



What does good support to make decisions look like?

Everyone involved in supporting women with learning disabilities when they are at risk of harm has a duty to ensure that an appropriate balance is struck between 'protection from harm', and promoting their autonomy, wellbeing and human rights.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities says that persons with disabilities have the same rights to make their own decisions as everyone else, and that appropriate measures must be taken to support them to exercise their legal capacity.

Part of an informed and effective support service is to help people to re-gain control of their lives by offering tailored support to make informed decisions. This is sometimes called *supported decision-making*. By offering practical advice and support you can empower women with learning disabilities to do this. Here are some examples of how:

- ▶ Make time to listen, hear and get to know about people's lives and how they want to live, as well as their strengths and goals
- ▶ Take time to build effective relationships based on trust
- ▶ Be open and honest
- ▶ Communicate and share information in ways that people like and understand
- ▶ Provide people with information about their rights to make their own decisions about their lives
- ▶ Provide people with support to weigh up pros, cons and risks and to access emotional support
- ▶ Give people information about independent advocacy and help them to access it if they want
- ▶ Avoid influencing decisions by asking yes and no questions
- ▶ Allow people time to understand and make informed decisions

By supporting women with learning disabilities in this way you can shift safeguarding activity from a focus on people's disabilities, risk and behaviours to building genuine, equal, trusting relationships with women with learning disabilities. This in turn allows for a better understanding of their lives, thereby enhancing their safety and resilience.

There are accessible supported decision-making resources available to help increase participation and engagement at what can be a very scary and distressing time. See the [Inclusive Resources and Signposting \(https://equallysafe.scll.org.uk/toolkit/inclusive-resources-and-signposting-9/\)](https://equallysafe.scll.org.uk/toolkit/inclusive-resources-and-signposting-9/) section.

By routinely providing opportunities and support to make informed decisions about their lives, service providers can empower women with learning disabilities to gain the confidence and skills to live safe, loving and equal lives.

“Making our own decisions is good for our wellbeing, confidence, and learning. It allows us to practice making our own decisions, take responsibility and learn from our mistakes.”

– A member of People First (Scotland)’s Equally Safe Group, 2024