



Supported Decision Making: A “Mash Up” That Promotes a More Self-Determined Life

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TODAY'S PRESENTER

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- What supported decision making is, and why it should be considered
- How the concepts of supported decision making (SDM) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) work together
- How to take a lifespan approach to supporting individuals with disabilities and their families

SDM FOOD FOR THOUGHT #1

When you are faced with a major life decision, like buying a house or a car, whether to take a particular job, or if you should move to a different town, who do you turn to help you make that decision?



IT'S THAT SIMPLE

This process can be the same for a person with a disability. Supported Decision Making can help identify trusted individuals who can support a person with a disability in making decisions.



SDM FOOD FOR THOUGHT #2

Take a moment and think about how you would feel if someone were to take away your right to decide where to live, who to live with, what and when to eat, how to practice your faith, and how you will spend your days.

This is the reality for many individuals with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities.

It doesn't have to be this way, in all situations.

SDM OFFERS AN ARRAY OF OPTIONS – without removing someone's rights

- Circles of Support
- Waivers of confidentiality
- Letters of Intent
- Representative payee
- Power of Attorney



None of the above require an attorney or a court appearance. All of these can be changed or updated at any point.

GUARDIANSHIPS AND CONSERVATORSHIPS

- Require an attorney
- Require a court appearance
- Can be a costly process
- Give the impression that the individual who the guardianship or conservatorship are for is incompetent
- Is extremely difficult to reverse

Though rarely used, it is possible to have partial guardianships and conservatorships.

Even with guardianships and conservatorships in place, every effort should be made to practice SDM.

SDM FOOD FOR THOUGHT #3

- How many of you have ever made a big mistake in your life?
- Did you learn anything from this experience?
- Why shouldn't individuals with disabilities have those same opportunities? This speaks to the dignity of risk.
- How else will they learn?

TRY THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE OPTIONS FIRST

This is a fabulous tool!



www.lifecoursetools.com/lifecourse-library/exploring-the-life-domains/supported-decision-making/

CHARTING THE LIFECOURSE | EXPLORING DECISION-MAKING SUPPORTS

This tool was designed to assist individuals and supporters with exploring decision making support needs for each life domain.

Name of individual: _____

Name of person completing this form: _____

Relationship to individual (circle one): Self Family Friend Guardian Other: _____

How long have you known the individual? _____

For each question below, mark the level of support you need when making and communicating decisions and choices in the Charting the LifeCourse life domains.

	I can decide with no extra support	I need support with my decision	I need someone to decide for me
🏠 Daily Life & Employment			
Can I decide if or where I want to work?			
Can I look for and find a job? (read ads, apply, use personal contacts)			
Do I plan what my day will look like?			
Do I decide if I want to learn something new and how to best go about that?			
Can I make big decisions about money? (open bank account, make big purchases)			
Do I make everyday purchases? (food, personal items, recreation)			
Do I pay my bills on time? (rent, cell, electric, internet)			
Do I keep a budget so I know how much money I have to spend?			
Am I able to manage the eligibility benefits I receive?			
Do I make sure no one is taking my money or using it for themselves?			
🏥 Healthy Living			
Do I choose when to go to the doctor or dentist?			
Do I decide/direct what doctors, medical/health clinics, hospitals, specialists or other health care providers I use?			
Can I make health/medical choices for my day-to-day well-being? (check-ups, routine screening, working out, vitamins)			
Can I make medical choices in serious situations? (surgeries, big injury)			
Can I make medical choices in an emergency?			
Can I take medications as directed or follow a prescribed diet?			
Do I know the reasons why I take my medication?			
Do I understand the consequences if I refuse medical treatment?			
Can I alert others and seek medical help for serious health problems?			
Do I make choices about birth control or pregnancy?			
Do I make choices about drugs or alcohol?			
Do I understand health consequences associated with choosing high risk behaviors? (substance abuse, overeating, high-risk sexual activities, etc.)			
Do I decide where, when, and what to eat?			
Do I understand the need for personal hygiene and dental care?			

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Developed by the Charting the LifeCourse Navis - LifeCourseTools.com
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STEP TOOLS FOR SDM & LRE

Decision Making 101

Least Restrictive isn't just about kids in school; it's about people throughout their lives.

The individual's VOICE and CHOICES should increase over time.

