

**When someone has reduced capacity but can make their own decisions with assistance**

# Supporting a person to make their own decisions

You can support a person to make their own decision by:

## Giving the person relevant information

- Consider who would be the best person to talk with the person about the decision. This could be a combination of a professional, the substitute decision-maker (if one is appointed), a trusted relative or friend of the person.
- Take time to explain anything that is relevant or might help the person to make the decision.
- Keep the information only to what is needed.
- Describe any foreseeable risks and benefits in practical terms.
- If there are options, give the information about the choices in a clear and balanced way.

## Communication

- Consider the best time to communicate with the person (e.g. are there times of the day when the person is more alert?).
- Be prepared to have more than one discussion with the person about the decision that has to be made.
- If the person has hearing difficulties ensure that appropriate aids are used.
- Consider whether the person requires an interpreter.
- Use simple language – avoid jargon or complex medical terms.
- If appropriate, use photos or pictures and objects to communicate with the person.
- Speak at an appropriate speed and volume, and be careful of tone of voice.
- Ask one question at a time and wait for a response before continuing.
- Be aware of cultural and religious factors which might influence the person's way of thinking, communication and behaving.



## Making decisions is an important part of one's identity

Legally, a person's capacity to make their own decisions must be assumed unless there is evidence to the contrary. A person has decision making capacity if they can:

- Understand the general nature and consequences of the decision at hand;
- Retain such information, even for a short time;
- Use the information to make decisions; and
- Communicate the decision (in any way).

If a person is having difficulty in making their own decisions, they should be given support to make them as far as possible. This should occur before someone else is asked to make decisions for them.

***A decision that is different to the one you would make, does not mean the person lacks capacity.***

## Location

- If possible, choose a location where the person feels most at ease to have a discussion.
- Choose a quiet place where interruptions are unlikely and without background noise.
- Avoid other things that can contribute to sensory overload such as bright lights, strong smells.

It may be a discussion about something serious but try to avoid it being stressful – allow time and for the person to consider it in a comfortable way. Communication can also be non-verbal, e.g. body language.

## For more information

### More information about supporting a person to make their own decisions can be found at:

[capacityaustralia.org.au](http://capacityaustralia.org.au)

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500 is available to assist consumers.

### Information about advance care planning, with links to state-specific information, can be found at:

- [www.start2talk.org.au](http://www.start2talk.org.au)
- [www.advancecareplanning.org.au](http://www.advancecareplanning.org.au)

### Local contact:

### Other brochures in the series:

- Can they decide themselves? Assessing capacity to make decisions
- When you need to make a decision for someone – Information for substitute decision makers
- Who will speak for you if you can't?

### Acknowledgements

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## ASK ME model:

This model of supported decision-making emphasizes collaboration and relationships as a way of maintaining a person's autonomy.

### Step 1: Assess

What are the person's strengths and deficits? Knowing this will assist in the next steps of simplifying the task and maximising the ability to understand.

### Step 2: Simplify

Simplify the decision needing to be addressed. Also simplify the language used, e.g. by avoiding medical jargon.

### Step 3: Know

Know the person and what is important to them. What are their long-held values? Who do they trust? What is meaningful to them?

### Step 4: Maximise

Maximise the ability to understand. Choose the right time and environment. Visual aids may be helpful.

### Step 5: Enable

Tailor the level of support to the complexity and seriousness of the decision.

Peisah et al. (2013), *Decisional capacity: Toward and inclusionary approach*. International Psychogeriatrics, 25(10):1571 -1579.