

Supporting Decision Making



About choices

We all make choices everyday, some good, some not so good – but this is all part of the way in which we develop the skills to take more control of our own lives. For some people, making even everyday choices can be difficult if others do not support them to build their experience, skills and confidence. If people are to be able to make choices about their lives, they need information about the options available to them.

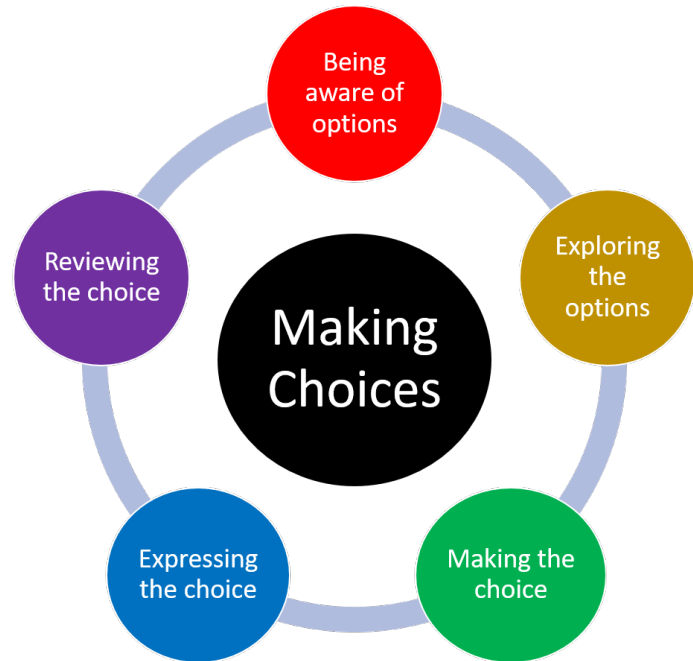
The ability to make good choices depends on experience, opportunities and the chance to learn from our mistakes. Big decisions are the outcome of small decisions and small decisions bring about small changes. Small changes can help to make someone feel effective and in control of a manageable part of their lives. This in turns builds the confidence to make the bigger decisions.

Promoting Choice

An important part of the advocates role is to help the person make choices and set goals. A good advocate will do this by supporting the person to access the information they need.

The process of making a choice

We all make choices every day: some are small choices (like what to eat and drink) whereas others can be huge choices (such as having a baby or deciding where to live). But we tend to follow the same process of being aware of options, exploring how we feel about them, making a choice and then reviewing it.



Being aware of the options

In order to make a choice, a person must be aware that at least two options exist - ideally they will be aware of all options available to them.

Be mindful that people may choose to dismiss certain options that do not appeal - for whatever reason. Its not important that people look at every option - just the ones that are attractive for them at that moment in time.

Your role as the advocate may be to help the person identify new options or old that have been forgotten about.

Exploring the options

We all make choices about a range of matters. We make small choices – what to have for breakfast; what programme to watch on TV; whether to walk or get the bus; whether to eat salad or curry for dinner AND significant life choices- whether to have a baby, where to live, whether to have serious medical treatment

The importance of any choice can be measured by these 4 factors:

1. whether or not it can be reversed and how easy or difficult this might be
2. its likely impact on valued aspects of a person's life
3. the duration of the likely consequences
4. its impact on the range of valued choices which will subsequently be available.

Making the choice

In this stage the person will reach a conclusion about their choice. In order to do this the person will need to be aware that they can influence which option is chosen.

People arrive to this step at varying quickness - some are able to move straight here (which is great) whereas others may need time to get here. Remember to go at the pace of your partner.

Some ideas for helping people who may experience difficulties to learn to make choice

- Present choices in manageable chunks – limit options. Asking “do you want to go swimming before tea or after tea?” may be too complicated. Separate the question into “do you want to go swimming?” and then “when do you want to go swimming?”
- Provide lots of easy choice making opportunities everyday for people to learn
- Find good ways of helping people to communicate
- Be ready to listen and act wherever possible
- Help people to learn to look at alternatives and pick one of them – even simple things like what clothes to wear
- Develop strategies to explain when something isn’t possible
- Provide choices that have consequences and may sometimes go wrong – if it never matters what choice a person makes, there is no motivation to make the choice
- Remember a person may change their mind about things – we all do

Don't forget that most people need to have real life EXPERIENCES when making decisions.... it is not desirable that people are asked to make choices and decisions about where to live, for example, without ever visiting that home. You wouldn't buy a house without visiting it, so don't expect people to express views on where they might live without visiting them.

Expressing their choice

In order to exercise their choice, the person will need to communicate this to others. Advocates often provide support to do this - either through supporting the person to self advocate, or by representing their choice.

Reviewing their choice

Once the choice has been made and a decision taken, the person may need some time to review this. Don't worry if the person later changes their mind (this is of course a very natural part of decision making), we all have experience of changing our minds!

Case study

An advocate supports Glen who has been prescribed medication for a mental health illness. Glen asks his advocate what the side effects are for the medication, how long he has to take it and if there are any alternatives to the medication.

A good advocate will spend time helping Glen to research the medication. They could do this by:

- speaking to the clinician to find out Glen's treatment plan
- finding out about the purpose of the medication and what it will do
- accessing credible sources (such as NICE guidelines) to find out more
- asking questions about alternatives to the medication
- helping Glen to participate in ward rounds or CPA meetings



Promoting Choice - Glen

The task of providing information may at first glance appear to be straight forward however it can present the following difficulties for the advocate.

- how to provide information in an unbiased way
- how to make a person aware of alternative options without influencing their choice
- how to actively promote choices which the advocates feels are risky or unwise

An advocate can guard against their own bias by moving away from being the source of information towards being the person who provides access to information. So in our case study above, the advocate would provider better quality support by

- asking the clinical team to speak to Glen about his treatment plan
- asking the Responsible Clinician to explain the purpose of the medication and what it will do
- helping Glen to access credible sources (such as NICE guidelines) to find out more
- supporting Glen to self advocate by asking questions about alternatives to the medication
- helping Glen to participate in ward rounds or CPA meetings

Top tips

There are a number of effective ways an advocate can help a person explore options and make choices:

1. Ensure they have enough time to explore options and work out their views. This includes opportunity to change their mind
2. Explore what the person thinks of the consequences of their choice
3. Differentiate between options. What are their pros and cons (and remember that these will look very differently to different people)
4. Support the person to understand the seriousness of their choice - is it reversible?
5. Be sensitive to how cultural, ethnic or religious factors can affect choice
6. Use augmented forms of communication such as sensory or physical objects
7. Make sure people have experiences connected to the decision (like visiting the proposed home)
8. Listen.
9. Listen
10. Listen :)

Thank you for reading.
Please return to the
e-learning for the next
section of learning

