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Family &  
Community Services  
Ageing, Disability & Home Care

# My life, my decision

## A handbook for decision makers

May 2015





## Decisions



### What are decisions?

A decision is making up your mind about something. To make a decision you must have choices. You can make choices every day about what to eat, whether to go out and what to wear. Some decisions are bigger than others, like choosing to move to a new home or deciding what to do when you leave school.

### It's your right

Your rights are about how you should be treated. You should be treated the same as everyone else. You have the right to make decisions about your own life. You also have the right to ask for help. Most people will ask for help when they have to make a decision, especially if it is a big decision. You can ask other people you trust for information to help you decide, or to help you think of your choices. You can ask for as much information or help as you need. This is called supported decision making. The people who help you are called supporters.

### Your responsibilities

As well as having rights you also have responsibilities. Responsibilities are about how you should treat other people. Responsibilities are also about things you need to do for yourself, your family and your community. Sometimes, your decisions will affect other people. You should tell other people about decisions that will affect them. You must also follow the law. If you are not sure what the law says, you can ask someone to help you find out.

Here are some of your rights and responsibilities.

**My rights**

**My responsibilities**

I can live the life I want

I should let other people live the life they want

My decisions should not break the law

I can change my mind

If I change my mind I should tell people about my new decision

I can spend my own money

I should keep my money safe

I can make mistakes

I can learn from my mistakes and do things differently next time

Can you think of some more rights and responsibilities?

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## Talking about your decisions

When you talk with other people about your decisions, or the things you need and want, it is important that you listen and understand each other. If you don't understand what someone is telling you – speak up and ask them to explain it better. If someone doesn't understand you, be patient and ask for help. You could ask someone in your family, a friend or a worker for help.

### Remember

- Some people need extra help to talk, like using pictures or talking machines.
- You can ask for extra help to make sure people understand you.

Can you think of a time when someone did not understand you?

What did you do?

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## Making decisions: What do you want?

If you have not made any big decisions before, you can start by thinking about what is important to you in your life. You can think about things you need or want to have a good life. You can think about things you want to change in your life. You might want to change your job or meet new people.

Imagine you could do anything you want and no one would stop you.  
What would you do?

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# My ideas about my life

What do you like about your life?

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What don't you like about your life?

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What are some things you want to do?

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What do you wish you could do?

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## How do you like to make decisions?



Everyone has a different way of making decisions. Some people like to decide quickly, while others like to take a long time. You might like to think about the different choices before you decide, or you might like to go for your first choice and see how it works out.

If your supporter knows how you like to make decisions, they can support you make decisions your way. You and your supporter could talk about how you like to make decisions. Then your supporter will know how to help you to do things your way. This is what Isha does for Anna in the story below.

## Isha supports Anna



Anna likes to think about her decisions. She doesn't like to be rushed. If someone wants her to decide in a hurry, Anna gets worried and upset.

Anna's supporter is Isha. Isha spends time talking to Anna about the decision and then lets Anna think about it by herself. Isha sometimes needs to remind other people to give Anna time to think before a decision.

### Remember

- Everyone is different.
- It might take time for your supporter to get to know how you like to make decisions.

How do you like to make decisions?

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## Getting help to make decisions

You can ask for help to make decisions. Who do you want to support you to make decisions? You can choose anyone you trust. The person you choose should know what is important to you and respect your choices. This person is called your **supporter**.

You could ask someone who helps you do other things in your life, like a family member, an advocate, a friend, a carer or a guardian.

You could have lots of people working together to help you make decisions. This is sometimes called a 'circle of support' because everyone works together to support you to make decisions.

Sometimes you might ask different people to support you to make different decisions as Jody does in the story below.

### Jody asks for support



Jody and Terry are friends. They go out together a lot and both love bushwalking and swimming. Terry knows what Jody likes to do. Jody wants to make a decision about her next holiday so she asks Terry to support her.

Jody also wants to decide how much money to spend on her holiday. Jody's sister Susan knows how much money Jody has and what other things she has to buy. Jody asks Susan for support to decide about her holiday spending money.

