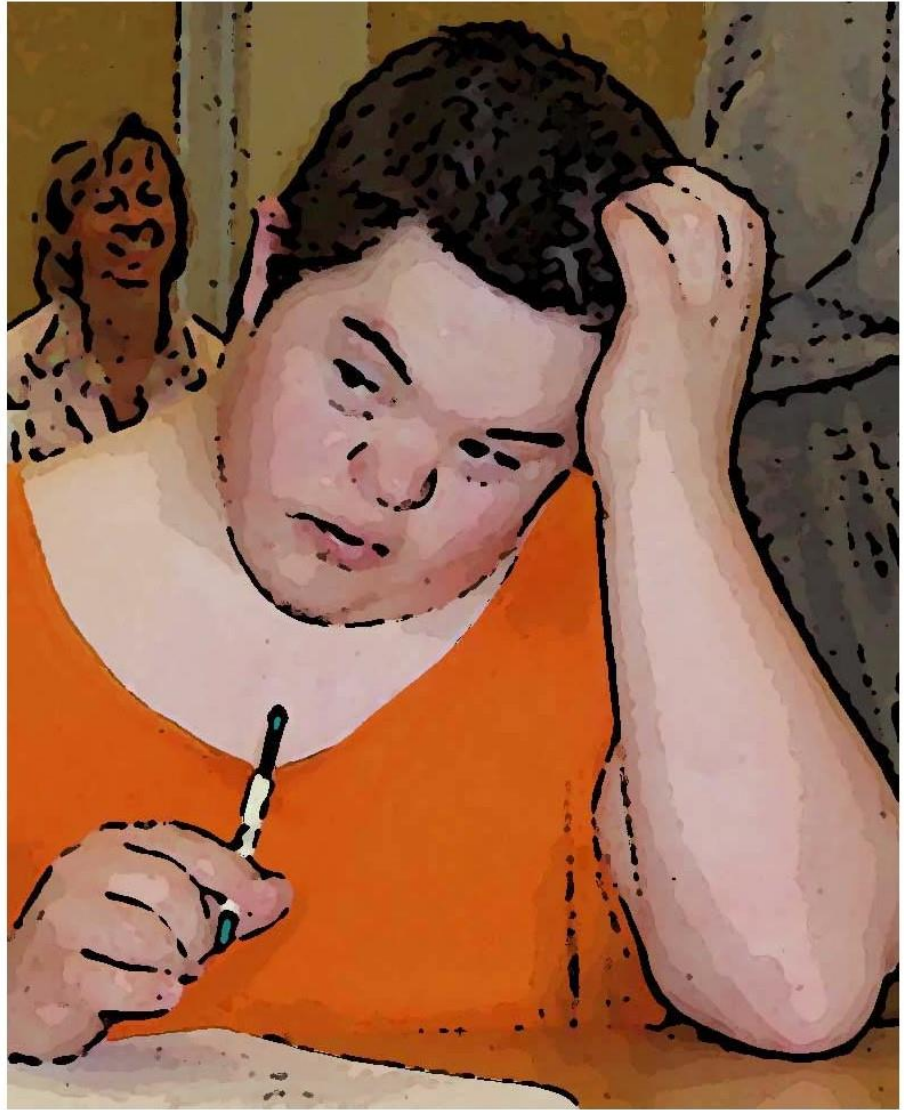
When you become 18 years old, the law says you are an adult. This gives you more rights. That means you are now responsible for your decisions.

If you have a special education plan in high school, you are now responsible for that plan. You will need to attend planning meetings and sign your own plan. You can now vote. There may be other legal papers you now need to sign. In college, or at work, you are expected to ask for your own accommodations. You will need to know when and how to talk about disability and the supports you need.

You have important rights to think about in this process. Even when someone is supporting you, that person can't just make decisions without your input. The law says that person must always first consider what you say you want.

If you are just beginning to make your own decisions, you may need a lot of support at first. Most young adults need support with big decisions. You will want to talk to those you trust about how much support you need

# Chapter Four



## Common Decision-making Supports

There are many ways people can support you to make your own decisions. Sometimes this process is casual and informal, just talking with an adult you trust. Other times, there may be a more formal process. You will want to work with an adult to select the support systems that protect your rights and give you as much voice as possible, but still get you the support you need. Here are some examples:

## **Support with money management decisions**

### Joint bank account

You can set up a bank account with “two signatures required”. Since you and one other person have to sign the checks, this can help you control spending and protect you from people who may try to cheat you out of your money.

