



A Guide to Natural Supports

A publication of the
Center for Disabilities



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



© University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine Center for Disabilities

South Dakota Council
on Developmental Disabilities



This project was supported in part by grant number 1901SDSCDD-02, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.



Introduction

This guide was created by self-advocates for self-advocates. It will introduce the concept of natural supports and provide examples of how to find, develop and use natural supports. This guide is meant to be a resource to assist self-advocates in thinking about how to start conversations about natural supports with important people in their lives. When reviewing this guide for the first time, some self-advocates may find it helpful to do so with the support of a family member or friend; this provides practice in using a natural support.

Relationships are important in every person's life. This guide does not address how to form and maintain relationships. However, those conversations may occur when utilizing the provided tools.

Please contact the USD Center for Disabilities for more information or with questions.

cd@usd.edu

1-800-658-3080

What are Natural Supports and Why are They Important?



Natural supports are relationships that people have in their everyday lives. They generally refer to unpaid relationships, although these relationships may develop out of paid services or interactions. Examples include friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers, community members and people in your faith community. Natural supports are important for people of all abilities because they help people build confidence in themselves through meaningful participation in activities with other people and organizations. These two areas not only create independence and growth, but they improve a person's quality of life.

Natural Supports in the Community

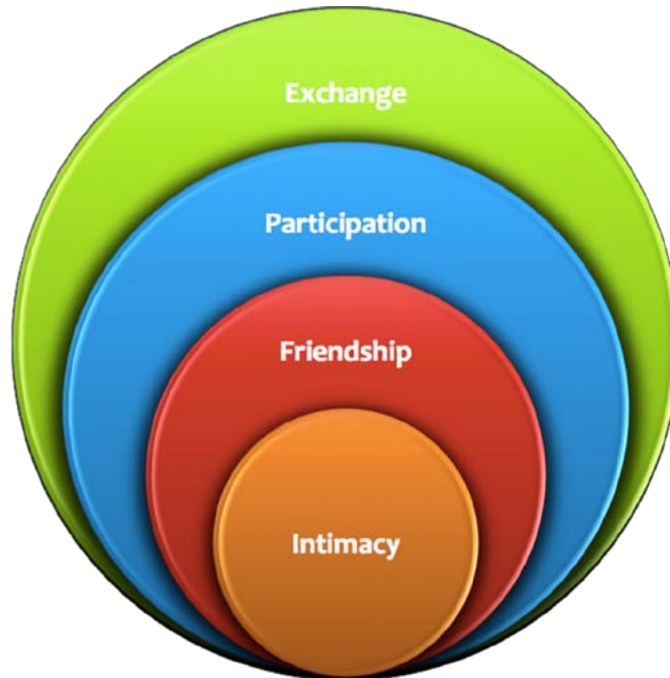


Natural supports can be used in the community in many ways. Some examples include: providing transportation, listening, companionship, volunteering with a local non-profit organization, attending community and social events, participating in a worship activity, recreation activities and being part of peer/mentor support groups. They can be used in any type of setting, situation or relationship.

You can start by identifying key people in various aspects of your life. Then identify your own interests and aspirations and seek out social and community events that best fit your interests. While it can take time and patience to develop natural supports, it will help you build confidence in yourself.

Levels of Natural Support

There are four levels of natural supports.



The Circle of Intimacy includes the most important people in your life. Typically, these are family members, close friends and pets. Often these are the people that support us the most. These people can provide support in a variety of activities including sports, hobbies, community events, entertainment, dates, conversations and many more. People who are closest to us might also be the people we would want to support us at appointments or as needed in restrooms.

The Circle of Friendship includes friends and relatives that you see from time to time. These might include people you take family vacations with or see during special holidays. They often plan activities together based on a shared interest (for example sporting events, concerts, shopping or special meals). These people might support us when we get together for fun activities.



The Circle of Participation includes people from your community organizations. You may know them from your work, school, teams or place of worship. When you are an active member of a community, there are often people in the community who can support you. Community activities may include serving on a board or joining an organization that you are passionate about, participating in school activities or having a job in the community. In these situations, natural supports could include getting a ride to a meeting, getting accommodations to participate in a team or even on-the-job training at work.

The Circle of Exchange includes the people who are paid to be in your life. These people might be counselors, teachers, case workers or medical professionals. These natural supports might be helpful with transportation, when needing accommodations at school or when scheduling appointments. Some professionals provide support as part of their job; examples of these types of supports are counselors and teachers.