## Remember

- You can change your mind about who you want to support you. Your supporter can also change their mind about supporting you.
- Ask other people if you can't decide who could support you. You could ask your family, friends or support workers about finding someone to support you to make decisions.
- If you don't know anyone who can support you, your carers or workers might be able to find someone who can get to know you and support you to make decisions.

You can write the names or put photos of people who could support you to make decisions.

Who can support you to make decisions?

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## What makes a good decision supporter?



People can help you in all sorts of ways. Your family and friends might help you to get around during the week or cook meals for you. A bus driver can help you get to work. When you choose someone to help you make decisions, think about someone who is good at listening and will let you decide. Sometimes, you might want more than one supporter. Or you might choose different supporters for different decisions. Some people have a group of supporters who work together, called a circle of support.

## Tracy's circle of support



Tracy lives with her mother and father. She has two sisters who live close by. Tracy's mother supports her to plan her week and get ready for work each day. Tracy's father supports her to make decisions about spending her money and paying her bills. Every Christmas, Tracy gets together with all of her family and they help her think about what she wants to do for the next year.

### Remember

- It's up to you to choose your supporters
- Your supporters could be people outside your family
- You can have more than one supporter and you can have a group of supporters

Here are some ideas about what to look for in your supporter. A good supporter will:

- know who you are and what is important to you
- listen to you and communicate your way
- not take over
- not try to fix things or stop you from making mistakes
- help you when you have a problem
- let you make your own decision.

What do you want your supporter to be like?

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## Making decisions with support: How it works



You can get support for your decisions in lots of ways. It's up to you. Sometimes you might need lots of support to decide, but other times you might not need much support at all.

You can ask your supporter to help you find information about the choices you have. Your supporter could read books or write letters about your decision or talk to other



people on the phone for you. Your supporter could go with you to visit shops or offices to talk about the things you want.

Once you have all the information about the things you want to do, you and your supporters can spend time thinking about which is the best choice. You might talk to your supporter about how much each choice costs, or how long it will take.

When you are happy with all the information you have found out, it is time for you to make your decision! This bit is up to you – it's your decision and your supporter cannot tell you what to do. Your supporter can talk about your decision with you, to make sure you are happy with what you have decided.

After you have made your decision, you could ask your supporter to help you tell everyone who needs to know what you have decided. You might want your supporter to write a letter or talk to other people about your decision. If you have decided to buy something, your supporter could go with you to the shop to buy it.

### Tran decides what to buy



Tran was thinking about buying a new bed. He went to the shops and got some brochures about different types of beds.

At home, Tran asked his mother to read the brochures and explain some of the words. Tran chose the bed that sounded right for him.

What could your supporter do for you?

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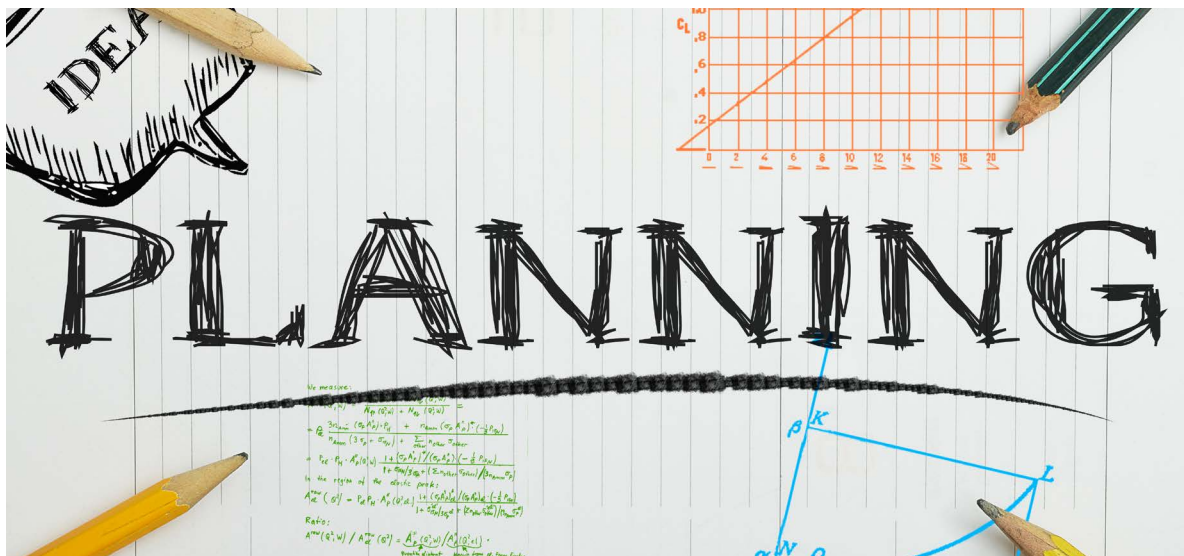
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Later on, you can think about how your decision worked out. You and your supporter could:



