

**A PERSONAL GUIDE
TO THE
VULNERABLE PERSONS ACT**

For Manitobans with a Mental Disability

Acknowledgements

This personal guide to the VPA is dedicated to all people in Manitoba who have an intellectual disability. Your struggle for acceptance inspires us to find ways of creating more inclusive and accepting communities. Individually and together you contribute to society through your courage, determination, acceptance, and ability. You contribute in many ways; you bring joy and purpose to people's lives. You make the world a better place because you are here.

In preparing this guide we asked several people from agencies to provide some general ideas first. Then we asked a group of self-advocates to provide input on each guiding principle of the law. They helped us understand what was important to them and reminded us to keep this guide in plain language.

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It is our wish that you learn and use the information in this guide to empower yourself.

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WHY THIS BOOK IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

In this book, you will learn about how you can make choices and how your family, friends and people who work with you can support you. Every person has rights, no matter what.

These rights are human rights.

Human rights are made and protected so everyone is treated fairly.

Along with these rights, come responsibilities.

These are things we do to make sure we are all safe and secure in our lives: Like obeying the law, and voting in elections.

The **Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act**, or the **VPA**, is a law in Manitoba which says people with a mental disability, sometimes called an intellectual disability, have the right to make their own decisions.

Along with the right to make decisions, comes the responsibility for making decisions.

Your life is full of choices and decisions: Like where you live, with whom, how will you spend your day and how will you spend your money.

How do you make decisions? Who helps you?

If you are someone with an intellectual disability, there are things you need to know about making decisions. We hope this guide will help you to understand them.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



You can read this book on your own or with some help.

You can ask someone to read it to you.

You can read it and follow along to the audio recording at the same time.

You might read it with friends or in a group.

We hope you will learn more about your rights, how you make decisions now, and how you will make decisions in the future.

In the guide, you can read or listen to some stories. These stories give you examples of some of the challenges and choices different people have made. They are made-up stories but come from examples of things that have happened in people's lives.

On other pages, you will have the chance to think about how you do things and practice making decisions. You can do this by yourself, or with others in a group.

You can read this book a little at a time.

You do not have to read it all at once.

And you can read it as many times as you like.

You get to decide!

THE LAW – YOUR RIGHTS



There are many laws in Canada and Manitoba.

These laws apply to everyone.

In Canada, there is a Charter of Rights and Freedoms to protect all our rights.

This means other people must respect your choices. It means you must respect other people's choices too.

In Manitoba, **The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act**, or the **VPA**, gives you the right to make your own choices. It supports your right to get help if you need it, and be respected for your choices by others.

This book will show you what the VPA means.

There will be questions to ask, things to think about, and ways to help you understand your place in your community.

There are three parts to the VPA. They are:

1. **The 5 Guiding Principles**
2. **Supports and Services**
3. **Protection and Safety**

ARE YOU A VULNERABLE PERSON?

Some people are born with disabilities.

Others have an accident or an illness that disables them.

It does not matter how your disability happened.

There are many ways of measuring, and deciding on the type of disability you have.

There are people, called clinicians, who are able to work with you and those who care about you to see if you have an intellectual disability. This person is trained to check your ability to understand and make informed choices.

Your family, teachers, friends, and staff can also offer information to them on how you make decisions.

The law says you are a vulnerable person if . . .

- ❖ You are 18 years or older
- ❖ Your mental disability happened before you turned 18 years
- ❖ You need help making decisions



THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are five main beliefs in this law.

They are the ***guiding principles***.

People refer to them as “the spirit of the Act.” They are the values that drive us.

1. You have the right to make your own decisions.
2. You are encouraged to make your own choices.
3. If you need help to make a choice, your family, friends, and service providers (staff) can help you. These people make up your support network.
4. When your support network helps you make choices they have to respect your privacy and dignity as an adult.
5. If there are decisions that you cannot make, with or without help, a substitute decision maker can be appointed to make decisions for you.



Introduction to Guiding Principle #1

It used to be that people with intellectual disabilities had no rights. Others told them what to do. They did not have the right to make any decisions. Even if they did make decision, no one had to respect their choice.

Most people make decisions about their life. They make these decisions on their own or with help from others.

In 1996, the Government of Manitoba passed a law: The **Vulnerable Persons Act**. Everyone, those with disabilities and those who do not have an intellectual disability, is learning about the Vulnerable Persons Act at different times and in different ways.

The VPA states that people with intellectual disabilities can make their own decisions.

Guiding Principle #1

Now...Everyone makes decisions every day. They are a natural part of life. Decisions are choices you make. Here are some choices that you might have to make in your life.

You might need to choose—

- Where you want to live
- Who you want to live with
- How you want to spend your money
- What kind of food you want to eat
- What you want to wear

- What movie you want to watch
- Where you want to travel
- Who you want to phone

Other things you can make decisions about include:

- How you want to spend your day and with whom
- The kind of work you would like to do, or
- What you want to learn or try - then you might need to decide where you can do that.

If no one has taught you how to make decisions, or if you are afraid of making a decision on your own, you might find it easier to let others make them for you.

**Guiding Principle #1 says
you are able to make your
own decisions.**

The good thing is, everyone can learn how to make decisions.

You do not have to make all your decisions at the same speed or in the same way as others. You do not have to make decisions by yourself.



Informed Decision-Making

Knowing what your choices are helps. Knowing what might or might not happen if you make a choice is also important.

Asking questions helps you get answers and this will help you make choices. This is called **Informed Decision-Making**.

Most decisions are easy to make. Some choices are part of everyone's daily routine: like,

- What time you want to or need to get up in the morning,
- What you will eat,
- What you will wear,
- When to go to bed,
- When to have a bath or shower.

