

THE SC SUPPORTED Decision Making PROJECT

Stop, Look, and Listen:

Planning for Independence and Adult Decision-Making Support

As families and IEP teams plan for the highest degree of independence possible, this tool is designed to assess what learning opportunities an individual has been provided to prepare for adult decision-making responsibilities. Ensuring access to learning opportunities is critical. It is important not to assume a deficit in a given area is a result of a disability. Often it is the result of a lack of opportunities to build skills related to independence.

Part 1 of “Stop, Look, and Listen” is all about gathering input from an individual decision maker and at least one adult supporter on the opportunities provided to learn and practice adult skills in critical decision-making areas. Part 2 provides guidance on putting into action the input gathered in Part 1.

This tool can be used by and with students of any age and any type of disability. Input from the individual decision maker is essential. Accommodations for participation may involve one-on-one assistance to explain concepts, record information, read prompts, etc. For many, a printed copy of nothing but the 2nd and 3rd pages of this tool may help it to feel more approachable.



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THE SC **SUPPORTED Decision Making** PROJECT

Instructions for the Stop, Look, and Listen Tool

- Step 1:** For each skill in Part 1, decide how often you have had the opportunity to practice or learn this skill (not at all, some, a lot). Check the one box that fits best.
- Step 2:** Compare the results of the decision maker with the results of a supporting adult. Highlight the areas of agreement or disagreement about available opportunities to learn or practice important, adult skills.
- Step 2:** Go on to Part 2 and begin the discussion as a family or as an IEP team on increasing opportunity for skill-building in the areas most important to the independence of that person.




THE SC SUPPORTED Decision Making

PROJECT




Stop, Look, and Listen

Part 1: Assessing Opportunities to Learn and Practice in Areas of Adult Decision Making

Who is completing this assessment? Decision Maker Parent Teacher Other _____

Stop, Look, and Listen Battery Levels	 I have had the opportunity to learn and practice this skill a lot.	 I have had some opportunities to learn and practice this skill.	 I have not had opportunities to learn and practice this skill.
Finances			
Making small purchases (e.g. lunch, snacks, clothing, etc)			
Keeping track of purchases and bills (i.e. budgeting)			
Managing a bank account (i.e. online banking)			
Understanding when someone is trying to take advantage of me financially			
Making big decisions about money (e.g. opening an account, signing a lease, or obtaining a credit card)			
Paying bills			
Relationships			
Understanding the personal space of myself and others			
Speaking up if something doesn't feel right			
Recognizing abuse			
Making choices about romantic relationships			
Making choices about sex			




THE SC
SUPPORTED Decision Making
 PROJECT

<p style="text-align: center;">Stop, Look, and Listen Battery Levels</p>	 I have had the opportunity to learn and practice this skill a lot.	 I have had some opportunities to learn and practice this skill.	 I have not had opportunities to learn and practice this skill.
Education			
Providing input in my IEP meeting			
Understanding my accommodations and requesting them			
Asking for support when I need it			
Choosing how I want people to help me			
Employment			
Communicating about what I want to do for work			
Working on the job independently and asking for help appropriately			
Behaving professionally with bosses and co-workers			
Health			
Taking the right prescription medication at the right time			
Communicating with healthcare professionals about how I am feeling			
Explaining in my own words how my disability or health condition affect me			
Setting and keeping appointments and knowing when to go to the doctor			
Making choices about how I want people to support me in taking care of my health			
Home and Community			
Choosing and doing things that I enjoy when I have free time			

THE SC

SUPPORTED Decision Making

PROJECT

Stop, Look, and Listen Battery Levels	 I have had the opportunity to learn and practice this skill a lot.	 I have had some opportunities to learn and practice this skill.	 I have not had opportunities to learn and practice this skill.
Using transportation available to me to travel as independently as possible			
Knowing what to do in the event of an emergency			
Completing chores and maintaining a clean living space			
Cooking meals and preparing snacks			
Understanding nutrition and planning meals			
Purchasing items needed for daily living (groceries, cleaning supplies, soap, toothpaste, etc.)			

Part 2: Planning for Independence

Now that we have taken a look at the opportunity to learn and practice specific skills, two things should happen:

- 1) We should have open conversations about how to increase opportunities to learn and practice critical, adult skills that promote independence. Part 2 of this tool was designed to help you do just that. Please keep in mind that some of these suggested activities may seem overwhelming at first but may be easily accomplished with the support of the IEP team or service provider agencies. The IEP team can use information gathered from this tool to inform annual transition goals in the IEP. Try to find ways to support the decision maker in leading the conversation, as the assessment itself is an opportunity to practice self-determination.

THE SC **SUPPORTED Decision Making** PROJECT

- 2) Most of us were not fully ready for adulthood when we reached the age of 18. As home and school work together to promote independence, it is also important to consider what options may be available for supporting adult decision making. In other words, upon reaching 18, how will an individual be supported in making adult decisions where skills are currently lacking? This can be done formally through planning and a Supported Decision-Making Agreement or more informally. Like surgery for a medical condition, a process like guardianship should be the last option considered. For more on Supported Decision Making, visit www.scsupporteddecisionmaking.org.

