

My Life,

My Rights,

My Way!



A Guide for Massachusetts Self-Advocates

Department of Developmental Services

Office for Human Rights

Table of Contents

Section 1: Services and Supports

- My Services
- What is dignity?
- What is respect?
- What is self-determination?

Section 2: My Rights

- What are my rights?
- How do I exercise my rights?
- Who can help me to learn more about my rights?

Section 3: Restrictions

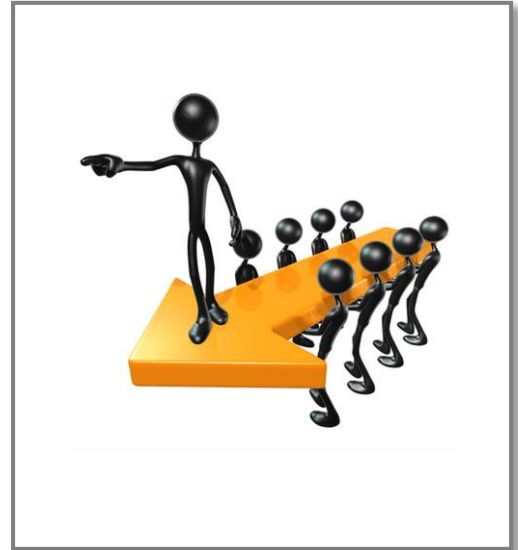
- What are restrictions?
- Why are sometimes rights restricted?
- What can I do about restrictions?

Section 4: My Responsibilities

Section 5: Who Can Help Me?

Section 6: Questions and Answers

Section 1: Services and Supports



My services should:

- Promote human dignity and self-determination.
- Meet my needs
- Help me to develop new skills
- Help me to increase my independence
- Support me to make independent choices

What is dignity?

- When I respect myself
- When I have confidence in myself
- When I am proud of what I can do
- When other people admire me and treat me with respect



I know I am respected when:

- People treat me like I am important
- People pay attention to me
- People listen to me and look me in the eye
- People don't interrupt me when I am talking
- People don't try to finish my sentences
- People care about what I think



What is self-determination?

- Freedom to do things and make decisions about my life
- Freedom to live as I choose
- Freedom to direct my life the way I want it to go



Section 2: My Rights

Services and Supports

- My services and supports should be explained to me so that I understand what's going on.
- People should be respectful when communicating with me.
- I should be treated like the adult that I am.



What can I do?

- Read the plans people write about me
- Ask questions
- Ask people to explain what I don't understand
- Ask for changes if I don't agree



Home

- My home should be located in a safe neighborhood.
- My home should be comfortable and nicely decorated.
- My bedroom should be decorated the way that I want.

What can I do?

- Think about what I want my room to look like
- Look through magazines
- Go online to download pictures of things I want to put in my room
- Take pictures of the displays at stores like Jordan's Furniture and Ikea
- Buy the things I need
- Decorate my room the way I want
- Ask for help if I need it

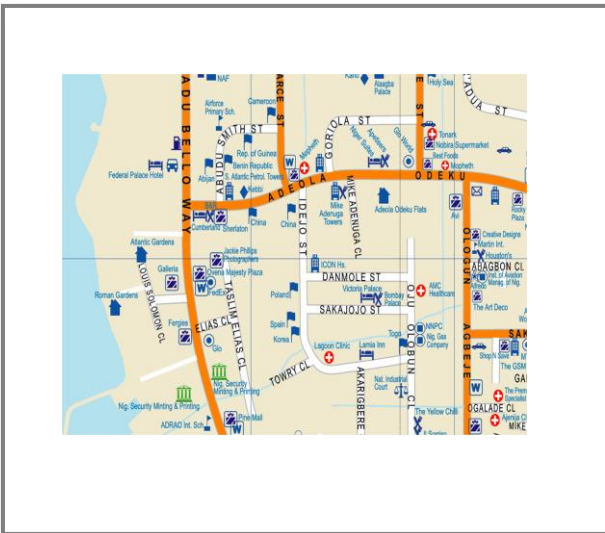
Community

- I should be familiar with the community I live in.
- I should be a part of my community.
- I should have opportunities to meet other people living in my community.



What can I do?