Most people think these decisions are easy to make because they are familiar.

Not every decision is easy to make.

There are times when making a decision feels uncomfortable.

A lot of us feel afraid when we make big decisions.

In those cases, it is okay to ask for help – we all do it.

Here are some examples of decisions you may want help with:



Where do you want to live?

Do you want to live by yourself or with a friend?

Do you need help finding a place and who can help you with that?

Do you need to go to the dentist or doctor?

What do you do if the doctor says you need surgery?



Perhaps you want to go on a date or you think you are ready to get married.

Who can help you with that decision?

HOW do you make your decisions?

Everyone has his or her own way of making choices.

Sometimes, decisions are made based on a feeling – like a decision to wear a shirt because it is your favourite colour.



Other times, choices are made based on what we think about something – like a decision to go to the dentist. We may not like going to the dentist, but we know it is better for our health to do it, than to not do it. In this way, we think about facts and other information when deciding what to do.

It is important to have information from sources that you can trust.

Knowing **who** to ask is as important as knowing **what** to ask.

Who do you know that you think makes good decisions?

WHAT kind of decisions do you make?

There are decisions that you make by yourself.

You might choose what to wear or what to eat on your own.

Sometimes you need help from others. Deciding what to buy or where to live is easier when you have help making that decision.

Decision-making becomes easier with practice.

We encourage you to practice making decisions as much as you can.



WHO can help you make decisions?

Most of us have family, friends, co-workers, neighbours, or others in our lives to help us make decisions.

Who do you have in your life to help you make decisions?

Who do you trust to help you? Who do other people recommend you ask?

Do you have a support network?

Do you know people besides staff to help you decide?

WHAT do you want or need to learn?

If making decisions with or without help is new to you, what do you need to know to get better at it?

Maybe you just need some practice – starting with decisions that may be easier for you and working up to those that may be a bit harder.

Maybe you need to learn how to think about the results of different choices or whom you can ask to help you do it.

Maybe you have a dream and you need to learn more about how to make it happen.

Learning to live your life the best way you can is something we all want. If you can imagine what you want then you have a good start.

Is there someone in your life who can help you with practicing, learning and dreaming?



WHEN do you have to make your decision?

Some decisions are easy to make. You do not need a lot of time to think about them.

Choosing your clothes, your food, or your friends can be easy.

Other decisions are harder and need more time to think about.

Choosing where to live, where to work or how to handle a medical concern may need more time.

Having to think about the big decisions in life may come suddenly or over a longer time period.

If you know that something will be changing in your life soon, you can begin thinking about some of the choices you may have to make.

Who can you rely on to help you decide?



After graduation you need to make some decisions.

Some choices that you make may cause other people to worry and this can make you feel uncomfortable. Telling others why something is important to you is one way of helping them understand your decision. Finding others who support your choice may also help.

Getting support from people who make you feel valued can be a big help. It is important to have people who respect you and want you to have good things in your life. Listen to what other people tell you and if it doesn't feel right to you, or you do not understand, ask others for their opinions.

After you get information you can understand, you can make an **informed decision**.



Your Rights and Your Responsibilities

With the right to make decisions comes *responsibility* and *accountability*.

This means you have to know your rights, and practice making choices.

It means understanding that there are things that happen as a result of some of your decisions that may disappoint you.

If a result you were not expecting happens, think about why that might be.

What can you learn from the experience and how you might do things differently or better next time?

*What would life be if we had no
courage to attempt anything?
Vincent van Gogh*

MARY'S STORY



Mary is a 26-year-old woman who lives with her parents. She would like to move into a home of her own. Along with her support network, which includes her parents, brother, her neighbour, and friends, she has decided on a plan to get there.

The decision Mary made was to look for an apartment close to where she volunteers. With help from her neighbor, Mary checked out possible apartments near where she wants to live. It is close to her brother's home and the leisure centre where she likes to go swimming and play cards.

Mary would like to try living on her own and everyone supports her in this decision. To make certain she is safe and has the support she needs to shop, prepare her meals, and keep her apartment clean, other people will help her. Mary's community services worker has arranged for staff to come every day to help her cook and assist with other household activities.

Her brother agreed to stop by weekly, too. Mary will continue to visit her parents on the weekends unless she has other plans. She will choose people to help her pick her new furniture, a cell phone, and a TV. All of these activities will occur over a couple of months and, with help, Mary will settle into her new apartment.

Introduction to Guiding Principle #2

It used to be people with mental disabilities had no rights about anything in their daily life. Before the law changed, they were always told how to do everything.

Even if people with disabilities had other people in their lives such as family or friends who spoke up on their behalf, it didn't matter.

Government staff could make decisions about people without listening to their family.

Even if families or friends did not agree with decisions made by government, those decisions still went through. As a result, many people were hurt for many years.

If you are 35 years or older and have been labeled as having a mental disability, you may have noticed a change in how you are being treated and in how you make decisions.

If you have not experienced a change in the way people support you or how you are encouraged to make decisions this next part is very important.

There are still a lot of people who have a difficult time accepting or believing that people with intellectual disabilities can make their own decisions.

If you have not practiced making choices you may find this hard too.

Guiding Principle #2

Now...Everyone is encouraged to make decisions.

Even deciding not to make a choice is a decision.

However, not making a choice means you are allowing someone else make it for you. You may not like what others choose for you.

Even if the choice they make is okay and in your **best interest**, making choices is like exercising your mind. The more you exercise your decision-making, the better you will get at it.

It might be easier to let someone else make your decisions for you, but it is also important for them to encourage and support you to do it for yourself. Just as you need to get used to making decisions, they need to get used to supporting you to make decisions.

