



**Rights, Choices
& Self Determination**
*Offering & Encouraging
Choice Making*

Introduction

- To live a normal life means for nearly all of us, to be independent and make our own decisions.
- As people grow and learn, one of the most important factors affecting their development is the right to make choices and decisions which impact their lives.
- Giving people choices means allowing them to succeed, as well as to fail. It's a natural part of simply growing up.

Introduction (cont.)

- **People with disabilities, however, often have fewer skills and fewer opportunities to make choices which affect their lives, even on the most basic levels.**
- **Therefore, a vital part of your job is to offer and encourage choice making**

Offering Choices

- **Reasons for offering choices:**
 - ✓ conveys an attitude of respect and caring
 - ✓ enhances their self esteem
 - ✓ may decrease power struggles and problem behaviors
 - ✓ increases the person's ability to exercise individual rights
 - ✓ helps to teach decision-making skills
 - ✓ promotes independence and interdependence

Intellectual Developmental Disability

- **A person who has severe/profound intellectual developmental disability may not have all choice making abilities, but they have some to a degree**
- **They definitely have likes and dislikes, preferences that allow them to make choices**
- **Focus on the person's communication - how can this person tell me what he/she likes or dislikes - wants or doesn't want**

Observe/Respond

- Be a good observer. Notice small, subtle body or facial movements they may use when they are uncomfortable, when they like something, or when they don't.
- Remember, they can communicate with you without meaning to.
- Notice which types of stimulation the person responds to best and most consistently-for example, sounds, touch or sight.
- Notice consistent responses
- If you tried to feed someone carrots, and they turned their head and closed their mouth, chances are they do not like carrots.
- You should respond by giving meaning to the behavior- "You don't like carrots."
- Keep track of all likes and dislikes you notice so you can have a better understanding of the person and can offer appropriate choices

Communicating

DOES HE OR SHE...

Point?

Smile or frown?

Nod or shake their head?

Look toward or away?

Move toward or away from an object?

Make positive or negative vocalization?

Use sign language or a communication board or
communication device?

Teaching Choice Making Skills

- Ask short, simple questions, one at a time
- Phrase your questions so that responses can be given
- Allow time for a response
- To teach choice making skills, start with things that are concrete and work towards choices that are more abstract
- **BE PATIENT!!!**

Here are samples of choices you might offer:

- ✓ A choice between two clothing items (a blue shirt or a green shirt)
- ✓ A choice of liquids at mealtime
- ✓ What to eat first, from their dinner plate
- ✓ A choice of musical instruments during group activity
- ✓ A choice between two after-shave fragrances



Choice Making Skills

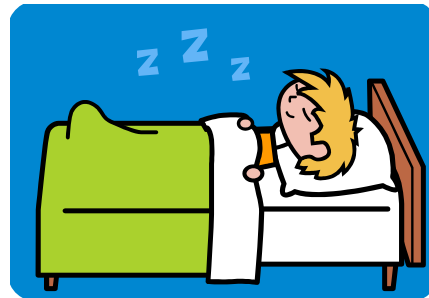
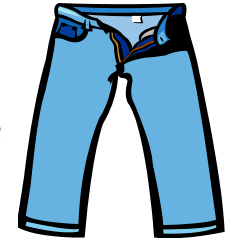
❖ Choice-making OPPORTUNITIES may include:

- When to get up
- What to wear
- What to eat
- Types of work
- Leisure activities
- When to go to bed

These



or these



BE PATIENT! Choices BE PATIENT!

- To help the person focus on the choice and decrease any confusion, start with a choice of just two things - something they like and something they don't care for.
- This will help the choice making process to be rewarding. Also, try to give choices which provide immediate access.
- The sooner someone is rewarded for a new skill, the better.

Choices (cont.)

- Its important to make sure choices are rewarding to him/her because positive choices are more effective in the teaching process.
- Give the person a rich background of words and experiences to draw from when choosing.
- Use exciting vocabulary - (big, pretty) actions (wash, eat) and feelings.
- Give the person an opportunity to experience these things in the environment as often as possible, using all senses.



- Choice making usually occurs with parameters.
- In determining when or whether it is appropriate to offer choices, it may be helpful to ask yourself these questions:
 - ✓ Is it something that must be done?
 - ✓ Can I offer a choice of doing it himself or being assisted?
 - ✓ Does the task need to be done by a certain time?
 - ✓ Does it really matter?



Tone of Voice

- Always try to be sensitive to the individual's feelings and experiences in a situation
- Your voice is an important tool that you always carry with you
- Remember to talk about what you are doing in a pleasant conversational tone as you move and work with the person
- Use lots of praise - "you did a good job choosing"

Teaching

- **TEACHABLE MOMENTS** are casual, unplanned teaching opportunities which present themselves in the natural flow of the day. We need to make use of teachable moments in their natural environment.
- Its also important to consider the person's choice making **ABILITIES**, by asking yourself the following questions:
 - Do they have the ability to reason?
 - Do they understand cause and effect?
 - Do they have the ability to understand the consequences?
 - What type of supports do they need to make choices?

Conclusion

- **Make sure that you offer choices only when either choice is acceptable and possible for the person.**
- **Then immediately go ahead and follow through with the chosen item or activity.**
- **Even a very involved person can make a slight body or eye movement to communicate a choice.**
- **Remember, its important to respect individual differences.**
- **When offering choices, respect the person's choice if it's appropriate, even if it's one that you wouldn't make.**

Conclusion

- Let them know that you respect the choice as **THEIR CHOICE**.
- Be aware of how you provide for the basic needs of the person. Your attitude, expression, voice, words and handling methods are the first bridge for building trust and warmth in relationship.
- Encouraging the person to communicate dreams, to make decisions and choices, no matter how minor, shows that we care and respect them – and that their wants and needs are most important.

**Devised 10/08 DB
Approved 10/08 CE*

