



Thinking about Supported Decision-Making



Celebrating 30 Years

Inform • Empower • Connect

familyvoiceswi.org

November 2025

About Our Learning Sessions

Information for Our Guests

- We do not record the video or audio from our sessions to respect the privacy of our attendees.
- MUTE yourself so everyone can hear the session.
- Make this a safe space: Please do not repeat any personal information shared by participants.
- These slides and a resource guide will be emailed to you after the session.
- If you have any remaining questions after the session is complete, please contact your [Children's Resource Center](#).



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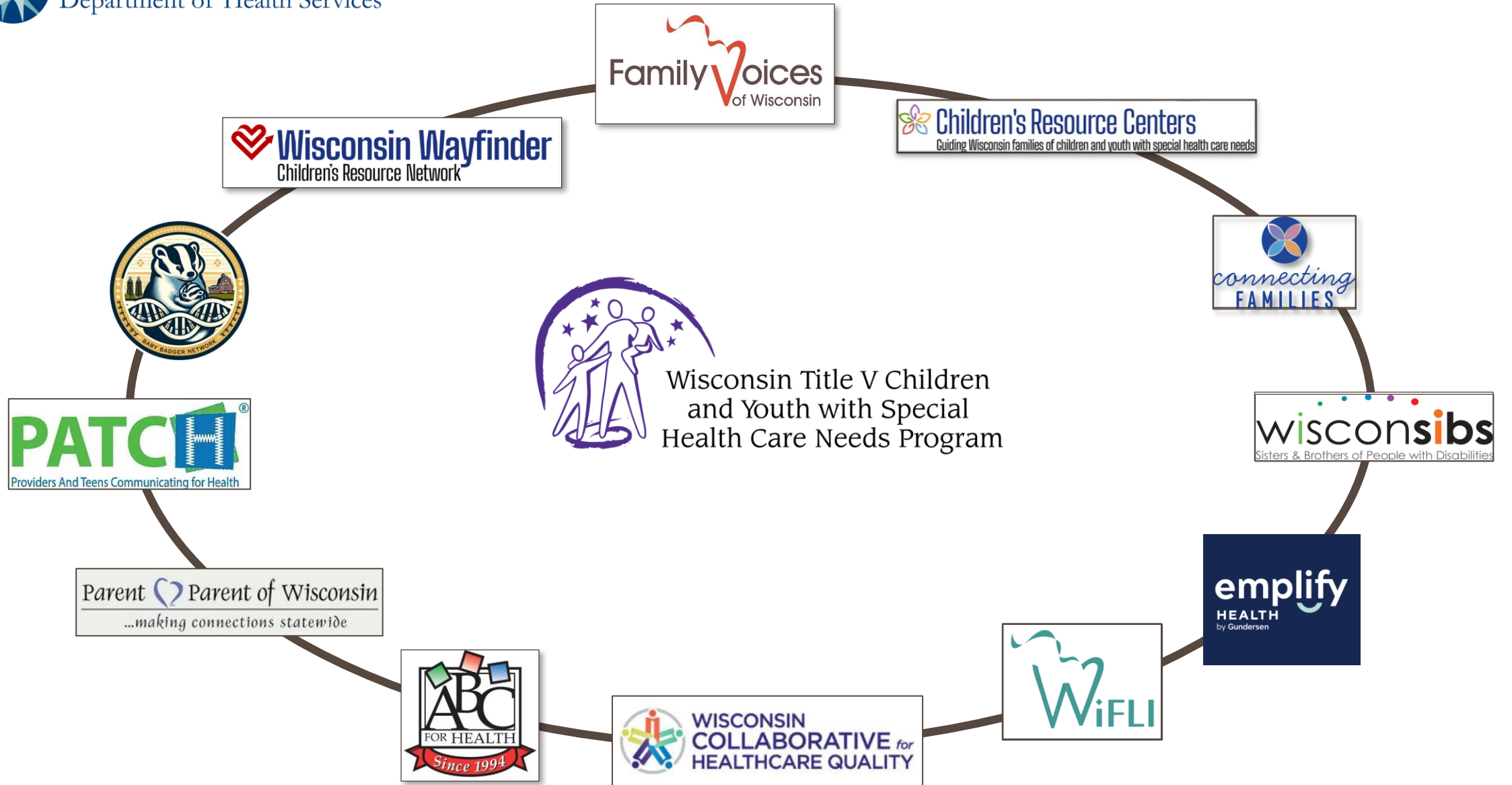