	Infant/Toddler Birth - Preschool	Elementary Grades K - 5	Middle School Grades 6 - 8	High School Grades 9 - 12	Beyond High School
Decision Makers and Decision Supporters	Parent/Caregiver Other family members Physicians Service Providers	Parent/caregiver Child Teachers	Parent/caregiver Child Teachers	Young person Parent/caregiver Teachers	Individual/Adult Trusted friends Family/Co-workers
Increase the types of decisions or choices the individual can make	Food choices Games/toys Other preferences of what they like or don't like	Bedtime Activities with friends Social media interactions	Classes to take Friends to hang out with Sports/after-school clubs Musical instruments	Career path Romantic partners Transition/IEP planning Post-secondary options	Housing/college Wellness/leisure Social interactions
Places where you receive services and spend time	Daycare Center Preschool Early Learning Early Intervention	School Home Afterschool programs	Classroom Community	At school In the home In the community On the job	On the job In the home/rental College

What If Decisions Being Made Put a Person at Risk?

Many families believe that the only way to make sure their son or daughter with a disability is "safe" in school or in the community is to restrict their decision making by taking away their rights.

We all make choices that may not be in our best interest. For example: eating pizza and chocolate every night and no vegetables! There are situations where we may feel the need to limit decision making for the individual, such as life-threatening situations which put them or others in danger or at risk of exploitation; decisions about medical procedures or signing financial commitments. These are very tough discussions to have and are perfect examples of why we promote supported decision making.

There is a continuum of supported decision-making options that can be explored. They range from no help with decisions to totally taking away a person's rights, with many other options in-between. To learn more about this important topic, contact the STEP offices or your STEP Regional Coordinator.

Allowing a person to participate in choice and decision making — at any age — with whatever level of support they need, is the least restrictive, and most empowering gift for each individual.

Visual Resource Gallery

Category	Resource
Supported Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TN Council on DD National SDM Center National Parent Center IDEA 45 SDM Videos Wrightlaw
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEED Tech Program Assistive Tech for Teens TN Technology Access Center Plan a Perfect Life Manual Plan a Perfect Life Ability Youth Financial Management
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult Housing Options TN Housing Agency (THA) HDB Fair Housing Ten Emergency Preparedness Online Safety for Youth TN Connect Aging and Disability
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TN DOE Legal Resources Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Disability Rights TN Youth Self Advocacy Videos Disability Awareness Self Advocacy Best Practices Special Education Health Assessments Guide TN Public Transit Services
Disability Awareness and Self-Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adolescent Autonomy Checklist Independence Videos (Youth) SHR Building for Youth Videos TN DHS - Disability Services Social Security Administration Department of Rehabilitation and Community Services
Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult and Community Services

For additional resources visit www.tnstep.org (Supported Decision Making Tab)

Decision Making 101

One Decision Leads to Another

It's never too early or too late to start helping people, at any age, to make their own decisions. And, if you believe—as STEP hopes you do—that people with disabilities should have the same opportunities to make important life decisions, then this guide will help make that a reality. Very few of us make decisions by ourselves. We turn to those people in our lives—our parents, siblings, friends, people we know that have faced similar decisions—who we trust, to help us consider the pros, cons, and consequences of each decision.

Two Laws that Work Together and Impact Decision Making

Least Restrictive Environment

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is most often used when talking about where a child or youth will receive their education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the school team, which includes the parents, to consider the general education classroom at the child's zoned school first. The least restrictive environment for each person, in school and in adulthood, is the place the **person chooses** to live, play, work, and learn.

Decisions about inclusive education often impact an individual's future independence and opportunities.

Supported Decision Making

Supported Decision-Making (SDM) is a way for people with disabilities to keep the right to make their own decisions. Tennessee passed a law in 2019 that says we should try the least restrictive options before taking away a person's rights. Before taking the very serious step of removing someone's rights through a legal process like conservatorship, STEP would like you to consider SDM; consider helping a person make a decision, instead of making it for them, and help them choose people they trust who can help them understand the important issues involved in those decisions.

Transition Guide: Decision Making

Getting Help Making Choices


What Is Supported Decision Making?

Supported decision making (SDM) is a tool that allows people with disabilities to retain their decision-making capacity by choosing supporters to help them make choices. A person using SDM selects trusted advisors, such as friends, family members, or professionals, to serve as supporters. The supporters agree to help the person with a disability understand, consider, and communicate decisions, giving the person with a disability the tools to make their own informed decisions.

How does Supported Decision Making Work?