If you already have people in your life who encourage you to make decisions in ways you understand, they can help others understand what works for you.

**Guiding Principle #2
says you are to be
encouraged to make
your own decisions**

Think about parts of your life where you want to get better at making choices. As you read through this next section, pay attention to different ways people can help and support you. Think about what might work for you.

We all learn in different ways. Some people like to try things to understand them, some people like to talk about things before making choices, some people like to spend time thinking about their choices and getting used to what it might mean to change the way they are doing things.

You may want to try things for a long time and then change your mind, or it might only take a short time to decide whether to stay with one choice or change to another. It is okay to try something for however long feels right to you.

When someone is encouraging you, they may say, “Try it out,” they offer to help you do something new, or they might suggest you do something differently to get the result you want. When you feel encouraged you are more likely to trust the person who is helping you.



You might feel *encouraged* when people seem glad to see or meet you. If they offer to shake your hand and express genuine interest in you, you might feel accepted and happy

If you try something and then decide you want to stop, that's okay, too. You also have the right to change your mind.



Sometimes people feel a bit scared when they try something new. That is natural and it's okay.

You can ask for help from someone you trust so that you feel more comfortable trying something new.

When you have other people helping you to make choices, it can sometimes be confusing.

Are they helping you to make a decision you want to make, or do they want to get you to make a choice they prefer?

Sometimes people may try to get you to do things you do not want to do or things you might want to do but shouldn't.

If you ever are worried about a situation like this in your life, speak to someone you can trust and get their opinion.

Here's what people say about making choices:

- It is not always easy
- It takes practice
- It works great sometimes
- Other times it might not be so great
- Having help from others is a good thing



We learn how to make choices in different ways. You have to be ready to make decisions. Watching others gives you some idea on how other people choose



Listen carefully to the information people give you. It's good to have people in your life that you know well so you can trust the advice they might give you.

People communicate in different ways. Some need symbols. Other people use gestures and body language to let people know they have made a choice, or that they do not like the choices other people have made for them.



To make an informed decision you need information about your choices. Asking questions about your choices can be helpful.

If you want help to make a decision and you cannot ask questions, whom do you trust to help you?

If you are able to ask your own questions, where can you go to get answers?

It is important to remember we ALL communicate differently and we ALL understand things in different ways.



Do not be afraid to make decisions; do not be afraid to make mistakes.

Carly Fiorina

BRAD'S STORY

Recently, at the age of 35 years, Brad moved into a residence where he lives with two roommates.

When Brad lived with his parents, he would let his dad make his decisions.

Now he is living with two others who have lived in this home for almost ten years. They make their own decisions about their lives in the home and the community in which they live.

In the beginning, Brad found it difficult to adjust to his new life. There were expectations that were unfamiliar to him: He had to contribute to the household chores, to grocery shopping, and to meal preparation.

Along with the others, he had to decide on what he wanted to eat, what to wear, or what to buy. He felt overwhelmed and did not like doing this at all.

The staff members, who worked for the residential agency, and Brad's roommates were patient and helped him make choices.

It took him several months to feel comfortable choosing certain things – his favourite foods, what to wear, and what to order in a restaurant. They encouraged Brad and soon he was willing to try and he practiced making more and more decisions.

Now, a year later, Brad has become very comfortable making decisions.

With help, he planned a vacation to Florida and has made new friends where he volunteers.

His family is very pleased and a bit surprised that he has developed in this way. He reminds them that he can make his own choices whenever they try to make decisions for him or without consulting first.



Introduction to Guiding Principle #3

It used to be that professionals recommended or decided on all areas of your life if you had an intellectual disability.

Sometimes, without talking to you, they would decide

- Where you would live,
- Who you would live with,
- How you spent your day.

It did not matter what you wanted because professionals used to think they had all the answers. Your choices about what foods you ate and what clothes you wore were made for you.

Professionals thought they were doing the right thing.

Families often went along with professional advice.

They thought they were doing the right thing, too.

A support network used to be made up of people who were paid to be in your life.

They were paid to make decisions for you, not to ask you what you wanted.

Guiding Principle #3

Now... if you need help to making a choice, your support network can help. You choose who is in your support network.

Your support network is made up of people like your friends, family and service providers. They want what is best for you.

They also want to encourage you to make your own choices.

When making decisions, it is important to have facts about or experience with something before deciding.

You may ask people on your support network who know facts or have experiences to share them with you. It is important they share them with you in ways you understand.

You might want to try something out to see what it is like before making your decision.

**Guiding Principle #3
says that if you need
help to make a
decision members of
your support network
are to encourage you
and help you
understand.**

If no one on your support network has the facts you need, or experiences to share, they can help you find someone who does.

For example, if you are deciding whether you want to buy a new camera, you might want to talk to someone who knows a lot about different kinds of cameras and how they work.

- Are they easy to use?
- How much do they cost?
- Can you get help learning how to work with the camera once you buy it?

In this example, your support network can help you find the right people to talk to.

They can help you understand how much money you can spend on a new camera.

They can help you sort out the different facts about different cameras. Then you can make your decision yourself or with their help.

Parents, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbours, cousins or friends of these people can be helpful if you have a trusting relationship with them.

There are many areas in your life you will need to make decisions where your support network can help. These areas include:

- **Your Home** – Where will it be and what will it look like?
- **Your Education** – We are always learning - Will you go to college or university after high school?
- **Work** – Where will you work or volunteer? What will you do?
- **Your Community** - What clubs or activities would you like to join?
- **Formal Services and Supports** - Who can help you with your supports and services?
- **In Your Relationships** - Who do you want in your life as close friends or partners

Let's take a closer look at some of these areas:

YOUR HOME . . . If you decide it is time to move into a new home you will have to choose

- Where to live,
- Whether you will live alone or with others, and
- Who your housemates might be.