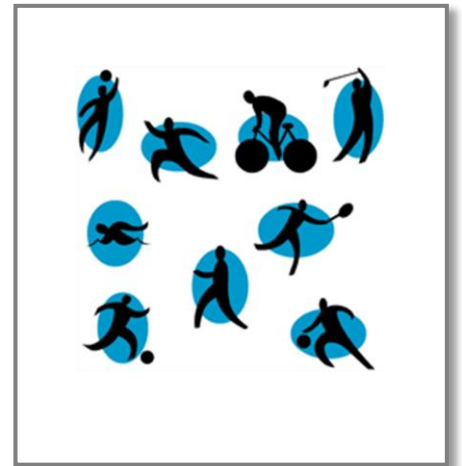
- Take a ride around the neighborhood
- Write down the names of places I would like to visit
- Buy or make a map of my neighborhood
- Be friendly and say “hello” to neighbors
- Search online or in the newspaper for events happening near me



- Ask for help finding events and opportunities to meet people

Activities

- I should be able to participate in activities I like.
- I should have opportunities for exercise and fun each day.



Activities like skydiving and jet skiing can be risky, but I can participate in these types of activities, as long as I am safe.

What can I do?

- Create a list of activities I would like to participate in
- Go online and search for “fun things to do in _____”
- Ask for ideas
- Come up with a schedule and plan for participating in these activities

- Discuss my schedule and plan with my caregivers, family, friends and my ISP team

Clothing

- What I wear is my choice.
- I can shop for my own clothes and pick out what I think looks good.
- My caregivers should support me to make sure my clothing is always neat and clean.



- I should have clothes for every season.

What can I do?

- Look online and in magazines for fashion ideas
- Window shop
- Try on different things
- Ask for opinions (if I want them)

- If I see someone wearing something I like, it's okay to compliment them and ask where I can find the same thing

Possessions

- If I buy something, then it's mine.
- I can use my possessions whenever I want to.
- I should have a place to store my possessions, where I can get to them when I want them.

What is the difference between something I need and something I want?

- I need _____
- I want _____



- If I were going to live on a deserted island for 30 days and could only bring three things, what would they be?

- If I had \$20.00 to spend on anything I wanted, what would I buy?

Nutrition

- My kitchen cabinets and refrigerator should be full of foods that are good for me.
- I should participate in the grocery shopping so that I can buy the foods and drinks I like.
- Sometimes, I want to eat cookies and ice cream, and that's okay.



What if my doctor puts me on a diet?

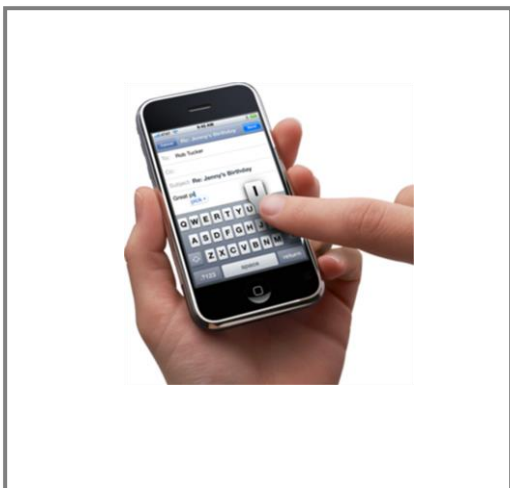
- A doctor usually makes a recommendation that will help me to be healthy.
- I can choose whether to follow his or her advice.
- If my doctor makes a recommendation I don't agree with, I should discuss it with him or her



(and with my ISP team) and try to come up with something I can follow.

Communication

- I should always be able to contact the people I want to talk to.
- I should have privacy whenever I'm using the phone, sending email, texting, using social media or any other form of communication to contact people.
- No one, besides the person I send it to, should be reading my mail, texts or email without my consent.



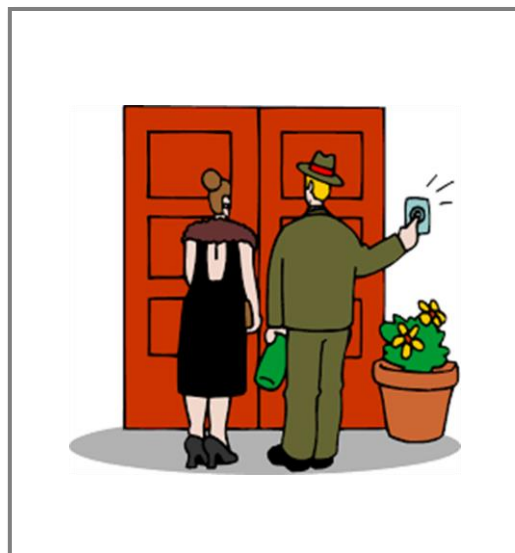
Privacy

- No one should post my picture in a place outside of my own home without my consent.
- No one should post a picture of me online without my consent.
- No one should give my address to anyone without my consent.
- I should have privacy when I sleep.
- I should also have privacy when I am taking care of my hygiene, getting dressed, and using bathroom.
- If I need assistance with hygiene, getting dressed or using the bathroom, then I should feel comfortable with the staff person who is assisting me.
- If I am uncomfortable with a particular staff assisting me, then someone else should step in to help.



