



Each family has a voice
Together, our voices will be heard

Early Choices Matter

Children Building Choice-Making Skills

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Circles of Life Conference

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familyvoiceswi.org



Family Voices helps families navigate health care and community supports and services by providing in-person and online training, information and education.

As a family-run organization, we support families in their own leadership and advocacy journey, and we promote family-centered care and family/professional partnerships.

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

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 Children and Youth with
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Wisconsin's Regional Centers help families get answers, find services, and connect to community resources.

Contact us!

We'll Cover

- Why is Choice-Making Important?
- How to Get Younger Children Started
- Building on Progress with Your Older Children
- A Service Coordinator's Perspective
- Group Activities
- Your Feedback

The Best Time is NOW

All children need to learn this

- Children with Intellectual Disabilities may need more practice
 - Increase independence
 - Problem-solve
 - Set goals
 - Become more self reliant
 - Communicate interests

This is
Important

Lead to a More Self-Determined Life

Making choices empowers children, especially those with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

A Good Path
to Follow

- Children with IDD will need extra practice for a more self-determined life
 - Connections to the community
 - A sense of safety
 - Security of knowing his/her opinion matters

Prepare for Independence

“You can’t protect them forever”

- A child who can’t make choices may lead to a vulnerable adult
 - Person who doesn’t have their interests at heart
 - Person who doesn’t care about long-term impact



A Sense of
Safety

Communicating for Yourself Can Reduce Behaviors

Choice-making is communication

- Children with Intellectual Disabilities need self-advocacy skills
 - Teach children not to be passive in choices
 - at school
 - at therapy
 - with friends



Boost
Communication
Skills

Getting Started with Younger Children



What is Choice Making?

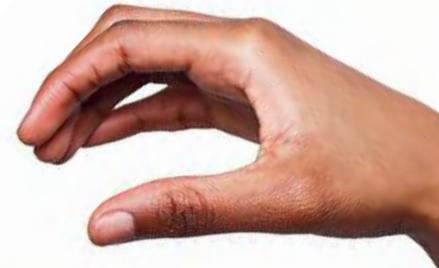
It's a Learned Skill Set

We make choices all day, every day

- Strengthen your choice-making skills
 - Practice
 - Like exercise for your muscles
 - Small choices make large choices easier



OR



The People in Your Child's Life

Everyone on the care team will ask your child to make choices

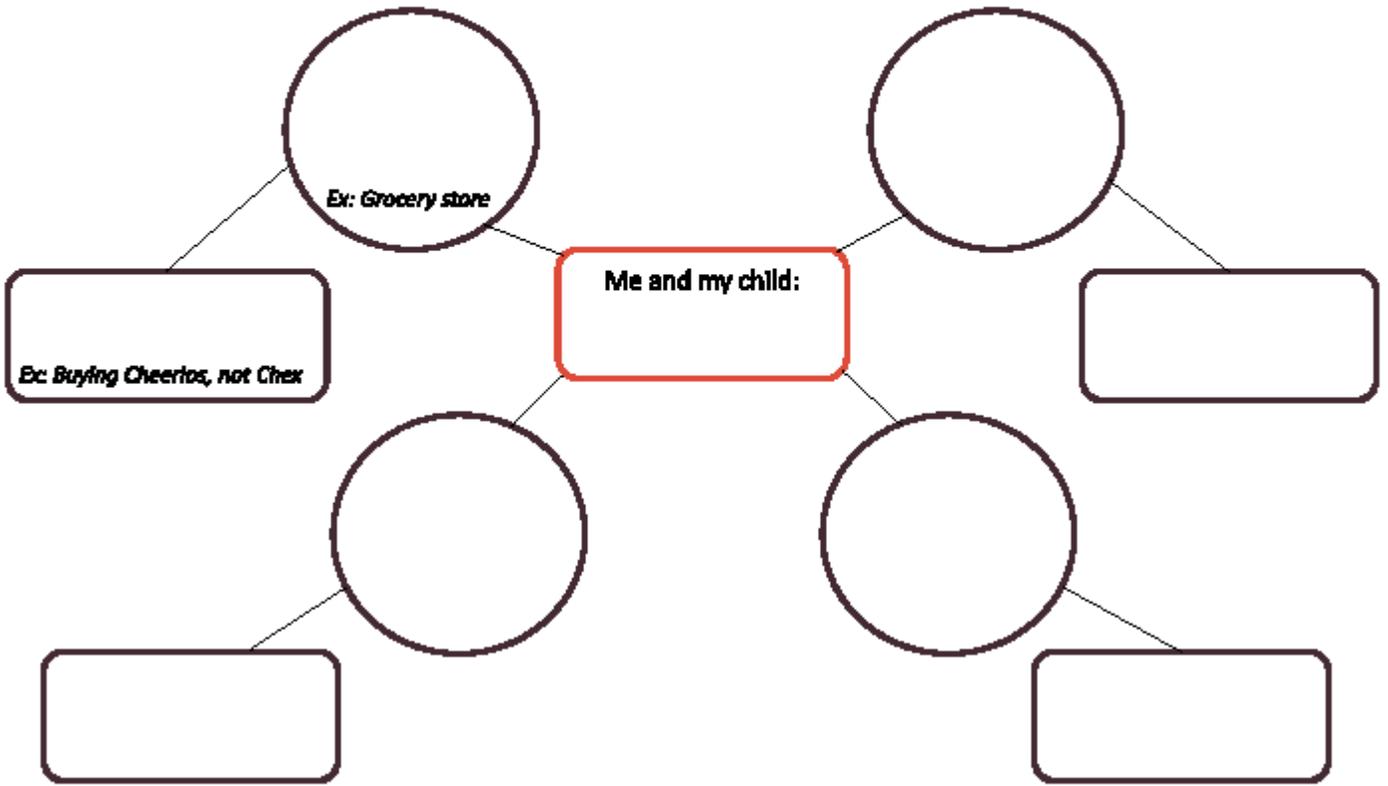
- Tell these professionals that you want to encourage choice-making
 - Teachers
 - Coaches
 - CLTS providers
 - Case Managers

