

INFORMED CHOICE: What Parents Need to Know – Helping Your Child Make Decisions About Their Future

WHAT IS INFORMED CHOICE?

Informed choice means your child has the **right to make decisions** about their future—especially about **work and independence**—with the information and support they need to understand their options.

Under the **Federal Rehabilitation Act**, individuals with disabilities must be supported to:

- Choose their own **employment goals**
- Decide what **services** they want
- Select their **service providers**
- Be part of how services are **delivered**

WHY IT MATTERS

When youth with disabilities participate in decision-making:

- They become more **independent**
- They are more **motivated** to pursue goals
- They build **self-advocacy and self-determination skills** that last a lifetime

KEY PARTS OF INFORMED CHOICE

Informed choice means the individual **HAS TO HAVE:**

- **Knowledge:** Access to accurate, clear information about their options
- **Understanding:** Support to process what that information means
- **Freedom:** The right to choose without pressure by family members or professionals
- **Authorization:** The right to expressly provide or withhold consent regarding decisions about their life
- **Capacity:** The ability to make decisions (presumed unless there is legal documentation that states otherwise) and, if needed, support to develop and exercise decision-making skills

TIPS FOR PARENTS: SUPPORTING INFORMED CHOICE

- **Ask open-ended questions:**
“What kind of work interests you?”
“Why does that matter to you?”
“What are you unsure about?”



- **Help your child explore options:** job visits, volunteer work, talking with people in different types of jobs
- **Let them try and learn:** even if the first choice isn't a perfect fit
- **Be patient:** making decisions takes time and practice and we all change our minds about what we do and do not want to do.

THE ROLE OF FAMILIES

As a parent or guardian, your role is to:

- Encourage your child to **take the lead**
- Help them **gather and understand** information
- **Share your insights** without making the decision for them
- **Support their choices** even if they're different from your own

The Role of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services (DARS) and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)

DARS and DBVI vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors will:

- Help your child decide on their **employment goal** based on their unique strengths, abilities, and preference.
- Develop an **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)** to help them meet that goal
- Provide **tools, supports, and guidance** throughout the VR process without making the decisions for your child
- Facilitate **learning and training opportunities** and **job experiences**
- Help your child **obtain or maintain** employment and the supports they need for success on the job.
- **Revisit choices** over time, as interests or goals evolve

REMEMBER:

- Everyone can make choices with the right supports.
- While choices cannot be unlimited, if only one or two options are given, the person cannot make a real choice.
- Choices have consequences. It's important to understand what those may be.
- Not all choices are equal—but every choice is a chance to learn and grow.
- Making choices is a skill that improves with experience and should be encouraged.
- A choice made without knowledge, understanding, freedom and authorization is not an informed choice.



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