You and someone from your support network might look at apartments, and talk to an agency that offers residential services.

You might want to share a home with another family that you have met and



like, and who wants you to move in.

Once you have decided where you are moving, the next step might be to decide how you decorate your new space.

You may need to go shopping for new furniture.

Each day you wake up in your home, you will need to decide

- What to wear,
- What to eat,
- When to have your bath or shower,
- Who to invite over for visits,
- What to watch on TV, or
- What music to listen to, and
- What time you go to bed.

There will also be things to do in your home like

- Laundry,
- Washing dishes,
- Cleaning the bathroom,
- Making your bed, and
- Keeping things organized.

If you need help, ask people who you trust to give you information in a way you understand so you can make good decisions.

If you want someone's advice it should be given to you in a way that does not make you feel pressured to decide one way or another.

Don't ask for help from people who will try to convince you their view is the only way.

AT SCHOOL . . . Sometimes the people at school can help you make new friends, learn new things, or try out a different way of life for a while. Your new skills may help you find work, live more independently or increase your social network.

Teachers, guidance counselors, teaching assistants, and classmates can help you learn the rules about the school you go to. Ask questions so you know what to do, when to do it, or where to go for more help.

You will want to find out what kind of classes or courses you can take and the kind of clubs or sports you can join. Your school or college may have special events that you are interested in, too.

Get to know other students. That way you will have others to eat lunch with or hang out with at break time.

If you need help making decisions about school, ask the people whom you trust to give you helpful suggestions and directions.

AT WORK . . . You may or may not need assistance doing your tasks at work. Sometimes things come up and you need to ask for assistance.

Whether you have a paying job or volunteer position, there are many people at your work place who can help. They can include your job coach, a helpful co-worker, your boss, or your supported employment worker.

If you need help speaking with a co-worker, supervisor, union representative, or manager, your job coach or supported employment worker are good people to turn to.

If you want to work on your own you may want to get advice on how to do this well.

Talking to other people who have started their own business is a good way to learn what to do.

An employment agency may also help.

It is important that you help people at your workplace understand your concerns, your abilities and how you are best supported.

Your sense of value will be greater if you feel you are heard and understood from the beginning.

IN THE COMMUNITY . . . There are many places in your community you might want to go and things you might want to do.

Some include:

- Shopping at the mall or plaza,
- Joining an activity or class at the recreational centre,
- Joining weekly services at church,
- Visiting the local library,
- Visiting dance clubs or bars,
- Going to sporting events,
- Visiting museums,
- Attending fairs or exhibitions.

Along with these activities, there are decisions that have to be made.

Sometimes it costs money to do things and go places and you have to think about whether you have enough money. Perhaps you will need to save for a while before making a big purchase.

You may need a ride or someone to come with you because it is safer that way.

You need to know that there may be people who you meet in the community who want to trick you into doing things that are wrong.

Emails, web sites, and phone calls are ways these people try and get your money or personal information.

If you are on the Internet, or get a phone call from someone asking for your personal information, be careful. You may want to talk with someone on your support network first or just say “no.”



FORMAL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS . . . There are people in your life who look after your health and wellbeing in an **official** way. They are paid to provide a service and work for or with you. Some of these include:

1. The Community Services Worker. This is someone who works for the government. They help you with information and choices about the kinds of supports you receive through government programs. You may get to know several over your lifetime.

2. Health Care Workers. These are the doctors and dentists, therapists, or other medical professionals who help you with your healthcare and healthcare decisions.

3. Financial Planning Professionals. These are people who have duties related to your money management. They include bank tellers, bank managers or financial planners. They can help you open an account, invest money in a Registered Disability Savings Plan, or apply for a bankcard. How you look after your money is very important.

4. Lawyers and Professionals in the Legal System. These include police officers, lawyers, peace officers, and judges. They are often involved in matters that have to do with the law, or official agreements that you make with other people.

An example would be a rental agreement with your landlord or with a real estate office. Sometimes you might have to speak with a police officer as a witness to a crime, or to report something that has happened to you.

If you need additional support when dealing with situations like these ask someone from your support network or someone you trust to be with you.

IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS . . . This includes the people who are close to you like your close friends, family members, and partners or spouses (sometimes called husbands or wives). People who you can trust, who you respect and who respect you are the types of people you want to have in your life.

Good relationships need work.

It is important to find interests, tasks, and responsibilities you can share with each other.

Some of the choices you will make will be with the other person, while others will be on your own.

It can be tricky to know which decisions are which.

If you want to find out what makes a good relationship, look for people in your life who have good relationships. Ask them what they do.



Introduction to Guiding Principle #4

It used to be that people with intellectual disabilities were treated like children no matter how old they were.

Others did not understand what life was like for people with intellectual disabilities.

People did not understand the different ways that decisions can and are made by those with disabilities.

People did not understand that most people get help from others when making choices and people with mental disabilities need this help, too.

Guiding Principle #4

NOW... any help you get must be given to you in a way that respects your privacy and value as an **adult**.

What does it mean when other people treat you as an adult and with dignity?

It means they give you the space you need to feel comfortable when you have a conversation.

It means they really listen to what you say, and respect your choices.

It also means they are empathetic (they understand how you feel and why you feel that way).

It also means that they expect the same

**Guiding Principle #4
says any help you
receive must
respect your
privacy and treat
you with dignity as
an adult**

from you. If you are able to show this kind of behaviour to others – allowing space between you, listening to what they are saying and trying to understand how they are feeling, you will likely get that behaviour shown back to you.



