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Self-Determination*

Self-determination is when you have the freedom to make your own choices and are in control of your own in life.

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) have the same right to self-determination as everyone else. They also have the same responsibilities that come with self-determination. They have a right to have opportunities, respectful support, and the power to control their lives, direct their services, and make choices for themselves.

Issue

In the past, many people with I/DD did not have a right to self-determination. They did not have the opportunity or support to make choices and decisions about important things in their lives. Instead, they were often overprotected (taken care of too much) and separated from others when it was not their choice. They could not take risks like everyone else and other people made decisions for them. This made it hard for many people with I/DD to live how they wanted and to be active, appreciated, and respected in their communities.

Position

People with I/DD have the same right to self-determination as people without disabilities. They should have the freedom, power, and help they need to control their own lives. They should know they can have a say in things that matter to them, even if they have a guardian.

Family members, friends, and other supporters are very important in helping someone make their own choices. They should give support and work together to help the person reach their goals. They should also understand and respect the person's right to make their own decisions and not try to control everything. Service providers, teachers, and people who help people with I/DD make decisions must respect their right to self-determination. These helpers must also understand there are limits to their power and responsibilities.

For this to happen, people with I/DD must be able to:

- Control all parts of their lives and have the supports they want to make decisions.
- Advocate for themselves knowing that others will listen to and support what they want.
- Choose their friends, who supports them, and other helpers.
- Make decisions about their own supports and services, including how to use the money they get to pay for them.
- Hire, train, manage and fire their own staff.
- Learn new skills to help them live their lives the way they want.
- Use equipment, tools, and other things (assistive technology) to help them communicate and live more independently.
- Try new things and take risks
- Live the way they want.

In the community, people with I/DD should be able to:

- Be a part of the community in ways that are important to them.
- Get support and help to vote and use other rights community members have.
- Be appreciated and respected in the community.
- Be active members and leaders of community boards, advisory councils, and other organizations.
- Lead the way in making decisions about how self-determination should work.

- Be part of making important policy decisions at the federal, state, and local levels.

Self-determination must be seen as a priority and it must be advocated for. Information about self-determination must be included in conferences, written materials, advocacy, training, services, policies, and research in the I/DD community.

Laws, regulations (rules), policies, procedures (how things are done), and funding (money for services) should support self-determination. They should be reviewed often and improved to fix problems. People with I/DD must always be involved in this process.

* The Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council supports the views and position of The Arc of the United States on self-determination for people with disabilities.

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