Involve
Everyone
on the Team

Activity: Eco-Mapping

Mapping Out the Decisions I Make

Decision making is already a part of your day-to-day life. Think about places you and your child regularly go and list those in the big circles. Then think about what choices you might make there and list those in the boxes. Take a moment to think about what your train of thought is with those decisions.



Control Over Choices Improves Quality of Life

**Evidence shows that people with
IDD can learn to exercise choices**

- Can apply this skill to:
 - Self-Determination skills
 - Problem solving
 - Self-Advocacy

Research Shows
the Importance
of Choice-Making

Learn What's Best for Your Child

Be a Student of Your Child

Study how your child makes choices

- Plan for best times and places to start working on choice-making
 - Did any thought go into the choice?
 - Was your child happy with the selection?
 - How did s/he show you this?
 - Was s/he angry? Upset? Agitated?
 - How did s/he show you this?

Teachable Moments

Prepare yourself and your child

- Don't want to trigger a meltdown
 - Are you both feeling calm?
 - Do you have time?
 - Are you both feeling attentive?
 - Start with small opportunities
 - Talk through available options

Look for
Opportunities

A Stake in the Outcome

Let your child practice making a choice with something that will have a longer-term consequence

Build on Progress



Narrow the options and then let your child make the final choice

OR



Know Your Comfort with Risk

The idea of risk is different when you think about your child with disabilities

- Are you and your child comfortable?
- Will you be okay with all options?
 - If not, you will get there eventually
 - Honor your feelings and your child's

Comfort with
Risk

Give a Safe Space to Land

Everybody deserves to fail...and fail

- It might be the best way to learn
- Start with small choices to get small outcomes
- Be ready to offer support after

Dignity to Fail

Talk Through Your Choices

Go on errands together

- Think aloud
 - Explain what you're doing and why
 - Your child doesn't have to be actively attending
 - S/he will learn the more time spent with you

Practice
Makes Perfect



Share Your Confidence

Be a cheerleader

- Share your expectations with your child's entire team
 - Team members will reinforce your expectations
- High expectations lead to improved graduation rates and post-school employment

Set High
Expectations

Owning Your Choices

An unwanted outcome can teach responsibility

- Giving your child the dignity to fail, improves choice-making abilities
 - Understand that choices have consequences
 - Space to learn responsible choice making

Consequences

Activity: A Day in the Life of Our Family



A Day in the Life of Our Family

Take a moment to think about what your day usually looks like with your child. What are choices that your child can make at different times of the day? How can you ask them?

AM Routine

1.

2.

Example: Shirt choice

1.

2.

Ex: Do you want to wear the red shirt or blue shirt?

Noon / lunch

1.

2.

Example: Fruit

1.

2.

Ex: Do you want cherries, grapes or an apple?

Afternoon

1.

2.

Example: Homework

1.

2.

Ex: Will you do math or english homework first?

PM Routine

1.

2.

Example: Self-care

1.

2.