Examples

The following pages contain examples of how people may use natural supports to participate in activities.



Jenna loves watching movies and would like to go to the movie theater with her friend Cassie. As a friend, Cassie could support Jenna to have a safe and fun experience at the movie theater.

- Jenna calls Cassie to ask if she would like to go to a movie. Cassie looks up the movie show times.
- Since Jenna doesn't drive, Cassie says that she will pick Jenna up from home before the show and drop her off at home after the movie is over.
- At the theater, Jenna buys popcorn and a drink. Jenna sometimes has a difficult time walking up stairs, especially with her hands full. She asks Cassie to carry her popcorn so she can safely walk up the theater steps to her seat.



James loves spending time with his girlfriend Carla. James would like to go on a date to a restaurant with Carla. As his girlfriend, Carla could support James to have a good time on the date.

- James calls Carla to ask if she would like to go on a date to a restaurant on a chosen night. Carla says yes and they agree to get together before the date night to pick out a restaurant.
- Carla helps James to decide on a restaurant by looking up menus online of different places that they both like and can afford.
- Carla and James decide on a restaurant and Carla helps James choose appropriate clothing to wear for the restaurant.
- Because James doesn't drive, Carla says that she will pick James up from his house before the date and drop him off after the date. *(If both James and Carla do not drive, they could take the public bus and find a restaurant to go to that is along one of the city bus routes.)*
- At the restaurant, Carla helps James decide on what to order and reminds him of what he liked when they looked at the menu online.
- After both eat their meals, Carla helps James with payment by figuring out how much to tip.



Cody just started his new job at a grocery store as a courtesy clerk bagging groceries. He also helps place groceries in customers' cars in the drive-up and performs other cleaning tasks assigned by his supervisor. Cody could look to a co-worker, Adam, to support him on the job.

- First, Cody needs to learn when he needs to be at his work shift by reading his schedule. Adam supports Cody by helping him read his schedule and helping him learn how to clock in and out.
- Cody needs to learn how different grocery items go together in bags. Adam supports and trains Cody about which grocery items go together, how to make customers feel welcome and know which questions to ask about the customers' groceries.
- Adam supports Cody by giving him reminders about when his work breaks are.



Ellen would like to learn to drive, but she knows that she will need some accommodations in order to drive safely. Sara is a therapist who gets paid to help people learn to drive and use accommodations. Sara could support Ellen in learning to drive.

- Ellen needs to learn the rules of driving and she needs to practice driving. Sara supports Ellen by letting her use study materials that fit her learning style. Sara also answers questions that Ellen has about the driving rules.
- Sara gets to know Ellen and makes suggestions for accommodations that Ellen may find useful. Sara teaches Ellen how to use the accommodations and supports Ellen as she practices driving.
- Sara also helps Ellen apply for funding to make her vehicle accessible.

Planning

The following pages may be used as guides to help you plan who your natural supports might be and some locations and activities in which you may need support. There is also a planning guide to help you think through the natural support process.



Natural Supports Location Planner

Where do you **HAVE** to go that you might need support? (ex: work, school, appointments, grocery shopping)