### Ask for a payee.

You can agree to have a payee appointed for your money. A payee can help you manage your money. Many people with SSI or Social Security have payees.

## **Support in meetings or at medical appointments**

### Do you need a new doctor or therapist?

If you can't understand your doctor and have trouble making decisions, maybe you need a new doctor who will explain things.

Ask someone you trust to come to meetings and appointments.

You can ask a friend or someone you trust to go with you to meetings. You have the right to have someone come in with you when a doctor examines you or talks to you. You have the right to have someone come to any meeting with you as an advocate.

Appoint a power of attorney.

A power of attorney is a document that gives someone the right to help with your decisions. You can say what you want the person to do in the power of attorney. You can fire the person whenever you want. Not everyone can appoint a power of attorney – you must be able to understand what you are doing. The person with the power of attorney is your advocate. A staff person cannot have a power of attorney, but a family member can.

**BE CAREFUL!**

Do not give a person a power of attorney unless you trust them and have known them for a long time. Make sure that the person is someone you know will not cheat you.

## **Support with Employment**

### Work with a job coach or employment vendor

A job coach or employment vendor can sometimes help you get into a job you like that has the supports and accommodations that you need.

## **Support in School**

### In college, work with your school's Disability Service Center

The Disability Service Center or Disability Support Center can help you determine what accommodations, classes, teachers, or other supports you need to be successful in school

### In high school or transition, work with your IEP team or your 504 coordinator

You might have a 504 plan or an IEP, an individualized education plan. These documents can determine what you learn in school, what accommodations you need, what classes you take, what life goals and skills you want to develop. You will want to be involved in the planning of this document.

### Bring an advocate or friend to meetings

It is helpful to have an extra pair of ears and some support at meetings; especially meetings where lots of people talk about your future. Your friend or advocate can help you prepare for meetings. You have the right to get information about these meetings, ahead of time, in language you understand. If you do not understand something during a meeting, you have a right to ask that things be explained to you. You have a right to say what you want during the meeting and in your future.

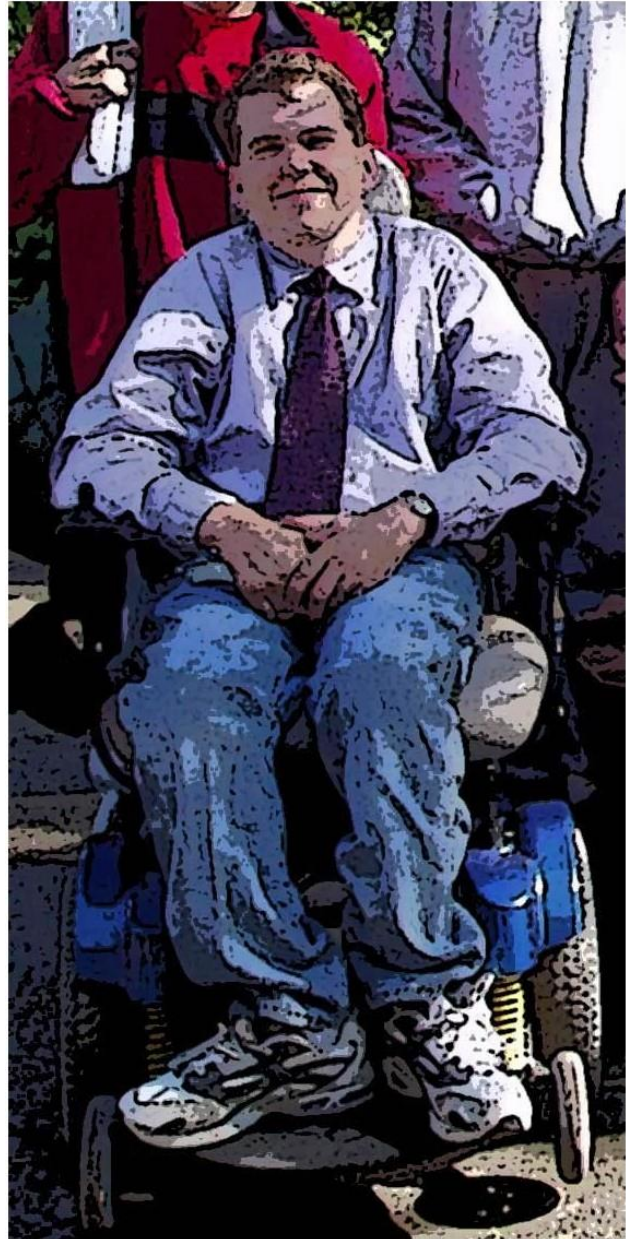
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## **Protection from abuse or exploitation**