Sometimes, even when you do all the right things, some people may treat you in a disrespectful way.

They might say things that make you feel bad, talk to you like you are a baby, ignore you, or try to take advantage of you. Some people may shout at you or tease you in a mean way.

This can make you feel bullied or like you are invisible.

Speaking up for yourself can be scary.

It is not always easy. In fact, many people find it hard to speak up at first. Like decision-making, it takes practice. With practice, you become more confident.

If you are having a hard time feeling respected and valued, find ways to have friends around you as much as possible. Include people that you trust, and who treat you well. Those people can be there to remind others to be respectful.

If you are someone who does not talk, you may have had others talk about you as if you were not there. When they said good things about you it seemed okay, but, when they talked about you in a bad way, you might have felt hurt. Let people know you want them to talk TO you, not ABOUT you when you are in the same room.



Practice respectful behaviour:

- Pay attention when someone is speaking. It is rude to walk away when someone is talking to you without saying, “excuse me” first.
- When someone is talking to you, let them finish first without interrupting or trying to complete their sentence.
- Tell others about your choices in a nice way – don’t tease them or make them feel bad about their opinions if they are different from yours.
- Your choices are important. You have a right to express them.
- Speak in plain language – stay away from using short forms for things or big words that others may not know. That way all people understand.
- Make the effort to include people.
- Be friendly and show friendliness.
- Be genuine and sincere. (Sometimes called “being down-to-earth”)
- Tell the truth and be honest about how you feel or what you saw and experienced.



Respect Yourself:

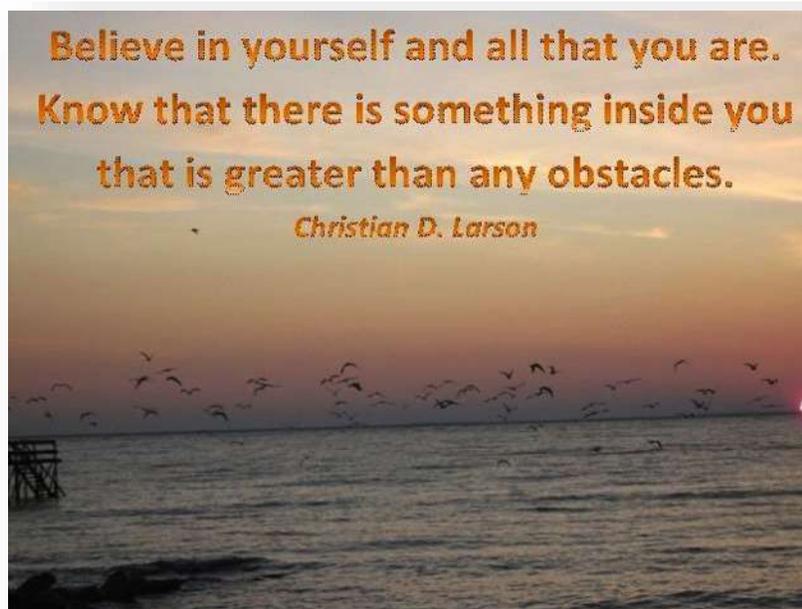
Being respectful begins with you.

Respect yourself because you have value and you belong.

This helps others respect you.

Saying good things to yourself about you (quietly in your mind) can help you feel better if you are afraid or angry.

Sometimes you may feel mixed up inside – like when you are excited about trying something new but are also scared about what it might be like. By thinking good thoughts, you might feel better and find you can do more than you thought you could.



Feeling Good About Yourself

You can start by making a list of things you have done well (your successes).

Everyone has some things they are good at.

Some ideas of things on your list might include:

- Being good at your job – your boss and co-workers like the work that you do and you feel good doing it
- A special interest or hobby that you have – knitting, baking, bowling, skating, dancing, collecting stamps, etc.
- Winning an award for something you did
- Being a good friend to others – your friends like to be around you and you enjoy time with them
- Having a great sense of humour
- Being a hard worker – you are able to keep on trying to get better at doing something that you want to do



Ask other people to help you with your list – sometimes we don't see the good in ourselves that others see.

Whenever you can be with people who make you feel good and are fun to be around.

Say “thank you” when they compliment you.



It takes practice to stay positive and feeling good about who you are. Some days you may be better at it than others and that is okay too.

It is important for you to know that everyone has something to give to their community. You are a valuable member of your community and no one can take that away from you.

These are just some ideas to think about when you want to feel good about your life. When other people see your successes and respect you it makes you feel good. But, people cannot take away what's inside of you. No one can take your dignity unless you let them.

When You Feel Hurt

Many words hurt us.

If you have been labeled with an intellectual disability, you might know what it feels like when someone calls you a hurtful name.

Not everyone is respectful or knows that some words are wrong to use, or that some words make people feel bad. Other times you may not understand the words people use. They may be too big or complicated for you to understand. It is important to ask them to give you information in plain or clear language.

Being able to let others know the language they are using is wrong or difficult for you is important.

Here is a story that might help you think about ways you might handle difficult situations.

CHARLENE'S STORY

Charlene is a 30-year-old woman who lives on her own in a side-by-side house. She has staff come in at suppertime and help her with her meal preparation.

They also help her with some grocery shopping.

The rest of the time Charlene does things on her own, or with help from her neighbours and family.

She lives her life making decisions on her own and has a part time job working in an office for a provincial government department. People she works with really treat her with respect and show appreciation for the way she does her job.

Her life was not always that way.

While in school, Charlene was often teased and bullied by other students.

They used to call her stupid and “retarded.”

She hated that word, and she still does.



Even when her sister told her they were not using the word in the right way (it does not mean stupid, it means slower), she felt hurt and didn't know what to do.

