

The Basics of Supported Decision Making

What is Supported Decision Making?

Supported Decision Making (SDM) is getting the help you need, from people you trust, to make your own decisions. Isn't that how we *all* make decisions? We *all* need help when we're faced with tough choices, or don't understand our options, or just want some advice. It's simple: they give you information and advice to help you make the best decision for you. They support so you can decide.

SDM is very important for people with developmental disabilities who can make their own decisions when they get the support they need. For them, SDM can be used instead of more restrictive options, like guardianship. For individuals with guardians, SDM can be used to maximize self-determination.

Why Should I Use Supported Decision Making?

- Scientific studies have shown that people with disabilities who make more decisions (who are more *self-determined*) have better lives: they are more likely to be independent, work, and safer. This is true regardless of the nature of their disability.
- Using SDM instead of options like guardianship protects rights instead of taking them away.
- Virginia law, the National Guardianship Association, and best practices all agree that you should use the least restrictive option for decision making support. You can always seek additional legal authority later if it is needed.
- Putting SDM into place can be cheap (or free), fast, and flexible as needs change.

What if Something Bad Happens?

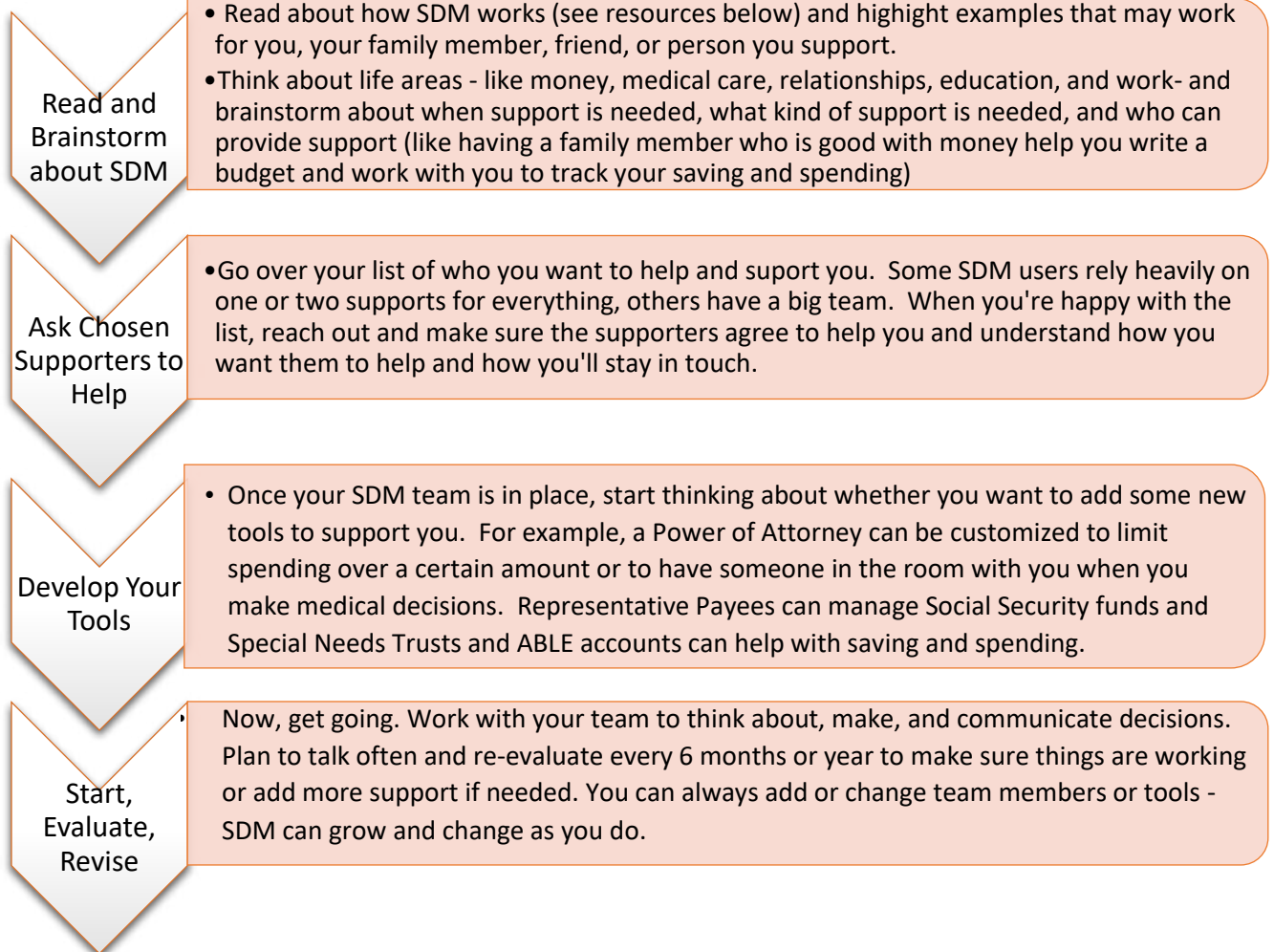
The honest reality is that something bad can happen to anyone, at any time, and people with disabilities are often more vulnerable. Historically, we have leapt to guardianship to protect people. Unfortunately, there isn't a single study showing it makes people safer, and it can take away people's rights and self-determination, which increases their vulnerability.

SDM builds on people's strengths, and the help of their supporters, so they can overcome their limitations, make their own decisions, and direct their lives. That way, even when people make "bad" decisions – and everyone does, sometimes – they can learn from them and use support to do better next time. That process can be long and slow, but we all go through it as we become adults.

How Do I Really Use SDM?

There are as many ways to use SDM as there are people. Some SDM users stay in contact with their supporters by phone, email, and text. Others find it helpful to have an SDM team that meets and talks regularly, like a circle of support. Others use phone apps or technology to help them track spending or remember to take medications. Some people create Powers of Attorney, Advanced Directives, Special Needs Trusts, ABLE Accounts, and other legal forms to help them set up support systems and work with their supporters. Options can be added or changed over time as you learn what works best. The next page will show you some ways you can explore and use SDM in your life or with a family member, friend, or person you support.

Putting SDM into Action



Supported Decision Making Resources	Where to Find It
The Arc of Northern Virginia's Toolkit with contacts, sample POAs, and more	https://thearcofnova.org/sdm/
Webinars on SDM implementation and team building	https://youtube.com/user/VideosatTheArcofNoVA
Asking any SDM questions	https://thearcofnova.org/answers/
"Supported Decision Making" book by Jonathan Martinis and Peter Blanck	https://tinyurl.com/SDM-book
"Setting the Wheels in Motion" article by Suzanne Francisco	https://tinyurl.com/SDM-Wheels
Jenny Hatch Justice Project info on start of SDM in VA, SDM data	http://www.jennyhatchjusticeproject.org
National Resource Center for SDM's stories, videos, agreements, and research	http://www.supporteddecisionmaking.org/
"When Do I Want Support" SDM tool	https://tinyurl.com/SDM-ACLU
Center for Public Representation's SDM forms and stories	https://supporteddecisions.org/

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