- Talk about how the decision worked and whether it turned out the way you wanted
- Think about what to do if you are not happy with the way the decision worked out
- Ask people in your life what they think about your decision
- Think about what you could do differently next time.

### Remember

- You can also think about how your supporter helped you. Could they do anything differently next time you want to make a decision?

## What about other people?

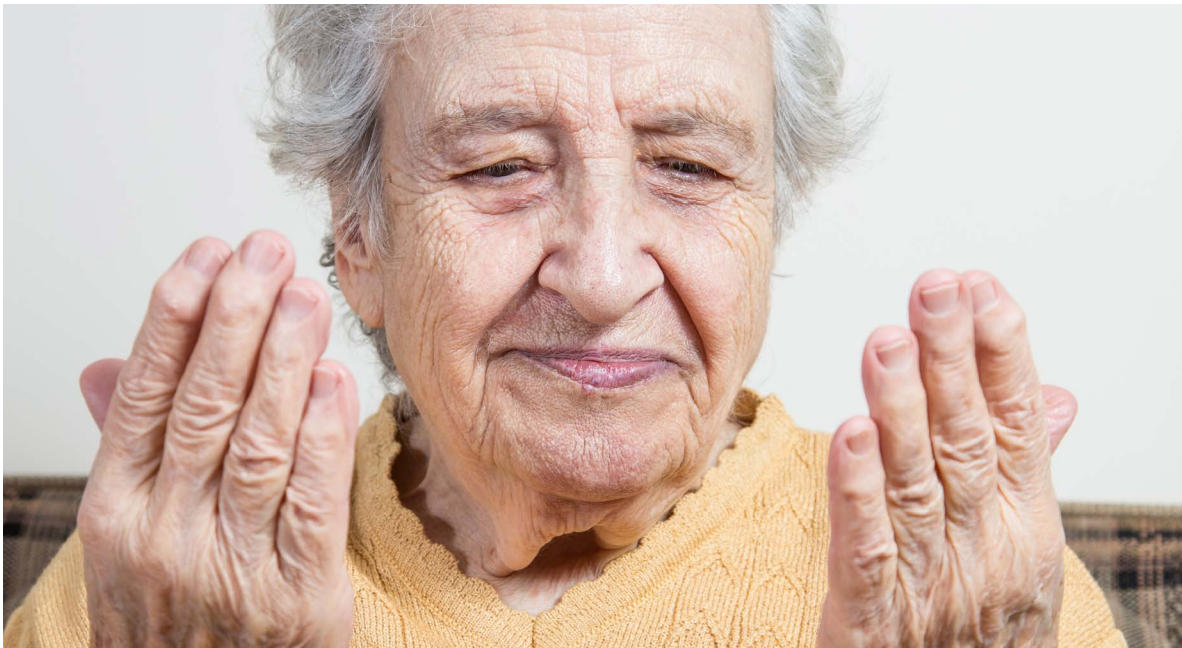
Your decision might affect other people in your family, or your friends or workers. It's your right to make your own decisions but it is good to think about how your decision might affect the people in your life. You could talk to your supporter about this.