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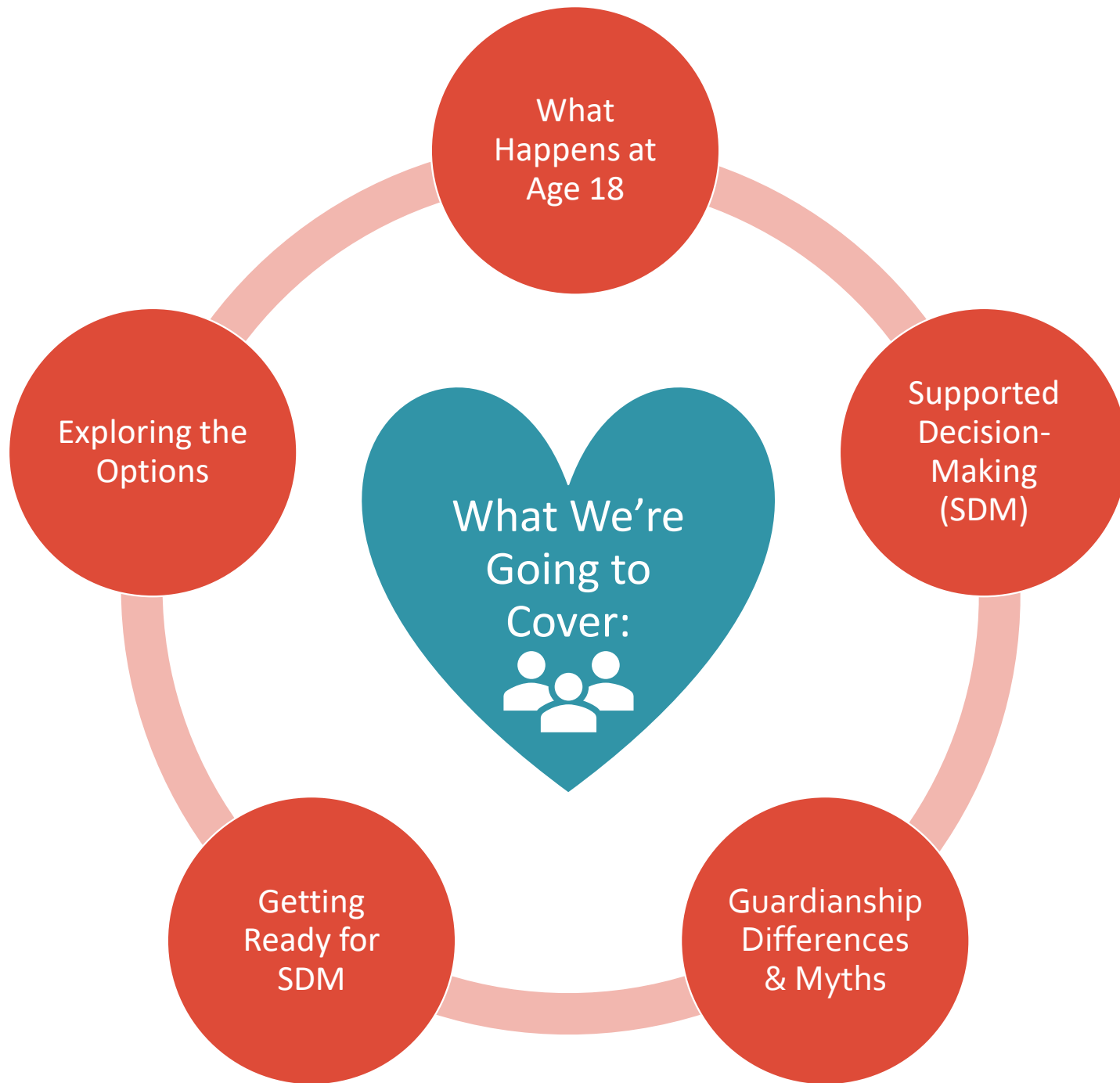
Family Voices supports families who have children with disabilities and special health care needs. We empower families to navigate health care, community support and services.

