



How does Mencap support people to make their own decisions?

We believe every person has the right to make choices in order to have as much control over their own lives as possible.

For people who cannot easily communicate their preferences and choices, it is important we work with you as a family member to help them to make choices and decisions about their lives.

People make choices and decisions every day but some people need more help than others. Northern Ireland doesn't yet have any specific legislation in place to help us to do this, but we work within the principles of the Mental Capacity Act (2005), which is in place in England and Wales, to ensure that we get this right. We also use our own decision-making tool, which helps us to understand the support that individuals need.

Mental capacity is a person's ability to make decisions for themselves. People who cannot make decisions for themselves are said to 'lack capacity'. This could be due to a lifelong condition such as a learning disability, or it could be short term, for example if someone is temporarily suffering from a mental illness.

Capacity is different for different things; a person could have capacity to make simple decisions, such as what to wear each day but lack capacity to make more complex decisions such as how to manage their finances. To decide whether someone has capacity or not, their capacity must be assessed, this may be a formal, or informal process depending on how big the decision is.

How does this work for Mencap?

What Matters Most decision-making tool

What Matters Most is the way Mencap works to support the delivery of high-quality personalised support. As part of this, we use a decision-making tool to understand what support people need to make decisions. The tool helps us to understand the support people need, how they would prefer to be supported when making decisions, and who else we should be talking to about the decision being made.

We will discuss the decision-making tool with you early on, to ensure we listen to and understand your thoughts on how best to support your family member to make decisions.

Best interest approach

Once the decision-making tool has been used to understand the support that people need to make decisions, we may need to arrange something called a best interest meeting. This is a meeting of a group of people who come together to discuss the decision and decide on what is best. The person we support, and their family form part of this decision-making process and we ensure that their thoughts, ideas and opinions are listened to.

How does this work at Mencap?

Case study

James has been in considerable pain in his hip for some time and it is now affecting his mobility and quality of life. James does not have the capacity to determine for himself how this could be treated effectively. His GP refers them to the consultant orthopaedic surgeon for their professional opinion. This medical professional decides to recommend a total hip replacement. The family are invited to a best interest meeting to explore their views and listen to what the surgeon is advising as the best possible treatment for James. All the views are taken into consideration, including previous medical history, input from other paramedical professionals, support teams, and family. James is included in this meeting to hear and have explained in ways that he can try to understand, what is being decided in his best interest.