Location

Support Needed

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

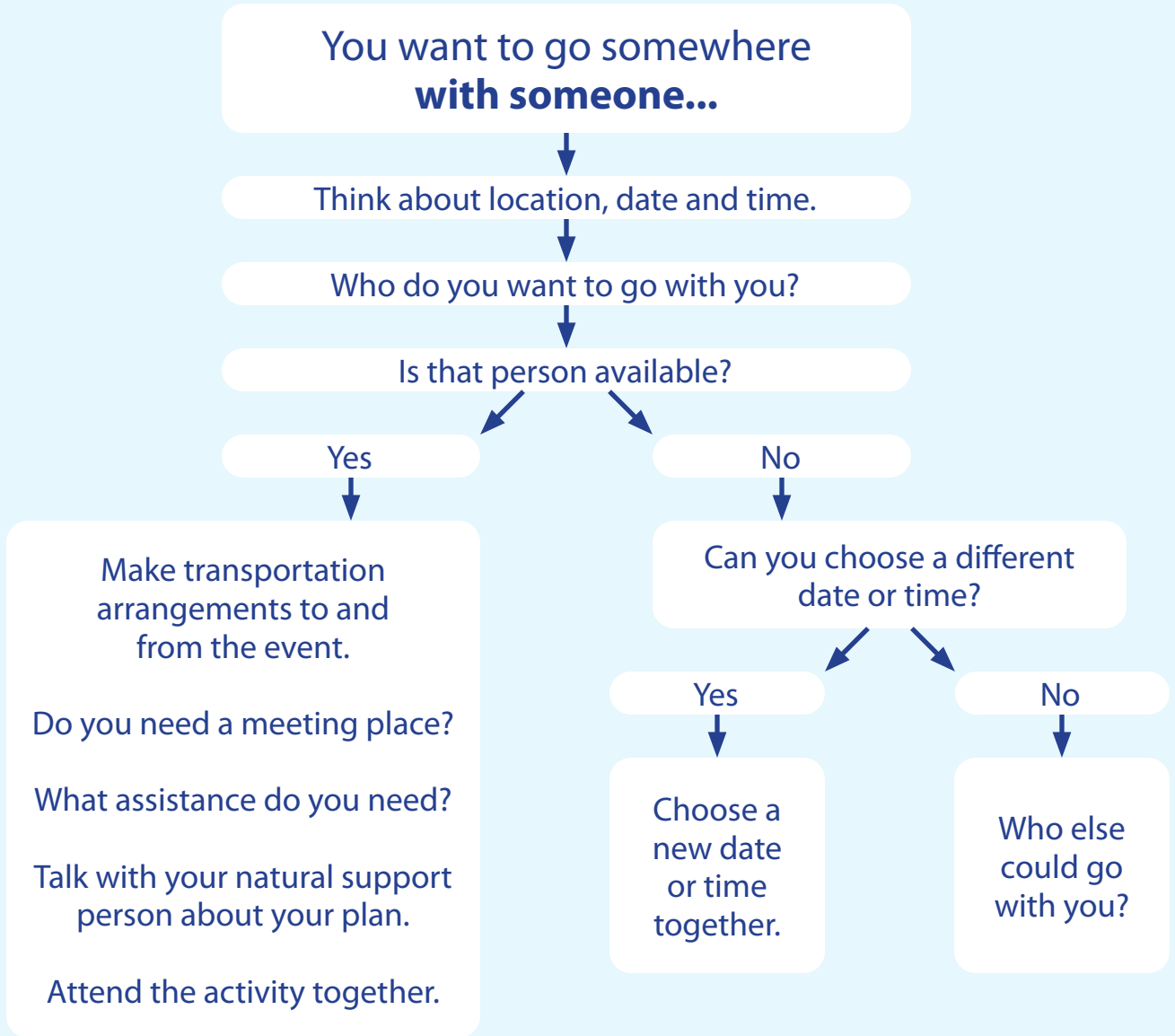
Where do you **LIKE** to go that you might need support? (ex: community events, concerts, movies, restaurants)