Supported Decision Making will look different for different people. It means finding tools and supports to help a person with a disability understand, make, and communicate their own choices. Some examples might include:

- ♦ Finding materials written in a way the person can understand
- ♦ Finding materials in a different format — like videos or recordings
- ♦ Allowing extra time to talk about and think about their choices
- ♦ Creating lists of the good and bad parts of the options
- ♦ Bringing a supporter to appointments or meetings to help with:
 - ♦ Taking notes
 - ♦ Asking questions
 - ♦ Discussing options
 - ♦ Encouraging self-determination



Check Out These Resources

Websites:

- National Resource Center for Supported Decision Making: www.supporteddecisionmaking.org
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network: autisticadvocacy.org/tag/supported-decision-making
- Parent Guide to Getting Ready for the Age of Majority: http://www.cabr.org/centerhub.org/page_of_majority-prepare/index

Videos:

- Supported Decision Making — Call to Action Video: youtu.be/vof7JN7eWw
- Supported Decision Making — Gabby's Story Video: youtu.be/duy1Jkz2mIQ

Publication:

- Supported Decision Making — Creating a Continuum of Choice - Options in TN: bit.ly/2ocoo0A

No Help With Decisions

No "formal" process in place for trusted advisors, friends, family members or professionals to serve as supporters.

Supported Decision Making

- Agreement with supporters in a written plan
- Can be changed as needed
- No court process
- Could include finance, healthcare, education, employment, housing or other area of need
- Person with a disability makes informed decisions

Power Of Attorney

- Gives up some of your power
- Person with a disability must be competent to sign this legal agreement
- Person gives decision making authority to someone else in specific areas

Conservatorship

- Individual is determined by a court to be incompetent to make decisions in certain areas
- May be in all areas or only specific areas
- Person may have some say in their daily activities but final decisions are made by someone appointed by the court
- Very hard to change
Costs money and is hard to reverse

