



SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING (SDM) Defined

Everyone uses supports in their daily lives to make decisions. We may consult a professional, such as a doctor or a tax preparer, or we may ask advice of friends and family. This is no different for people who experience disability in their life. What is different is that people who use supports in their daily lives may not have had opportunities to learn decision making. Decision making is an experiential skill. You have to do it to get good at it. Ideally, small decision-making grows into big decision-making. Sometimes, because of illness or incapacity, people need immediate assistance and advocacy with decisions as they relate to safety, medical care, living arrangements, goods and services. The Arc of Mississippi, in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, provides Supported Decision-Making services state-wide, upon request, and without charge to the person served.

WHAT SDM IS

- Monthly and as-needed communication to verify well-being and assist with decisions related to day-to-day life.
- Provide surrogacy services in some cases to facilitate medical care, end-of-life decisions, advocacy, and identify support needs.
- Use face-to-face Discovery as needed to understand who the person is, experience their current situation, or be present for planning and celebration.
- Timely response to challenges and opportunities such as crises or medical emergencies.
- An additional entity in a person's life according to Evidence Based Practices to combat the danger of over-control by a single, or limited number of paid service providers.

WHAT SDM IS NOT

- The Arc of Mississippi does not control, have access to, or provide financial resources or other assets to the people we support through SDM. We do not have a slush fund we can tap into to offer. We consider the control of a person's resources and SDM services to be a direct conflict of interest.
- We do not provide transportation of any kind. The Arc of MS is held to services that are specifically requested and approved by DMH.
- We are not a service provider. We are advocates. We are not certified by DMH to provide any services such as Supported Employment or Respite. Our DMH certification is for advocacy and as subject matter experts.
- We are not responsible for providing communication services. DMH Operational Standards (2020) Rule 14.4.A. requires all service providers to "provide *bilingual employees and interpreter services at no cost to people.*" These services "*must be offered at all points of contact with the person while he/she is receiving services.*" Your plan for these services must be in all provider's policies and procedures.

It takes all of us in tandem, working together, to help the people we care about and support to live their best life. We all have important roles to play. Thank you for what you do.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- √ Decision-making is a fundamental right as described in the United States Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision of 1999, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- √ All people need help making decisions at different times in their life.
- √ People experiencing disability should be allowed and encouraged to contribute to the management of their own life. Some will require more assistance and guidance than others.
- √ Guardianship is a last resort, not a first response, to assisting people with disabilities. It has been widely used, often abused, and is no longer the best-practice in the United States for supporting an individual with ID/DD.
- √ It is not the intent of The Arc of Mississippi to gain control of the financial assets or responsibilities of a person using SDM.
- √ Supported Decision Making is person-centered and based on principles of Discovery to learn what is important to and important for an SDM partner.
- √ Choice is not unlimited. Everyone has restrictions to choice based on resources. The goal is to maximize choice and control based on the resources at hand.
- √ People must be met at their level of communication in order for them to be fairly supported.
- √ It is not enough for people to have rights: people must know what their rights are and be free to exercise those rights. With rights come responsibility.
- √ Presume capacity.