

Decision Making

Making a decision is more than making a choice. As a parent, you can support your child with a disability to learn and practice the process of decision-making. Decision-making involves knowing about all the options available. You can help your child think about the consequences of each option. Depending on the decision, this might mean having a chance to try out each option. You can then guide your child to make the best choice for him/her based on what he/she found out. Help your child to think and talk about the decision afterward. Discussing whether or not it was a good decision will help your child to get better at making decisions.



What Research Tells Us:

Children with developmental disabilities are more self-determined when they have more chances to make their own decisions.

Families can support the development of children's decision-making skills at home.

Youth with disabilities can make decisions when given the right support.

Young adults with disabilities who are more self-determined (including having better decision-making skills) have better school, employment, and adult life outcomes.

What You Can Do:

- ◆ **In the early years:** Give your child chances to try lots of different activities. Talk with your child about what he/she likes or does not like about each one. When possible, involve your child in decisions that will directly affect him/her. **Example:** Give your child chances to play with many children. Talk with him/her about those experiences and then ask your child to help decide who to invite to future play dates.
- ◆ **During the middle years:** Teach your child to use different ways to gather information about activities, such as talking to people, making lists, gathering pictures, and by trying activities. Involve your child in team meetings that will result in important decisions. If your child does not use speech to communicate, support him/her to find other ways to express decisions and then honor choices made. **Example:** Your child wants a volunteer opportunity. Help your child to talk with youth and adults involved in the various options. Guide him/her to read, look at pictures, or watch videos about the activities. Help your child to list pros and cons before making a decision. Later, talk about if it was a good decision and why.
- ◆ **In the teen years:** Talk with your child about longer term life decisions (e.g., careers, relationships). Help him/her to find and try out options in settings with people without disabilities. Support your child to lead any decision-making teams. **Example:** Your daughter and her transition team will be deciding on community-based work trials. Support your child to state his/her opinions and preferences as each experience is evaluated.