Less Restrictive

Supported Decision Making Continuum

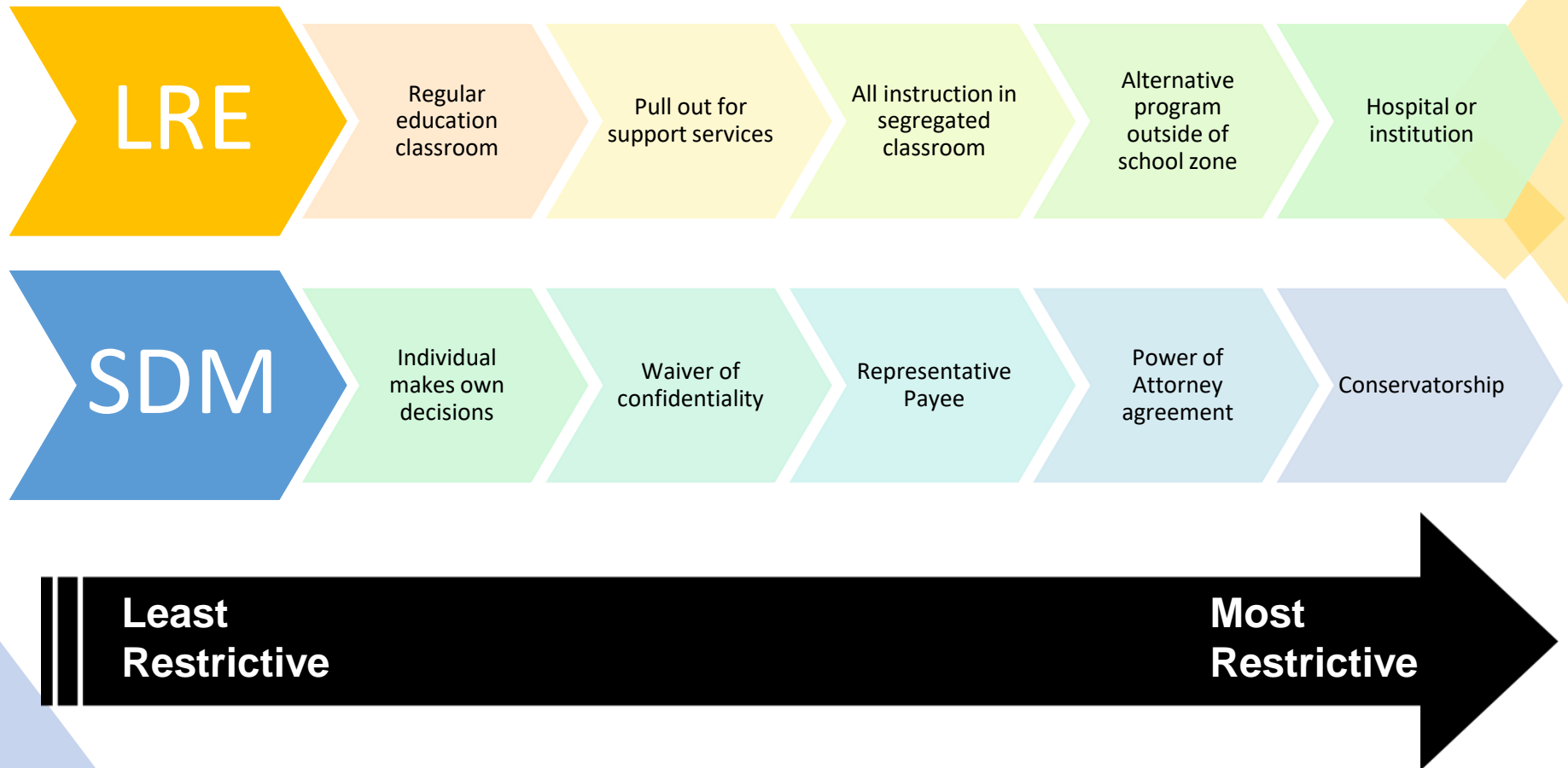
More Restrictive

WHAT IS LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT?

LRE means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports, referred to as "supplementary aids and services," along with their nondisabled peers in the school they would attend if not disabled, unless a student's IEP requires some other arrangement.



HOW DOES LRE INTERSECT WITH SDM?



SDM/LRE - FOOD FOR THOUGHT #4

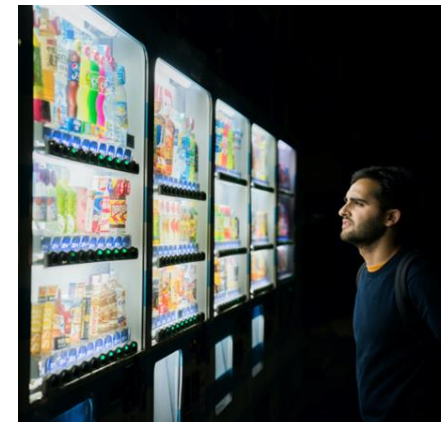
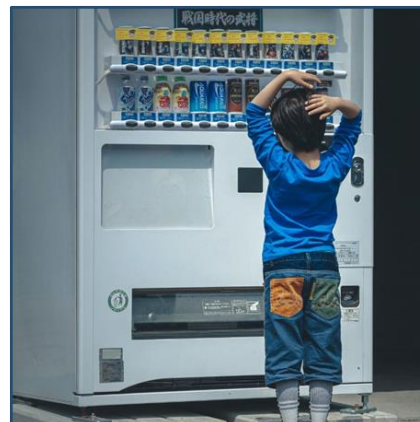
When discussing the concepts of SDM and LRE, we are really talking about empowering individuals with disabilities to make as many choices, and to have as much control over their lives, as possible.

How do you see your role in teaching individuals in your life to understand the importance of trying to make SDM and LRE work?

LRE & SDM ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

The concept of a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) isn't just about kids in school; it's about people throughout their lives. It's never too early or too late to start helping people make their own decisions.

An individual's "voice" in the choices they make should increase over time. With continual practice the "weight" of those decisions can increase over time too.



LRE & SDM ACROSS THE LIFESPAN #2

Here are a few more examples of ways to promote decision making:

- Gina allows her two toddlers to pick which diaper they want to wear from two – even though the two options are exactly the same.
- Sam gives his five-year-old son a choice between two lunch options to take to school.
- Julia allows her eleven-year-old to choose the family's evening entertainment.
- Ahmed gives his sixteen-year-old son a choice among a series of household chores in order to earn an hour later curfew.
- The Strickland family has a dinner discussion with their young adult children about how their large tax refund will be spent.

The more decisions that people can make for themselves, or with the support of trusted family members or friends, the less restricted their lives will be.

THE LIFELONG IMPACT OF SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING AND LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT



IT'S A WRAP!

Questions/Comments?

Take-aways?

A possible first or next step?

Other ways to promote decision making?



Let's Connect



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For More Information
Visit
www.tnstep.org

Find Event Calendar, Archived Webinars, Virtual Trainings,
TNSTEP's Parent Manual, and more!

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TNSTEP staff is available to provide support, information, and training to Tennessee families and students



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