

Choice Making

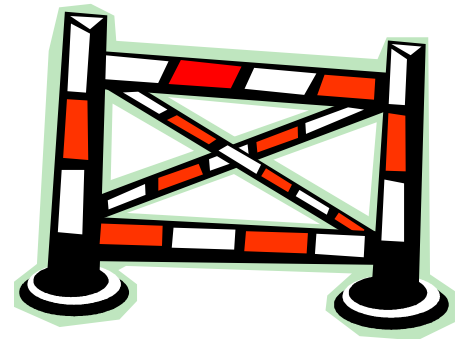
Choice is complicated and not as easy as a concept as it seems. Consider:



- A. It is difficult to imagine our lives without choice, life without choice is a scenario few of us could or would tolerate.
- B. Although we may take choice for granted, choice is a cherished component of everyday life.
- C. If choice making is so valued, how did it come to pass that people with disabilities are often denied such precious opportunities?
- D. We are unaware of public declaration: “Thou shall not present choice to people with disabilities.”
- E. Our attitudes and systems have created these barriers.

Barriers to Choice Making:

1. The view of perpetual children and protection.
 - Daily routines are frequently built around the caregiver’s organizational needs vs. individual choice.
2. Professional training has preempted opportunities for choice.
 - Choice making is new
 - The **importance** of choice making is new
 - Old way of teaching – no learner input
 - Staff decide what to teach, how to teach and when to teach
 - Regulatory accountability creates fear from deviation
 - Little room for flexibility, individual control over their lives through choice
3. Attitudinal and systemic barriers to choice assist in denying people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to have control over their lives through choice.



Think About This...

While it may be argued that some people with developmental disabilities do not have the skills for choice making or may make poor decisions, which are not in their best interest or habilitation goals, the question then becomes:

“How does anyone learn responsible choice making without the opportunity to make choices?”

This holds true for all of us!

Importance of Choice Making

1. Choice leads to personal satisfaction
2. Choice prepares learners for independence
3. Choice increases motivation to learn
4. Choice may prevent problem behaviors
5. Choice equals participation in one's life

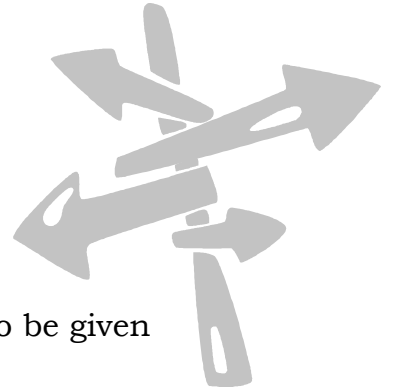


Concept of Shared Control

- A. Choice making does not mean the freedom to do whatever one wants. It is a process of shared control.
- B. Choice making can be conceptualized to the extreme. When misunderstood, it can inappropriately be used as an excuse not to provide choice or appropriate supports to people with disabilities.
- C. Choice making is a process of shared control...negotiated within the boundaries of constraints.
- D. The challenge is to ensure that the constraints are those that are imposed by society and not arbitrarily so narrow as to discriminate against people with disabilities.
- E. Concerns about health safety and welfare are acceptable constraints.
- F. Constraints are also imposed by one's age and culture.
- G. As we support people with disabilities we need to recognize the concept of shared control.
- H. As support staff we need to guide people to recognize their limits even as they discover the multitude of options available within reasonably set boundaries.
- I. We must constantly evaluate ourselves to ensure that constraints are normalized and acceptable for people without disabilities of the same age and cultural background.

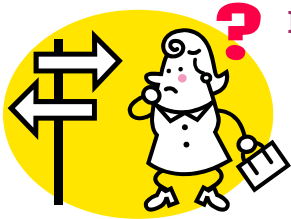
Simple to Complex Choices

- A. Choice is simply the act of selecting between two or more options.
- B. Choice results in two outcomes
 1. Preference
 2. Control
- C. If choice making is to be meaningful, a person needs to be given opportunities to achieve both.



Teaching Choice Making Involves Three Important Goals

1. Clearly communicate their selection
2. Teach learners that their selection will result in a preferred outcome.
3. Give learners even greater control by teaching more sophisticated choice making skills.



Implications for Presenting Choice Opportunities

1. Present choice opportunities within the context of rich, stimulating environments in which the individual has frequent opportunities to experience new materials, activities and events.
 - Old favorites quickly become boring options without opportunities to experience new things. The greater the experience, the greater the options for choice making.
2. Present meaningful choice options that lead to preferred events and/or control. Options must be sufficiently motivating to invite a choice response.
3. Honor choice selections. Respond quickly, especially when teaching beginning choice making skills. It is better to delay presenting a choice opportunity than not to respond to an individual's request.
4. Keep choice making inviting. By definition, choice means the opportunity to make selections free from coercion. Choice should never be used to force people to do something that they do not want to do.



Strategy for Embedding Choice across Daily Routine

1. ID daily routine
2. ID types of choice options between activity choices within activity choices
3. Select a choice format: Closed? or Open?
4. Present choice options throughout the day

5. Modify the choices
 - Are the types of choice options appropriate?
 - Is the number of choice opportunities appropriate?

When individuals with emotional and behavioral challenges were provided with a variety of task options within activities, their participation increased substantially.

Troubleshooting Questions to Ask When Looking at Choice Making

1. Does the person know how to make choice selections?
2. Does the person know what options are available? Are options presented in a way that the learner can understand?
3. Has the person had sufficient experience with the options? Does the learner know what the options are?
4. Are options sufficiently motivating to invite a choice response?
5. Do options result in meaningful outcomes?
Access to a preferred event or control?
6. Are choices varied? Could the person be bored with the options?
7. Are choices presented in a rich environment that introduces the individual to new experiences and new options?
8. Are choice responses honored immediately? If delayed, does the individual understand waiting?



Reference/Resources: Innovations - Opportunities for Daily Choice Making
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