



# Understanding Supported Decision Making

## Supported Decision Making: A Personalized Approach

People navigate decisions based on a complex interplay of desires, needs, personal history, relationships, education, culture, beliefs, and unique experiences. When individuals feel heard and understood by their supporters and providers, a collaborative environment emerges. This essence encapsulates Supported Decision Making (SDM).



### What is Supported Decision Making?

In Minnesota, SDM is legally defined as “assistance from one or more persons of an individual’s choosing in understanding the nature and consequences of potential personal and financial decisions, enabling the individual to make and communicate decisions consistent with their wishes.”

### Key Principles of Supported Decision Making

SDM is rooted in the fundamental belief that everyone has the right to lead fulfilling lives, exercise self-determination, and receive person-centered support. It aims to strike a balance between what is important to the individual (e.g., personal expression, cultural values, relationships) and what is important for them (health and safety). SDM preserves the right of individuals to make decisions, fostering stronger relationships with supporters and leading to positive outcomes like employment, community integration, and life satisfaction.

## Why is it Important?

By law, trying SDM and other less restrictive alternatives is mandatory before seeking guardianship and/or conservatorship. Beyond legal obligations, embracing SDM upholds the principles of self-determination while ensuring the person’s needs are met. SDM respects individuals’ right to live their best lives with agency and support, in the least restrictive manner.

## How to Implement Supported Decision Making

SDM is diverse and adaptable, lacking a fixed checklist or defined process. It may involve a written agreement, daily interactions, or occasional conversations with a trusted person during decision-making moments. The process begins by identifying the issue, understanding the person's abilities and challenges, and engaging in open conversations. This includes exploring views, preferences, and plans, discussing risks and benefits, and obtaining necessary information through a Release of Information if required. The goal is to help the person make informed decisions, incorporating necessary protections, safety nets, and backup plans.

## Considerations for Effective Approaches

When assisting someone in decision-making, the approach matters. Factors to consider include:

### Timing

Consider the course of illness, time of day, and external factors affecting the person's life

### Relevant Information

Assess the appropriate information for the level of discussion and understand cultural factors impacting beliefs and decisions

### Communication

Use plain language, illustrations, and preferred language; build trust and allow time for consideration. Re-approach if needed

### Inclusive Participation

Determine who to include based on trust, cultural considerations, comfort, safety, and translation needs

Supported Decision Making is a holistic effort, encompassing all actions, whether big or small, formal or informal, that contribute to enhancing an individual's self-determination and meeting their needs.

## For Further Assistance

For additional information or consultation, please contact the following VOA resources:

Center for Excellence in Supported Decision Making

☎ **Guardianship Information Line:** 952-945-4174  
(toll-free 844-333-1748)

✉ **Email:** cesdm@voamn.org

🌐 **Website:** www.voamnwi.org/cesdm

Culturally Responsive Caregiver Support & Dementia Services

☎ **Phone:** 952-945-4034

🌐 **Website:** www.voamnwi.org/caregiver-support



Volunteers of America  
MINNESOTA AND WISCONSIN

**CESDM**  
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE  
IN SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING



Culturally Responsive  
CAREGIVER SUPPORT+  
DEMENCIA SERVICES