As a family-run organization, we guide families on their own leadership and advocacy journeys. We promote family-centered care and family/professional partnerships.

Visit our website to view our fact sheets, newsletters and online learning.







What Happens at Age 18

You are legally an adult in Wisconsin at age 18

This is called *age of majority* or *transfer of rights*

- At age 18 it's assumed someone can:
 - manage finances
 - exercise legal rights
 - choose where to live
 - consent to medical treatment
 - vote
 - enter into contracts

Some form of support may be necessary if a person needs assistance

- This assumption of full-ability does **NOT** change because a person has a disability or diagnosis

Making an Informed Decision

Talk about Making Decisions

- Start the conversation before of age 18
- Think about the need for decision-making supports
- Connect to learning opportunities
- Intentionally practice decision-making skills
- Making decisions is a civil right

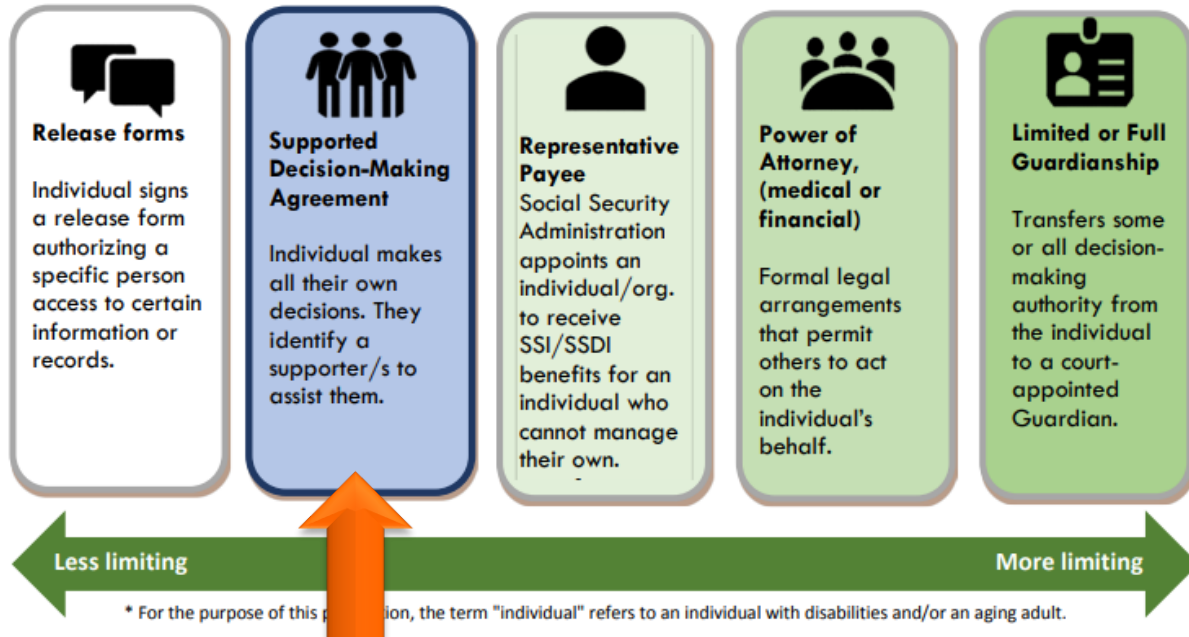
What is Supported Decision- Making (SDM)?

Supported Decision-Making is a set of strategies that help individuals with disabilities have more control over their life and future. It involves family and friends working together with individuals to support them in making complex decisions.¹

¹ *Keeping Individuals with Disabilities and Aging Adults in Charge of Their Lives: Supported Decision-Making and Other Alternatives to Guardianship*, WI BPDD, 2019.