After many years of being a member of People First, things began to change.

Members of People First can learn how to speak up and after practicing Charlene started to feel more confident.

One day while she was listening to a talk show on the radio the person being interviewed used the "R" word.

Charlene called the radio station and complained. She asked to speak to the manager and told him using the "R" word on the radio was wrong.

The next day, with help from a friend, she wrote a letter about her concerns. She got other people to call and write letters, too. Speaking up felt very good.



What do you do when people don't understand you have rights?

It is important to learn how speak up and let others know you can and do make your own decisions.

You can do this on your own or have a friend or other support person with you to help.

Practicing at home can also help you to get comfortable with the words you need to use and with knowing when to speak up and when to stay quiet.

You likely have also met people who decide, before they get to know you, what you can or cannot do

That's called being **prejudiced**.

You may have felt like people treated you differently because you have a disability. Learning to cope with being hurt or left out isn't easy. When other people say or do things that are hurtful you can choose to stand up for yourself or to walk away.

How do you know whether to stick up for yourself or not?

Everyone wants to be respected.

When other people are saying or doing mean things to or about you, you do not feel like they respect you.

You have to decide for yourself whether or not to say something about what they are doing or saying.

It might depend upon how safe you feel in the situation.

It might also depend on how comfortable you are with the other person. This might show up as a feeling in your body.

Sometimes your stomach might feel different - that's called a **"gut feeling."**

Or maybe you will experience your feelings in other ways.

You can feel confident, nervous, scared, unsure, or other emotions. Those feelings can make it easier or harder to speak up.

Learning how to respond to feelings and acting in a way that feels right might take some practice. Talking to someone you trust about your can help.



Here are some questions to ask yourself when you are not sure about what to do:

- How important is it for me to be heard? If it is very important to you, you may find it easier to say something.
- How safe do I feel with this person? If you do not feel safe, you may want to be quiet. Wait and talk to someone you feel safer with.
- Could they hurt me if I tried to speak up? If you might get hurt, it might be best to wait and say something when you feel safer.

- Do I need to wait and talk to someone else who feels safer? Sometimes we need to talk through the situation with someone we trust first and then we can talk to the person who is doing or saying things we don't like.
- Do I feel too angry right now to say what's important? Sometimes when we are very angry we might do or say something we wish we hadn't.
- Do I need to calm down first before I speak up? Taking deep breaths and counting to 10 can help you feel calmer.
- How risky does it feel to speak up or stay silent? Sometimes, even when you do not feel safe, it is important to speak up so that others around you notice and can help you to feel and be safer.

If you decide to speak up, even if you are feeling nervous, try to do it in a calm way. Look the other person in the eye when you talk. If you are standing, stand straight, and if sitting, sit straight. Be firm about what is important to you as a person.



If you decide that you do not feel comfortable speaking up at this time, you may want to get away. If you can, walk away as calmly as you can.

Sometimes you may not be able to walk away. If you cannot leave, you may want to take some deep breaths and do things to help you to feel calmer.

Avoid yelling at the other person.

Later you might need to talk to someone you trust about your feelings and your problem. They can help you think about other ways you can handle things in the future.

What will people think about me?

We all want to feel like we have some control in how we live our lives and how others treat us.

Making decisions on whether or not to stand up for yourself are part of life.

How you get your point across is important.

Because everyone is different, you will meet some people who change what they do or say to respect what you say to them.

But there will be other times when there is no change in how the other person acts. At times like that, remember, the most important person who needs to respect you is YOU!

If you want to be treated as an adult, it is important that you act as an adult.

If others see you as childish and immature they will be less respectful than if they see you as an adult.

People who are good **role models** show you how to do or say things in a way that shows respect for yourself and for others.

This is called mature behaviour. Good role models in your life are those people who you like, who are honest, and give good information or advice.

Trudy's story shows how she worked to get others to see her as an adult to be listened to.

TRUDY'S STORY

Trudy has a hard time completing her sentences sometimes.

Other people would try and finish her sentences and this frustrated her.

They saw her as not able to speak properly, but that was not true.

Often Trudy wanted to share something important in her life but she would give up trying to tell her story or make her point because of this frustration.

A friend noticed this and suggested Trudy speak up and tell others to wait for her to finish.

Trudy practiced doing this with her friend and then started to do it more and more with other people.



Now more people are giving Trudy more time to speak and not to interrupt her so she can finish her sentences.

In Bob's story, he had to learn not to talk so much to show respect for others.

BOB'S STORY

Bob loves to talk and he will start a talking to just about anyone who is near him.

After a while other people get tired of listening to Bob.

They want to talk too but he does not give them a chance to say anything. They think he is not being respectful.

His support network worked with Bob to help him have real conversations with other people. He learned about pausing to let other people speak and asking them questions to learn more about them. Bob's support network reminds him to listen first to others before saying anything himself. This has helped Bob become a better communicator.



In Nancy's story, she had to learn to act like an adult and make more choices for herself.

NANCY'S STORY

Nancy has a great family!

Her parents and brothers have always been there to make sure she has all she needs. But they often did things for Nancy instead of teaching her how to do them for herself.

When she moved out of her family home Nancy thought staff would do the same things for her as her family had done. When they did not, she would get angry, cry and pout.

Because of this behaviour, some people saw Nancy as a spoiled brat. Although she was 32 years old, they saw her as childish and out of control.

The people at the agency helped Nancy become more responsible by being patient, teaching her new skills and become more comfortable doing things for herself.

*Courage is what it takes to stand up and
speak.*

*Courage is also what it takes to sit down
and listen.*

Winston Churchill

Introduction to Guiding Principle #5

It used to be that families and professionals decided everything for you if you had an intellectual disability.

