



Council on  
Developmental Disabilities



---

## Decision-Making and Students with Disabilities

---

Learning to make decisions is a critical part of preparing students for life after high school. It is common for students with disabilities to face barriers that students without disabilities do not face in making and carrying out decisions: from needing a communication device or help understanding information to overcoming stereotypes and stigma.

Educators and parents are the most influential people in students' lives and are essential for supporting and practicing decision-making skills with all students, including students with disabilities.

**Supported decision-making:** refers to an approach that protects a person's right to remain the final decision-maker while ensuring they have supports in place. The kind of supports will be different for every person.

**Decision-making after "the age of majority"** (turning 18): the student can invite whomever they choose to the IEP meeting, according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This means anyone – including parents – who has been involved in decisions prior to age 18 can continue with the student's permission. In some cases students may request to lead the meeting without their parents. A student-led IEP meeting can be an opportunity for the student to prepare for adulthood as they apply decision-making skills learned over the years.

Tools to identify support with your students:

- The LifeCourse tool for decision-making will help you and your students figure out which types of decisions they want or need help making versus which decisions the student wants to make on their own, AND which (if any) the student wants someone to make for them: <http://bit.ly/DecTool>.
- Use "How to make a supported decision making agreement (by the ACLU) to understand the different forms you can use for decisions, including "Sharing School Information" on page 36: <http://bit.ly/SDMAgreement>.
- The Council on Developmental Disabilities Supported Decision-Making webpage: <http://bit.ly/CouncilSDM>.

If you don't see what you need, contact us: [Tnddc@tn.gov](mailto:Tnddc@tn.gov) or 615-741-5019.