

One of the principles enshrined in the Disability Services Act 1993, is the right of people with a disability to choose their own lifestyle and to have access to information that is provided in a manner appropriate to their disability and cultural background, to allow an informed choice.(1e)

If appropriate and sensitive assistance is provided to a people with an intellectual disability, their ability to make their own choices and decisions can be greatly enhanced. The aim is to empower people to take control of decisions which affect them and the approach may vary according to the individual and the nature of the decision. Try to ensure that the person is not being pressured about the decision.

The following strategies are good practice ideas for maximising a person's ability to make their own major decisions:

- Identify all sources of relevant information the person needs to consider and understand to make the decision. Help to identify the different options. Don't make it harder by adding unnecessary information.
- Break up the information into stages that follow logically. Put each stage to the person and assess whether s/he understands each stage before adding more information.
- Allow the person plenty of time to take in and respond to each piece of information. Encourage questions and discussion.
- Things are often better explained by using pictures, examples and, better still, personal experience. Be creative! For example, the best way to explain going to hospital may be to visit or talk to another patient; to explain work options may be to have a trial period at the different options.
- Be aware of non-verbal messages you may be sending.
- Remove any structural and/or physical obstacles to participate in decision making.
- Be careful not to ask questions in such a way as to suggest an answer. For example, "You're happier working here, aren't you?"
- To check whether the person has understood, go back over the information, ask the question in another way or have the person explain their decision to you. Be sure to reassure the person that you are checking this so that you are clear about their wishes and not because their previous answer was wrong.
- Assist the person to identify the likely results of possible decisions.
- If the decision is a major one, for example, regarding whether to have surgery, and the Doctor feels uncertain about the person's capacity to make the decision and there is no person responsible available to make the decision, you may need to consider making an application for guardianship.

Further Information

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