Someone else decided on what you would wear, what you would eat, where you would live, and how you would spend your day. That was for your entire life. People were not given any choices.

Guiding Principle #5

NOW... only if there are decisions you can't make, even with help, can someone make them for you.

This person is called a **Substitute Decision Maker**. Sometimes they are called an **SDM**.

The kinds of decisions they can make for you are about your health and your money or the things you own.

They have to apply to the government to do this.

They cannot do it forever; they have to reapply from time to time.

Guiding Principle #5 says if there is a decision you are unable to make even with help, as a last resort, a substitute decision maker can make some decisions for you.

This person has some responsibilities, like:

- Talking with you before making a decision to see what you think,
- Giving you some choices and helping you to be part of the process,
- Respecting your values and the things that are important to you.

If you have an SDM, he or she should be someone who knows you well and can make a decision as if they were you.

They must **“step into your shoes”** so you have a safe, healthy, and secure life.

When could you have a Substitute Decision Maker (SDM)?

Having an SDM is a last resort and means only if necessary will someone step in and make decisions for you.

You may need an SDM because you cannot make a decision on your own, even with help.

You may be too confused, sad, depressed, or you just do not care. Maybe you have a medical condition they think you do not understand.

Perhaps they cannot figure out how to tell you about something a doctor thinks you need to do or they do not trust you understand what they tell you.

You might hear someone tell you that it is **“in your best interest”** for a certain decision to be made. This means your wellbeing is at risk if a different choice is made.

Our bodies and minds change as we age - as you get older your ability to make decisions may change too.

Your health or your safety may be something that needs to be checked from time to time.

Perhaps you may need to move into a new or different home, find a new doctor, begin taking some new medication, etc.

Maybe the people who support you see your decisions as getting too risky or dangerous for yourself or others.

If you take too many risks or make a lot of mistakes over and over, people who care for you may worry about your health and safety.

They may start looking at your decisions more closely and apply to be an SDM to help keep you safe and secure.

What is “Risky” behaviour?

Some examples of risky behaviour might include: -

- Spending too much money at a bar or on VLTs, instead of on rent or on groceries,
- Going places that are dangerous to your health and safety,
- Being promiscuous (having sex with a lot of people),
- Giving money away to strangers or lending money to friends or family just because they ask for it.

Peter’s story shows different ways people can be at risk. It also shows how his friends, family and staff worked with him to make things better.

PETER'S STORY

There was a time when Peter spent too much of his money on things he could not afford. He applied for a credit card and used it to buy things he wanted and gifts for his friends and family. Then he did not have the money to pay the bills when they came in the mail. When friends asked Peter for cash he would give it to them and they would not pay it back.

Peter could not pay his rent or buy food.

At that time, Peter did not have anyone in his life that could be a Substitute Decision Maker over his money.

His Community Services Worker stepped in and completed an application for a Substitute Decision Maker. The Public Trustee, someone in government who can be an SDM when there is no one else in your life able to, was made Peter's SDM for money.

For those two years Peter worked with someone who helped him understand how to budget his money.

He paid off his credit card debt and even opened up a savings account.

Peter also worked with an agency to find people to be part of his support network.

By the third year, Peter and his Community Services Worker went to a **Vulnerable Persons Commission Hearing Panel** and asked that the **Public Trustee** stop being Peter's SDM over his money. Peter showed that he was responsible and he now had a support network to would help him stay on track. Based on that, the panel recommended to

the **Vulnerable Persons Commissioner** that Peter be given back the ability to make his own decisions about his money.

What kind of decisions can a substitute decision maker make?

There are three ways that an SDM make decisions for you:

1. Involving things related to your personal care (personal care means your health and safety)
2. Involving things related to your personal property (personal property means the things you own)
3. Involving things related to both your personal care and your property.

They have to keep your best interests in mind. If you are not happy about their decisions, you have the right to let other people know. And just like in Peter's story, there may be times in your life when you need an SDM and other times when you do not.

Personal care might include things like where you live, or whom you live with.

It might also include how much freedom you have to come and go from your home, and where and how you spend your day . It also includes your healthcare needs.

Personal property includes how money or things you own are handled for you. Sometimes, an SDM is appointed when you get a large amount of money at once and need to decide how to keep it safe.

Other times, if you live in your own home, an SDM can make decisions on how best to keep your home in good working order.

A good SDM will stay up-to-date about your life, listen to others who know you well, and talk with you about any changes they think are needed.

If you do have an SDM in your life, here are some things you can talk to them about:

- Who they can talk to about your life,
- How you sign your name,
- How you would like to spend your money,
- How you can learn about budgeting your money,
- Who gets to take your photo and use your picture,
- How you take your medication,
- How you like to travel (with whom and how long),
- Where you would like to travel, or take vacations.

How does someone become a substitute decision maker?

First, there has to be a decision that needs to be made.

People who support you have to try and help you by giving you information, examples or ideas to help you reach your decision.

They must think about the time it takes to share information, and for you to make an important decision.

If something has to happen fast and you do not have the time you need to make a decision, an SDM may be needed.

If others are worried about the choices you make, you have to show more than once that you are not making informed decisions well.

Usually others are concerned about you because they see you making decisions that do not have good results.

If you are hurt in any way, everyone who supports you will want to look at ways of helping you to live a safer, healthier lifestyle.

If you are unable to make that happen for yourself, even with support from other people, then you an SDM may be needed.

What are the steps for becoming an SDM?