You and your supporter could think about things like:

- Will your decision upset someone that you care about?
- Will your decision cost someone else money?
- Will your decision mean someone has to change the way they do things?

If your decision is going to affect someone else, you could talk to them about it and ask what they think.

### Max moves out



Max lives at home with his grandmother. He wants to move into a flat with a friend. He and his supporter talk to his grandmother about this. She is worried about living on her own and will miss Max. She did not expect him to move out so soon. Max decides to wait for a few months before he moves out so his grandmother can get used to the idea. He takes her to see his flat and she helps to choose his furniture.

## What if it goes wrong?

When you are making a decision, you are changing something in your life or doing something new. It is important to think about what might go wrong with your decision, and to plan what to do about it. Your supporter can help you to do this.

### Valentino goes swimming



Valentino wanted to learn to swim. Sometimes Valentino finds it hard to follow instructions. He also gets tired easily. Valentino asks Joe to support him to think about the things that could go wrong with his decision to learn to swim.

They think that Valentino could:

- Sink under the water and not be able to breathe
- Get tired from working hard in the water
- Get upset or scared because he can't understand the teacher.

Valentino decides to do some things to try to make sure the decision to learn to swim works well:

- Valentino talks to the teacher before the lessons about the best way for them to understand each other during the lesson.
- Valentino rests before each lesson so he is not tired.
- The teacher makes each lesson short so Valentino doesn't get tired.
- The teacher shows Valentino a floatation vest he can wear if he is scared.

### Remember

- It's ok to decide to do something, even though it might go wrong
- We all learn by our mistakes

## What if it's not working?



## If you are not happy with your decision

When you make your own decisions, you are in charge of what happens afterwards. Sometimes your decision will turn out just the way you want. Sometimes, you might not like the things that happen because of your decision. This is how you learn more about making decisions for yourself.

You or other people might get hurt or upset because of your decision. If this happens, you can ask for help to change things. You can also think about what went wrong. You can talk to your supporter about what to do if your decisions don't turn out the way you want.

## Susan goes fishing



Susan decided that she would like to go fishing. Her mother Amanda helped her to choose a half day fishing tour on a boat. Susan was excited about the trip, and it was a lovely sunny day. But the ocean was very rough and Susan felt sick. She also got bored after the first hour. After the trip, Susan and Amanda talked about her day. Susan decided that next time she would just go fishing off the beach.

## If you are not happy with your supporter

You should talk to someone else you trust if:

- Your supporter is making you feel bad about your decisions
- You and your supporter don't agree on a decision.

Sometimes your supporter should not support you because your decision could affect them too much. For example, if you are thinking about giving them money. Someone else should support you to decide whether this is the best thing to do.

The person you talk to if you have any problems with your supporter might be a family member, carer or a worker from a service you use. You could also ring an advocacy service.

## Speaking up for yourself

This book is about getting support to make your own decisions.

You might also want to make decisions by yourself without any support. This is part of what is called self-advocacy or speaking up for yourself.

If you want to learn more about self-advocacy, you can contact Self-Advocacy Sydney.

Self-Advocacy Sydney

[www.sasinc.com.au](http://www.sasinc.com.au)

Phone: 9622 3005

### Remember

It's your right to make decisions and to get support when you want it.

- You can ask other people for help if things go wrong.
- Not every decision will turn out the way you want but every decision can help you learn about how to make decisions that are right for you.

# My decision making worksheet

What do I have to decide?

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What support do I need?

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Who is the best person or people to support me?

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What information do I need?

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What are my choices?

Choice 1:

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Choice 2:

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Choice 3:

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Add more choices if you need:

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What are the good things about each choice?	What are the bad things about each choice?
Choice 1:	Choice 1:
Choice 2:	Choice 2:
Choice 3:	Choice 3:
Other choices you added:	Other choices you added:

What is my final decision?

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Who do I need to tell?

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How did this decision turn out for me? (Write down your thoughts later)

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