

Reflecting on your Role as a Decision Supporter

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Reflection Exercise 1

Think of a time when you needed support to make a decision. What was the decision?

How much support did you need? What type of support did you need to make the decision?

Was the support provided helpful to you? Why or why not?

What did your experience teach you about providing someone else with decision support?

Reflection Exercise 2

What are some things you do in your role as a decision supporter?

What do you consider to be the most important aspect of your role?

What are some of the things that make providing decision support difficult?

How do you define success as a decision supporter?

Three Ideas to Consider

1) Quality support relationships are important

A growing body of research exploring the practice of supported decision-making has found the quality of the support relationship (between the person and their supporter) is an important factor which shapes the process of decision-making support. A quality support relationship involves:

- Commitment to knowing the person (their life story, goals, priorities, needs, preferences)
- Seeing the person as an equal (seeing beyond their disability)
- Trust
- Honest and effective communication
- And mutual respect

Research has also identified the key role of decision supporters when engaging in supported decision-making is to respond to the person's expressions of will and preference. When supporters reported they were in an intimate or very close relationship with the person they were more responsive to their expressions of will and preference.

People express their will and preferences constantly in living their lives. A person's will is what motivates and initiates their actions whether they realise it or not. A person's preferences reflect their priorities, the things they like and dislike, that are developed from experience, knowledge and intuition. Therefore, a person's will and preferences inspire their actions and non-verbal communication, as well as the goals and desires that are important to them. Decision supporters may need to support the person to be able to express their will and preferences in relation to a specific decision.

2) There are five factors which shape the process of decision-making support

The quality of the support relationship is one of five factors which have been found to shape the process of decision-making support. It may be helpful for supporters to become more aware of the range of individual, relational, decisional and environmental factors which are shaping the way they respond to the person's expressions of will and preferences when providing decision support. The other four factors are:

- The experiences and attributes the person brings to the process
- The experiences and attributes the supporter brings to the process
- The environment in which decision-making occurs and
- The nature and consequences of the decision.

It is the complex interaction of all five factors which shapes the person's ability to express their will and preferences and the supporter's response(s) during the process of decision-making support.

3) A tension exists between relational closeness and neutrality

A dilemma of practice which is emerging from research and people's lived experience engaging in practice is the tension between relational closeness and the ability to be neutral and non-judgemental when supporting decision-making. The WAIIS guide to supported decision-making recommends supporters identify when they have a vested interest in the outcome of the decision, so that they can try to mitigate their bias. Various groups of decision supporters seem to struggle with this dilemma differently. Paid supporters may struggle to develop relational closeness because of time constraints and professional expectations but often have less difficulty approaching providing decision support from a neutral stand point. This may be because they have less vested interest in the outcome of the decision-making process. On the contrary, family members often have high levels of relational closeness, from years of shared life history, but experience difficulty trying to separate their own goals and priorities from those of the person, which makes providing neutral support challenging.