1. They must fill out an application form
2. They must be investigated by The Vulnerable Persons Commissioner's office – the office checks out information on the application. They learn about you and your story. They learn about the person who wants to be your SDM. The Vulnerable Persons Commissioner decides whether or not a meeting is needed before making a decision about the SDM.
3. They must attend a meeting with the Vulnerable Persons Commission. This meeting (about you) is called a **hearing**. You can invite people you want there. You will be told where and when the meeting is going to happen.

Three other people also attend the hearing. They are called a **hearing panel**. Each of them is appointed by the provincial government.

They will get written information about you to read and think about.

At the meeting the panel members will ask questions and give everyone there a chance to say something about your story and share about how they know you.

After the meeting is over, the panel will go over the information they read and heard. They make recommendations to the Vulnerable Persons Commissioner.

The Commissioner goes over information from the hearing, and a decision is made about the SDM. The Commissioner sends a letter to tell you who has permission to make decisions for you, what kind of decisions they can make and for how long

Who can be your Substitute Decision Maker?

People who you know well and who you trust are the best people to start with.

That can include someone from your family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, or someone from your faith community.

The most important thing for you to remember is the person has to know something about your values. They must think about them when they are making the decisions for you.

Who cannot be your Substitute Decision Maker?

When a person has their own reason to make a decision for you, it is called a **conflict of interest**.

For example, if your friend decides for you that you should buy something that your friend would use more than you would, that would be a conflict of interest.

Someone who gets paid to be in your life can be in a conflict of interest.

This would include anyone who is paid to support you, like your staff, a homecare worker or your job coach. No one with a conflict of interest can become your substitute decision maker.

When the Public Trustee is your substitute decision maker

If you have the Public Trustee as a substitute decision maker things will be a bit more complicated. There will be an **administration officer** who works with you and the Public Trustee. This officer also works with other professionals and specialists to act in your best interests.

Your family and relatives should keep in touch with your administration officer to help the officer understand your life and things you might need. The officer may allow your Community Services Worker to make your decisions for you.



Changing Substitute Decision Makers

You may start out having one or two substitute decision makers. But they can change over time.

Because it is important that the people who are making decisions for you know and understand you well, it is in your best interest to have people you trust and know well as your SDM.

You can change your SDM if things are not working well for you.

To do that, speak with your Community Services Worker, the Executive Director at the agency that supports you, the Vulnerable Persons Commissioner Office or the Public Trustee Office.

We have listed some resources that you can contact if you need help in this area, or with something else.



Some Final Words on Your Rights and the Vulnerable Persons Act

Learning how to make your own decisions can be hard. It helps to have people in your life who can support you. It is also good to know that there are organizations out there who work to make your life better. Community Living Manitoba is one of those organizations. We work with the government, with service providers, with people throughout Manitoba and across Canada. We want to help you and your families and support networks get what you need to have a good life in the community. Community Living Manitoba supports a number of “local” Associations for Community Living in cities and towns in our province. There may be one where you live. Ask your community services worker or you can visit our website at www.aclmb.ca.



People First of Canada is an organization that was formed because some of the people in our communities felt that they were not considered as people first. They felt that they were talked about, talked to, thought about, and treated according to the disabilities that others labelled them with.

The founders of People First did not think this was fair. Over the years people have been called *mentally handicapped*, *developmentally disabled*, *cognitively challenged*, *intellectually disabled*, and many other labels.

In Manitoba, we have a provincial association for People First, People First of Manitoba, and a Winnipeg association, People First Winnipeg. You can learn more about People First at www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca.



More things you should know:

Community Living Manitoba

6-120 Maryland Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 1L1

Phone: 204-786-1607 Fax: 204-789-9850

Email: aclmb@aclmb.ca

Local Associations for Community Living

Beausejour: Association for Community Living - Beausejour

204-268-1803, aclbb@mymts.net

Brandon: Community Living-Brandon

Box 20154, Brandon, MB R7A 6Y8

Flin Flon: Association for Community Living - Flin Flon

204-687-7050, vtc@mymts.net

Interlake: Association for Community Living - Interlake

204-467-9169, aclint@mymts.net

Portage la Prairie: Association for Community Living - Portage

204-856-1190, aclportage@mymts.net

Red River: Association for Community Living - Red River

204-347-5418, rrws@mymts.net

Selkirk: Community Living Selkirk

204-482-5435, info@communitylivingselkirk.ca

Steinbach: EnVision Community Living

204-326-7539, info@envisioncl.com

Swan River: Association for Community Living - Swan River

204-734-9114, aclswanriver@mymts.net

Virden: Association for Community Living – Virden

204-748-1444, aclvirden@mymts.net

Winnipeg: Community Living - Winnipeg

204-786-1414, acl@aclwpg.ca

Community Living disAbility Services

For offices near you, visit: www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pwd/supported_living/
or phone your regional office:

Norman: 204-687-1700

Parkland: 204-622-2035

Thompson: 204-677-6570

Eastman: 204-268-6226

Interlake: 204-785-5158

Westman: 204-726-6173

After hours emergency service:
204-725-4411

Portage la Prairie: 204-239-3110

Morden: 204-822-2861

Winnipeg: 204-945-1335

After hours emergency service:
204-945-0183

People First of Canada

5-120 Maryland Street

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 1L1

Phone: 204-784-7362

Fax: 204-784-7364

Email: info@peoplefirstofcanada.ca

Public Trustee's Office

Suite 500 - 155 Carlton Street

Winnipeg MB R3C 5R9

Phone: (204) 945-2700

Fax: (204) 948-2251

Email: publictrustee@gov.mb.ca

Vulnerable Persons Commissioner's Office

305-114 Garry Street

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4V7

Phone: (204) 945-5039 or 1-800-757-9857

Fax: (204) 948-3713

Email: vpco@gov.mb.ca