

THE SC **SUPPORTED Decision Making** PROJECT

Supported Decision Making and Other Alternatives to Guardianship FAQs for Medical Professionals

What is [supported decision making \(SDM\)](#)?

Supported decision making is “a recognized alternative to guardianship through which people with disabilities use friends, family members, and professionals to help them understand the situations and choices they face, so they make their own decisions without the ‘need’ for a guardian” (Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities et al., 2015)

Why Should Medical Professionals Know about Supported decision making?

Medical professionals encounter family members of patients and patients themselves who inquire about guardianship, supported decision making, or other future planning. Many parents and medical professionals are not aware of all the options. Supported decision making can be used in conjunction with other tools, such as a power of attorney. Per the American Bar Association, guardianship should only be recommended after all other less restrictive alternatives have proven to be ineffective or unavailable (American Bar Association & NGA).

What does guardianship entail?

The process to obtain guardianship can be expensive and time-consuming for families. It also represents a profound responsibility on behalf of the guardian. Guardianship may take away an individual’s right to: marry, vote, drive, work, manage money, decide where to live, consent to medical treatment, and more. In contrast, it has been shown that people with greater self-determination are healthier, more independent, and better able to recognize and resist abuse (Khemka, Hickson, & Reynolds, 2005; O’Connor & Vallerand, 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).

How can you help?

It’s important to be mindful of the model of care you use as a practitioner as you may have the potential to empower your patient to live a more autonomous, independent life or restrict their ability to weigh in on matters that impact them.

Recommend patients and parents/guardians to begin the transition-planning process early. Children with disabilities, like those without, need to start practicing life skills early to build those competencies.

Encourage families to learn about all the options and connect with sources of support like [Able South Carolina](#) and/or an attorney.

Use the [PRACTICAL Tool](#) for SDM Developed by the American Bar Association

P = presume that guardianship is not needed.

R = reason. Clearly identify the reasons for concerns.

A = Ask if the concern is caused by a temporary or reversible condition.

C = Community. Most care is provided by family, friends and community-based services.

T = Team. As an individual trusted by the person to provide help in making decisions.

I = Identify the abilities and needs of the person.

C = Challenges presented by potential SDM advisors or agents.

A = Appoint advisors and empower them as legal agents to carry out the choices of the person.

L = limit any guardianship or conservator appointments to only the issues absolutely needed.

Learn more about [The Continuum of Decision Making Supports and Other Alternatives to Guardianship like Power of Attorney, Adult Health Care Consent Act, Adult Students with Disabilities Education Rights Consent Act, and Representative Payee.](#)