Visits

- I should be able to have visitors in my home.
- I should have privacy when visitors come to see me.
- If a visitor comes to see me, then staff should find me to ask if I want that person to come in.
- I should also be able to have visitors in my bedroom.





Section 3: Restrictions

What are restrictions?

Restrictions are limitations or controls placed on someone or something.

What are reasons for restricting human rights?

Sometimes, our rights may be limited to keep us safe.



For example:

A speed limit is a restriction that keeps us safe.

Those who support me should make sure that any restrictions placed on my rights are the **LEAST** restrictive ones.

There should always be a plan to get rid of any restrictions placed on my rights.

Before a restriction is official, this is what must happen:

- I (or my guardian) must consent
- My ISP team must discuss it and approve



- The Human Rights Committee must approve
- My doctor (sometimes) has to approve

What can I do about restrictions?

- I can ask questions about why the restriction is necessary.
- I can help the team to develop a plan to get rid of the restriction.
- I can talk to my Human Rights Advocate if I don't feel the restriction is necessary.



Section 4: My Responsibilities

My Responsibilities

- Know my rights
- Know who to go to for help
- Speak up and let others know what I need
- Be active in my services and supports

I must also:

- Treat others with respect
- Understand that I share my home or building with others
- Use my possessions in legal, safe and proper ways
- Understand that I may have to wait for some of the things I want



I must also understand that the choices I make have consequences. I should always think about these consequences before I make my decisions.



Examples:

Choice	Consequence
If I stay awake all night...	I may be too tired to go to work the next day.
If I spend all of my money on cigarettes...	I may not have enough money to go to the movies or out to dinner with my friends.
If I don't do my laundry...	I may not have clean clothes to wear when I want to go out.

Section 5: Who can help me?

Who can help me to learn more about my rights?

Human Rights Officer (Advocate): the person in my home, job or day program who has been trained on Human Rights and how to advocate for me.

Human Rights Coordinator: the person at the agency providing my services, who organizes the Human Rights Committee meetings, and has been trained to assist the Human Rights Advocate to advocate for me.

Human Rights Specialist: The person who works for DDS, who is available to assist anyone with a human rights question or issue. There is one Specialist in each region of Massachusetts.



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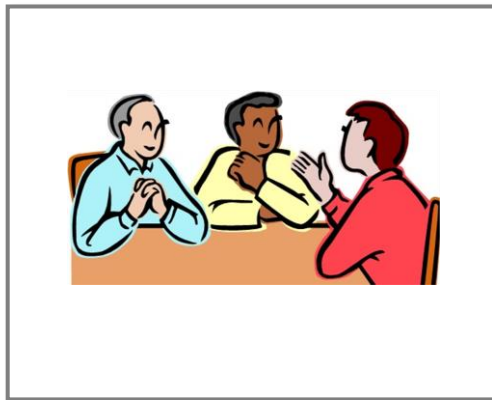
(617) 624-7738

Human Rights Specialists

- Central/West Region: (413) 205-0892
- Northeast Region: (978) 774-5000 extension 528
- Southeast Region: (508) 866-8916
- Metro Region: (781) 788-5261

Who else can help me to learn more about my rights?

- My staff
- My Service Coordinator
- A family member
- A friend
- Someone I feel comfortable with



These people can help me to understand my rights. They can also help me to feel comfortable speaking up when I need to.



Section 6: Questions and Answers

The answers to the following questions may be different for someone who needs more support, or for someone who requires more help with safety.

If these answers are not true for me, then I should notify my Human Rights Advocate and then contact my Service Coordinator to find out why.



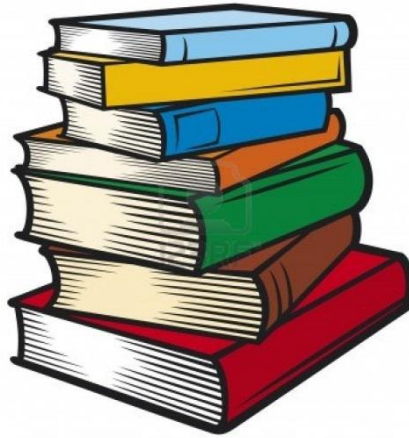
Question 1: Do I have the right to vote?