Gathering Student-Driven Input

- 1) What skills are most important to you? What skills do you need to learn to be as independent as possible?
- 2) What do you want your life after school to look like? Where would you like to live and work? Who would you like to spend time with, and what would you like to do for fun?
- 3) How can we support you in practicing these skills? What are we doing that may be keeping you from being more independent?

Gathering Group Input

- 1) What are our biggest decision making and adult skill concerns? What are the strongest areas of adult skill and decision making?
- 2) Are there areas where our IEP team or our family's practices can and should add opportunities to learn and practice adult skills and decision making? Are we all aiming for independence and challenging our assumptions about possible areas of dependence?
- 3) As a family or an IEP team, do we understand the many available ways to support an adult decision maker that do not include the removal of rights through guardianship? If not, do we know how to find resources that may help in that conversation?
- 4) How can we make sure the decision maker stays at the center of this process and directs their services?

THE SC **SUPPORTED Decision Making** PROJECT

Guidelines for Independence

- 1)** Independence is rarely "all or nothing." We increase our independence with a skill as we are exposed to it and the natural consequences for doing it or not doing it. If an individual is not currently performing a skill, it does not mean they cannot grow in that area. Needing support in areas is a natural part of growing up for all people. The very act of making choices and decision may need to be taught.
- 2)** Connect with sources of support. Youth with disabilities may be used to others providing support in their daily lives without them asking for it. For this reason, youth may need help in defining the possible roles of adult supporters, problem solving, and requesting that support.
- 3)** Avoid assumptions about capacity to understand or grow in an area. Try not to avoid learning opportunities because of failures in other areas or the difficulty of a task. Independence from increased responsibility can be a great incentive for learning new skills.
- 4)** Nationally, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) mandates that transition planning begin in the IEP no later than age 16. In South Carolina, transition planning must begin by age 13. The purpose of this window of time is to purposefully plan for the transition to adult life, and the IEP can and should set a path forward for learning critical skills. With a strong IEP and a home life that supports independence, incredible things are possible.

Notes

What types of adult decision making skills are going really well?

THE SC

SUPPORTED Decision Making

PROJECT

What types of adult decision making skills do we need to create more opportunities for learning and practicing around?

How are we taking into account the decision maker's input, preferences, and goals in our strategies? How can we promote even more self-direction?

What are some additions or changes that we'd like to see to the IEP to better address areas of adult decision making?

THE SC **SUPPORTED Decision Making** PROJECT

Appendix A: Activities to Promote Independence

Finances

1. Mock budgeting exercises
2. Provide practice in the community with purchases
3. Talk about the thought process of making financial decisions
4. Use a phone app to break down and discuss spending and bills
5. Role play basic financial scenarios
6. Role play complex financial scenarios like credit card offers, incorrect change given in cash purchases, etc.
7. Begin using a bank account with a limited amount put into it each month, with a budgeting activity to guide spending with exposure to natural consequences

Relationships

1. Role play relationship scenarios
2. Identify examples of appropriate and inappropriate relationship behavior
3. Discuss personal interactions seen in public or on TV
4. Teach youth explicitly about sex, boundaries, and consent
5. Allow youth access to relationship topics as taught in general education classes (e.g. Health Education)
6. Support youth in finding trustworthy, online sources of information about relationships, sex, and reproductive health

Education

1. Support youth in understanding their role in the IEP meeting and providing input verbally, in writing, or through a prepared presentation
2. Create a plan with youth for how they want support in an IEP meeting and in the classroom
3. Plan with youth for one-on-one discussions with teachers about accommodations and what they need to be successful in the classroom
4. Find ways youth can self-monitor behavior in school, increasing self-awareness and advocacy

Employment

1. Provide a variety of employment experiences
2. Discuss job duties, possible accommodations, and role play conversations with an employer to request accommodations to perform a job
3. Help supervisors perform feedback and help youth understand employment-related consequences on the job
4. Teach skills to get a job and to navigate on-boarding process
5. Discuss with youth appropriate work relationship behavior and encourage honest self-assessment of workplace participation

Health

1. Use a phone-based app, planner, and/or pill boxes to encourage taking responsibility for medications
2. Support youth in talking to healthcare professionals
3. Plan for the role of youth in appointments
4. Begin setting appointments *with* youth instead of *for* youth
5. Discuss experiences with youth after appointments. Asking permission to capture an audio recording of appointments for this purpose may be helpful
6. Discuss diagnoses, health conditions, and treatments openly

THE SC **SUPPORTED Decision Making** PROJECT

Home and Community

1. Provide training in travel like using public transportation or ride sharing
2. Create an emergency plan together
3. Teach independent living skills explicitly
4. Offer youth roles in household chores and help create a plan for completing them
5. Encourage household responsibility early
6. Ask youth to track supply of toiletries and to request when they are needed
7. Provide opportunities to learn about internet safety, including safe use of social media as a social outlet
8. Role play a variety of emergency situations