Being exploited means someone is cheating you, or taking advantage of you. This could mean that someone is stealing from you. This could mean someone is using you or your things illegally for their benefit. You have a right to be safe. If someone is hurting you or exploiting you, no matter who that person is, you can call the police and Adult Protective Services (APS). APS and the police help people who are abused, neglected, and exploited. They can ask a judge for a “protection order” that says that an abuser cannot contact you. If the abuser still bothers you, they can be sent to jail.

If abuse is an issue for you, you can make a “stay safe plan” with someone you trust. Talk to a friend, a family member, a staff person, case manager – anyone you can trust. Ask them to help you decide what to do if someone tries to abuse or exploit you. Make a plan.

# Chapter Five



## A Few Words on Guardianship

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The people who support you may request that a judge appoint someone called a guardian to help you make decisions. This is called a guardianship.

Many people think a guardianship will protect people from being exploited or abused. But this is not what a guardianship does. A guardianship simply gives someone else power to make your decisions. This can take away your rights, and should be the last option in supported decision making.

Some people do need more support and may require a guardianship. If you do have a guardianship, there are many important rights you still have.

- Those who are supporting you still have to consider what you want first
- You have the right to ask the judge to fire your guardian
- You can ask the judge for some of your rights back.
- You can fight your guardianship if you don't think you need one.
- You have a right to say who you want for a guardian.
- You have a right to let the judge know when you disagree with your guardian.
- You have the right to ask for a different guardian.

A guardianship will spell out what decisions you can make and what decisions someone else will make. You will want to talk carefully about which decisions are yours. A guardian also needs to pay close attention to what you say you want when making decisions on your behalf. That is your right.

A guardianship doesn't have to be a permanent thing. As you make your own decisions and gain independence, you will need less support. You can talk with people you trust about a plan to lose the guardianship as you gain independence and make more of your own decisions.



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# Chapter Six



Nothing About Me  
Without Me

It may seem, sometimes, that the people who are closest to you do not support you. Sometimes the people who have raised you or been part of your family all your life are used to making decisions for you, as they needed to do when you were younger. This is a time for the adults in your life to learn new ways to support you as you become more independent. This is a common challenge for all youth as they become adults.

The best way to deal with this is to talk openly with parents/guardians or other adults involved in your life. Let them know that you would like to start making your own decisions. Ask them not to make decisions about you without your input. Remind them that even though they know you very well, and have lots of life experience, you know what you want, and you want responsibility and direction in your own life. You are your own expert.

You can also suggest that someone other than a parent be your payee or guardian. Sometimes having an independent person help you make decisions will allow you to take on more responsibilities.

# Chapter Seven

## Practice Making Decisions

The following is a list of items where you will want as much independence as possible. It is never too early to start practicing making your own decisions with these things.

- Managing Money
- Maintaining a Home and Living Independently
- Building a career you love, that pays the bills
- Organizing transportation
- Having healthy relationships with friends and family
- Having healthy relationships with your romantic interests
- Voting
- Contributing to your community
- Managing Fitness and Health
- Setting your own goals: practicing self-advocacy and self-determination

You can start small. Maybe the first decision under managing money is opening a savings account, or getting an allowance. What's important is that you work with people you trust to make decisions and take on new responsibilities. It will take time and patience to practice smaller decisions until you get to a point where you can make larger ones. This will help you become more independent.

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# Chapter Eight

## Web Resources

**It's My Choice Booklet** link to order

<http://www.mncdd.org/extra/publications.htm>

**The 411 on Disability Disclosure**

link to download

[http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources\\_&\\_Publications/411.html](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/411.html)

**Kids as Self Advocates**

[www.fvkasa.org/](http://www.fvkasa.org/)

**National Consortium on Disability and Leadership for Youth**

[www.ncl-d-youth.info/](http://www.ncl-d-youth.info/)

**National Youth Leadership Network**

[www.nyln.org](http://www.nyln.org)