Answer: Yes,

- if I am a US citizen
- if I have registered to vote

Here are some things to think about:

- Most people who are under guardianship can still vote.
- I should check my guardianship decree. If it doesn't say I can't vote, then I CAN.



Question 2: Can I go to school?

Answer: Yes,

- if I have the money to pay for tuition and expenses
- if I get accepted by the school

Here are some things to think about:

- Anyone who attends school will need to be able to handle the workload and homework in order to pass the class and remain enrolled.
- Schools make accommodations for anyone who needs them.
- I can ask for assistance if I need it.



Question 3: Can I get a job?

Answer: Yes, if I apply and get hired

Here are some things to think about:

- Anyone who is hired to work any job is expected to come to work on time and follow all of the rules of the workplace.
- MASS offers a training called “Explore-Prepare-Act,” which teaches about job hunting and other things I need to know to get a job.



Question 4: Can I buy a house and a car?

Answer: Yes,

- if you have the money to buy them
- if all other necessary bills are paid

Here are some things to think about:

- If I own a home, I must also pay for insurance, taxes and utilities.
- I am also expected to mow my lawn, shovel snow and keep my property clean.
- If I buy a car, I must also pay for insurance, taxes, gas, oil changes, brakes, and tires.
- I must have a driver's license in order to drive.



Question 5: Do I have the right to have a girlfriend or boyfriend?

Answer: Yes!! I can even get married if I want to.

Here's something to think about:

- The other person must agree to be my girlfriend or boyfriend in order for the relationship to begin.



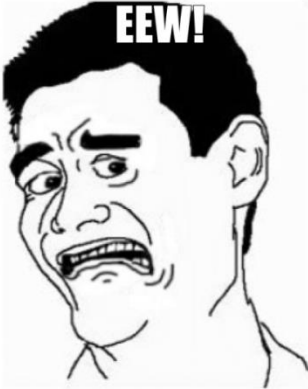
Question 6: Can I have a pet?

Answer: Yes,

- if I have the money to buy one
- if I (not my staff) am able to care for the pet:
 - food & water
 - medicine/vet visits
 - cleaning
- if my landlord agrees
- if my housemates agree

Here are some things to think about:

- Some people are allergic to certain animals.
- The agency providing your services may have a policy prohibiting animals in the home.



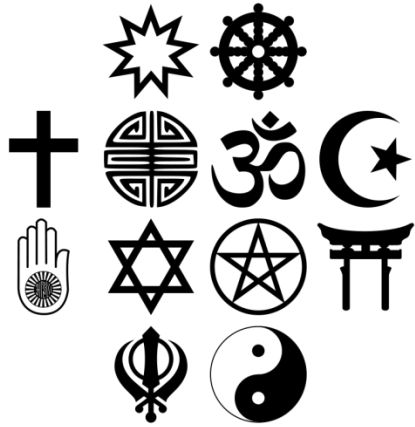
Question 7: Do I have to eat what my staff made for dinner?

Answer: No,

- I should eat what I want
- I should be offered something different

Here are some things to think about:

- I should be supported to prepare my own foods if I am able to.
- It is important for me to let my staff know which foods I like and don't like.



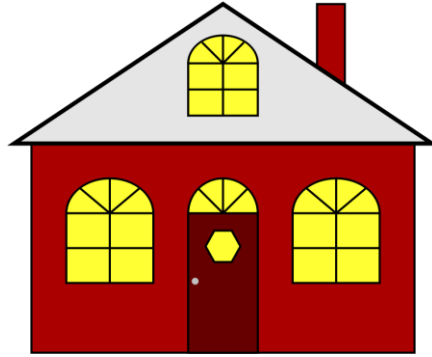
Question 8: If my staff don't practice the same religion as me, do they still have to take me to church?

Answer: Yes,

- my staff are paid to support me, and to help me to get the things I need

Here's something to think about:

- Faith is an important part of people's lives and should be respected by others.



Question 9: If I don't like my house, can I move?

Answer: Yes,

- if there is a place available for me to move to

Here are some things to think about:

- If I want to move, then I should be sure to discuss this at my ISP meeting.
- It is important for my team members to know what I want, and for my wants and needs to be documented in my ISP.

If your question was not included in this handbook, then contact your Human Rights Advocate. That person can help you to get the answers you need.

Thank you.