

PHILOSOPHY & VALUES  
SELF DETERMINATION

**Self-Determination**

Being self-determined involves choosing and setting goals, being involved in making life decisions, self-advocating, and working to reach goals.

Self-determination refers to a characteristic of a person that leads them to make choices and decisions based on their own preferences and interests, to monitor and regulate their own actions, and to be goal-oriented and self-directing. A person acting in a self-determined way has a voice in the decisions that affect them and is causing things to happen in his or her own life.

A frequent misinterpretation of self-determination is that it simply means “doing it yourself.” For people who may have significant disabilities, this can be problematic. The ability to perform specific behaviors is secondary in importance to being the causal agent. So while a person may not be able to solve a difficult life problem without support, with appropriate support that person is enabled to act as a causal agent in the decision-making process and therefore is more self-determined. The more supports (e.g. friendships and community connections) that are available to people with DD, the more likely it is that they will have the necessary resources to cause things to happen in their lives.

One way to be self-determined is through self-advocacy activities. Advocating for oneself is an excellent demonstration of self-determined action.

**DD Act Self-Determined Actions**

Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (the DD Act) was created to assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of, and have access to, needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life, through culturally competent programs authorized under the law.

The DD Act ensures that an individual, with assistance:

- has the ability and opportunity to make choices and decisions;
- has the ability and opportunity to exercise control over services, supports, and other assistance;
- has the authority to control resources and obtain needed services;
- has the opportunity to participate in and contribute to their communities;
- has the support, including financial, to advocate, develop leadership skills, become trained as a self-advocate, and participate in coalitions and policy-making.

### Creating an Environment to Support Self-Determination

Self-determination includes looking at the entire picture when developing strategies for support; taking into account both the capacities of the person and the reality of the environment in which the person lives and works. This looks at not only the person, but also the environmental context. So when creating activities that increase and promote self-determination, we would want to address not only the individuals in the group, but also the environment in which they are living. Elements and situations which need to be examined can include: interpersonal, family, organization, community, policy, and services and supports.

To best promote self-determination, opportunities need to be provided in all of the environmental contexts - at home, at work, at school, and in the community. For example: you can support meaningful participation on a board; you can find or create activities that develop self-advocacy skills; and you can promote building a wider social network and increase social capital.

The following outcomes can result from implementing activities that promote self-determination:

- Access to community resources and supports.
- Improved ability to manage one's daily life.
- Greater community participation and acceptance.
- Emotional/material/physical well-being.
- Breadth and variety of daily activities.

The Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities defines Self-Determination as:

*Individuals are the primary decision maker in their lives, pursue what is important to them and have a meaningful role in the community. This includes five key principles:*

- **Freedom:** Individuals will live a meaningful life in the community and make choices about their lives.
- **Authority:** Individuals will have meaningful control over a set amount of dollars that can be used to build the supports they need by purchasing only what is needed and paying for what is received.
- **Support:** Individuals will have support to organize resources in ways that are life enhancing and assist them in reaching their dreams and goals. Individuals have a circle of supports made up of family, friends, and both paid and unpaid supports.
- **Responsibility:** Individuals assume responsibility for giving back to their community, for seeking employment, and for developing unique gifts and talents.
- **Confirmation:** Individuals are recognized for who they are and what they can contribute, having a leadership role in developing policies that affect their lives and helping others reach success.

Supports to promote self-determination should focus on:

- enhancing personal capacity,
- improving opportunity, and
- modifying the environment.

Because self-determination is a learned characteristic, you, as a support coordinator, have the ability to make a significant change in people’s lives. You can develop within others a growing awareness of self-determination. Many times an individual simply needs someone to believe in their ability to make choices and to create opportunities for them to increase their self-determination and strengthen their voice.

**Promoting Self-Determination Requires a Shifting Pattern**

There is a commitment to help individuals determine their future, respect their wishes, and plan to help them reach their goals.

From the individuals’ perspective the pattern shift would look like this:

From		To
Professionals planning for you		You and your ‘Circle of Supports’ planning for your supports
Counting on a paid professional who is only temporarily part of your life		Reliance on the lifelong commitment of people you have chosen to be in your life, including your family, friends and other natural supports
A view that only professionals can be responsible		Respect for the fact that you, your family, and your friends have a vested interest in acting responsibly on your behalf
Support Coordination as a means to let people into existing services		Individualized support planning as a way for you, your family, and your friends to organize supports in response to your needs and dreams
The belief that quality is created by relying on regulations, oversight and monitoring		The belief that true quality is created by enhancing your circle of supports and connecting you to your community

Interested in learning about self-determination in greater depth:

National Gateway to Self-Determination <http://ngsd.org/>

Missouri Self-Determination Association <http://mo-sda.org/>

Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities <http://dmh.mo.gov/dd/selfdetermination.htm>