*Ex: You have to brush teeth, wash face, brush hair
what do you want to do first?*

Challenge Choices

Talk about trying new things

- A choice may be a reflex
 - No thought went into it
- Encourage a new choice
 - Don't force change
- Share why you try different things

Change
Things Up

Take Care of Yourself

Being with your child is a joy

- Teaching your child about making choices is a goal
 - Don't make this a chore
 - Not every moment is teachable
 - You might sense a meltdown coming
 - You may be hurried
 - You might feel judged by other parents

There is
NO Failure



Older Kids: Build on Your Progress



Include Your Older Child

Have your child be part of the team

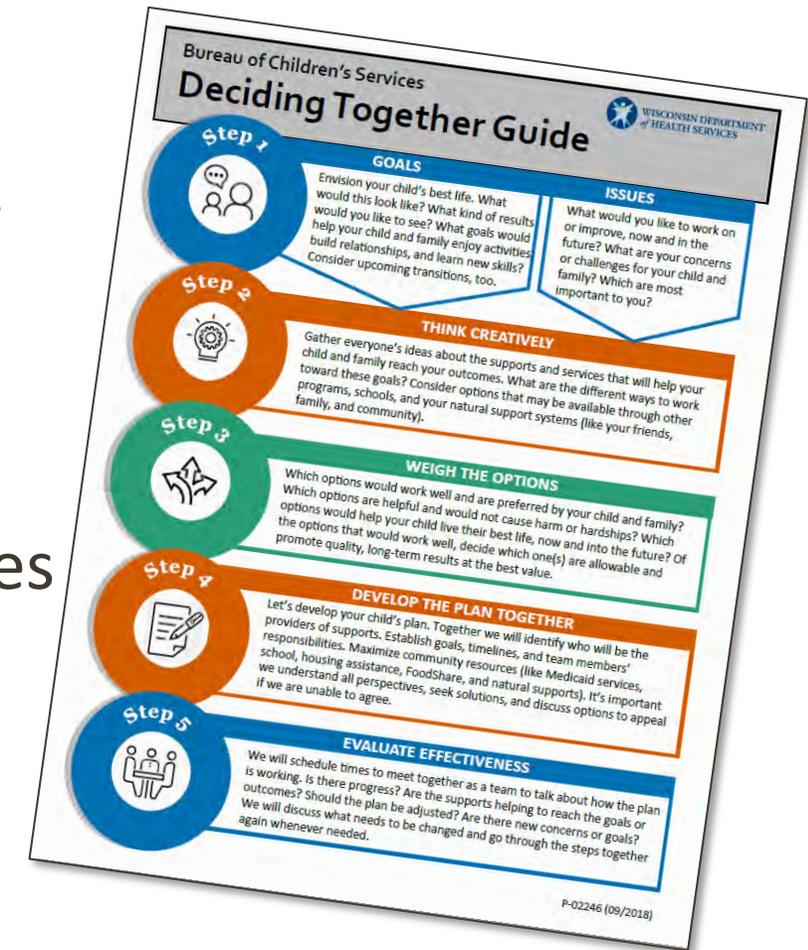
- These experiences build confidence
- Practice offering opinions to the group
- Have intentional choice-making as part of the IEP goals
 - Make choices for free period 80% of time

Pivot for
Older Children

The Deciding Together Guide

Deciding Together

- Helps children make choices as an equal part of a team
- Leverage members' skills
- Promote the goals that lead children to live their best lives



Set a Goal or Solve a Problem

Deciding
Together



A Service Coordinator's Perspective

Children's
Long-Term
Supports
(CLTS)

CLTS is a government program

- It funds community supports
- You are paired with a service coordinator
- Meetings are a good time for a child to practice making choices

A Service Coordinator's Perspective

CLTS helps you think about your child's future

- Set child on a path to self-determination
- Begin the meeting **before** the meeting
 - Choices in the near-future
 - Growing to choices in the next school year...and beyond

Children's
Long-Term
Supports

A photograph of a person and a child walking together in a field of yellow flowers. The person is wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants, and the child is wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants. They are holding hands, and the scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The background is a soft-focus field of green and yellow.

The Path to Supported Decision Making Continues

Now it's your turn!

How will you encourage your child to make choices?

Family Voices of Wisconsin, familyvoiceswi.org

Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities,
wi-bpdd.org



Focus Group Questions

- 1.** Did this session add to what you know about choice-making and why it is important? If yes, please share.
- 2.** Was this session clear and specific enough to give you ideas about when and how you might offer your child choices?
- 3.** Were the worksheets helpful?
- 4.** What other resources or information would make choice-making easier and more understandable for your child and family?
- 5.** After attending this session, do you think you'll support your child to make more choices?

Thank You.

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