Decision Making is a Continuum

Current decision-making support tools



Courtesy of Wisconsin Board of People with Developmental Disabilities, "Supported-Decision Making Toolkit"

- Person remains “the decider”
 - Release of Information/Consent
 - Supported Decision-Making Agreements
- Someone else is “the decider”
 - Power of Attorney (POA)
 - Guardianship
- Financial Safeguards
 - Social Security Representative Payee
 - Joint checking/savings accounts
 - Limits on debit cards
 - Conservatorship

These options are **not** mutually exclusive and can be used to complement one another

SDM Agreements

Wisconsin adopted SDM into law in 2018 with Supported Decision-Making Agreements

- Individual with disability completes agreement
- Names supporters

Supporters can:

- ✓ Gather information
- ✓ Make information and options understandable to the person with a disability
- ✓ Communicate person's decisions/preferences

While these agreements do not go through the courts, they are:

- A recognized legal document
- Flexible
- Easy to update

SDM Agreement

- Supporter cannot make decisions, sign legal documents or bind the adult to legal agreements
- No evidence of incompetency or incapacity
- Must be in writing, voluntary signed and dated
- Can be used with other tools, such as releases of information and powers of attorney

What's Included in SDM Agreements?

SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING AGREEMENT

Appointment of Supporter

I, _____, make this agreement
(insert name of person designating a supporter)

voluntarily and of my own free will. I agree and designate that

Name of supporter (Print)

Address of supporter

Email address of supporter (if applicable)

Phone number(s) of supporter

is my supporter. For the following everyday life decisions, if I have checked "Yes," my supporter may help me with that type of decision, but if I have checked "No," my supporter may not help me with that type of decision:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Obtaining food, clothing, and shelter. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Taking care of my physical health. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Managing my financial affairs. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Taking care of my mental health. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Applying for public benefits. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Assistance with seeking vocational rehabilitation services and other vocational supports. |

The following are **other decisions** I have specifically identified that I would like assistance with:

If I have not checked "Yes" or "No," or specifically identified and listed a decision immediately above, my supporter may not help me with that type of decision.

What do you
think?

Guardianship keeps my
adult child safe.

What do you think?

Guardianship is a good fit if I worry they will make decisions I disagree with or that I think are not in their best interest.

What do you
think?

Without Guardianship I
can't attend IEP
or other team meetings.

What do you
think?

My adult child under
Guardianship won't be
charged if they break
the law.

What do you
think?

I can decide how I want
guardianship to be set
up and the court will do
it that way.

What is Guardianship?

Guardianship is a legal process

- The court decides who will be the guardian of a person if:
 - They lack capacity to make decisions for themselves
 - AND-
 - There are no less-restrictive alternatives
- Responsibilities of being a guardian
 - Acting as an advocate for the adult's best interests
 - Exercising rights on behalf of someone else
 - Unintended consequences – change in relationship

Guardianship and Informed Decisions

Informed Decisions

- The impact of their disability on their **functional ability** to make decisions that are important for their health and safety
- Based on process they make and communicate these decisions
 - It is **not** based on the *quality* of the decisions
- Making an **informed decision** means:
 - Understanding the information needed to make decisions
 - Understanding the possible consequences of decisions
 - Have a way of expressing their decisions

Comparison

SDM Agreements	Guardianship
Person remains the 'decider'	Someone else becomes the 'decider,' rights go to guardian
Flexible, easy to modify	Difficult to modify or reverse—must go to court
No attorney or court hearing needed	Court hearing, no attorney required, but families may find it helpful to hire an attorney
With support, they can use available information to make decisions	Person is unable to navigate the decision-making process
Can assign different people for different purposes	Court decides who is selected as the guardian(s)

Practice Decision - Making

Young Adults with disabilities may need more time and *intentional* practice to build choice-making skills

- Add to IEP goals
- Ask professionals to support their choice-making
- Adults without these skills:
 - May be vulnerable
 - Less able to express their needs
- Young Adults who learn to make choices:
 - Communicate their interests
 - Increase their independence
 - Become more self-reliant
 - Trust their instincts

Fact sheets, tips, videos and worksheets: familyvoiceswi.org/learn

Next Steps

- Talk with them about making decisions
- Discuss with other families
- Learn about different decision-making tools
- Start with the least-restrictive tools
- Talk with your youth about signing a Release of Information (ROI) at bank, school and doctor's office
- **TAKE YOUR TIME**



TIME FOR OUR EVALUATION





familyvoiceswi.org/connect

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Contact Lynn at Lynn@fvofwi.org

or 608.512.0217 to bring one of our
learning sessions to your community



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