Location

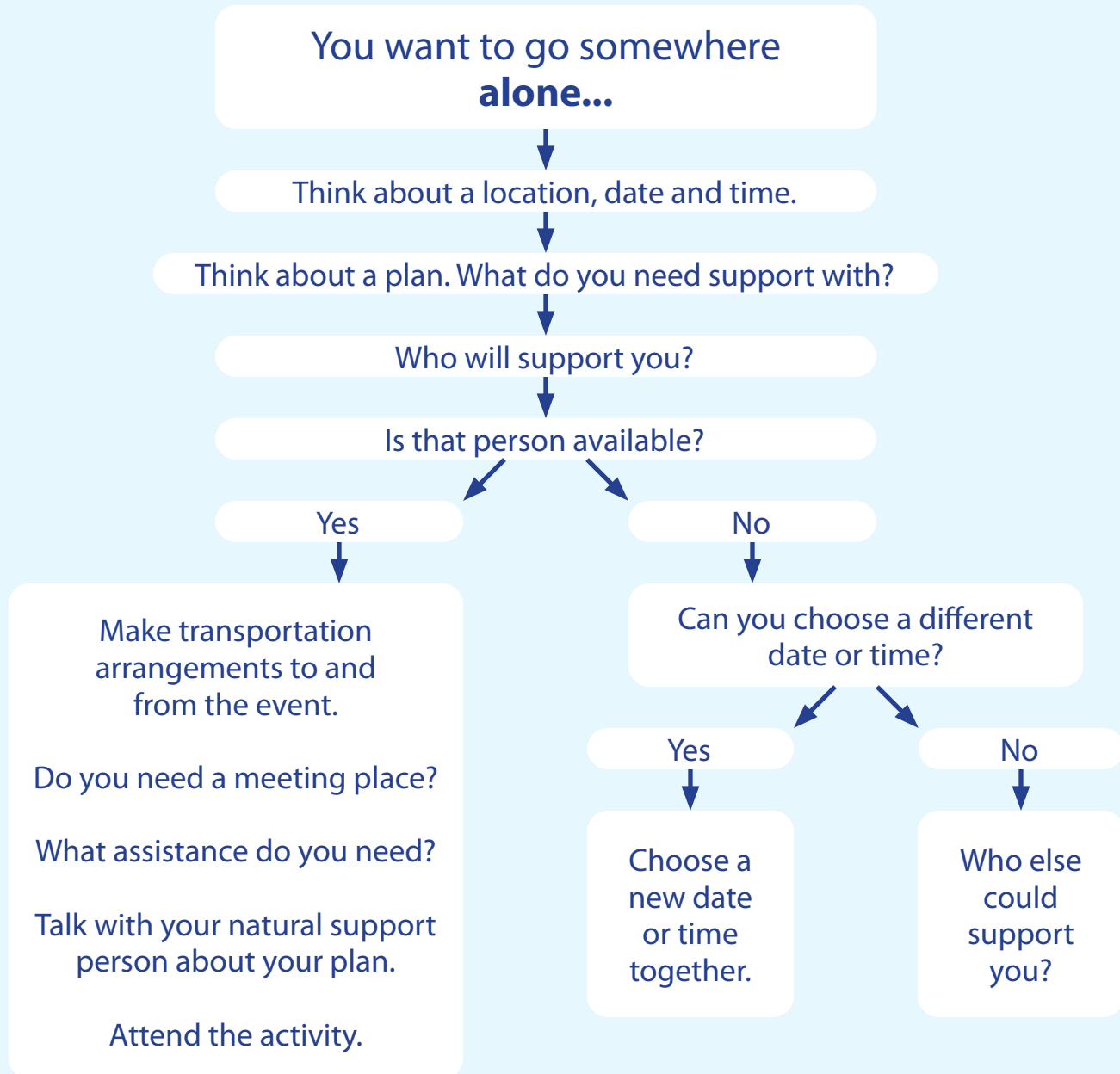
Support Needed

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Planning Guide



Planning Guide



Before the Event

When meeting with your natural support person, here are some things you might want to discuss prior to the event.



- Transportation: How will you get there?
- How much does the event cost?
- Who will be in charge of the money during the event?
- What time does the event begin and end?
- What time do you need to leave to get to the event?
- Where is the event located?
- What is the schedule during the event?
- Accessibility needs
- Location's accessibility
- Accommodation needs
- Clothing choices
- Etiquette appropriate to the setting
- Items or information to bring to the event
- Health concerns and supports
- Who can support you if your natural support person is not available?

Sample Questions

Here are some sample questions that people have asked their natural support person.



- I have (health condition). I brought my (medicine), but I might need assistance taking it. Can you help?
- I have a doctor appointment scheduled on (date and time). Can you help me get there?
- Do you want to go with me to the concert on (date) at (location)?
- What do I need to bring with me for (activity)?
- What time do I need to start getting ready so I can attend the event on time?

Natural Supports Planner

What family members or close friends could you ask to support you?

Name

Contact Information

Who else could you ask to support you? (ex: coworkers, teammates, people from your clubs or organizations)

Name

Contact Information

Natural Supports Planner

What family members or close friends could you ask to support you?

Name

Contact Information

Who else could you ask to support you? (ex: coworkers, teammates, people from your clubs or organizations)

Name

Contact Information

Natural Supports Planner

What family members or close friends could you ask to support you?

Name

Contact Information

Who else could you ask to support you? (ex: coworkers, teammates, people from your clubs or organizations)

Name

Contact Information

Natural Supports Planner

What family members or close friends could you ask to support you?

Name

Contact Information

Who else could you ask to support you? (ex: coworkers, teammates, people from your clubs or organizations)

Name

Contact Information

Planning Guide



You want to go somewhere **with someone...**

Think about location, date and time.

Who do you want to go with you?

Is that person available?

Yes

No

Make transportation arrangements to and from the event.

Can you choose a different date or time?

Do you need a meeting place?

Yes

No

What assistance do you need?

Choose a new date or time together.

Talk with your natural support person about your plan.

Who else could go with you?

Attend the activity together.

Planning Guide



Planning Guide



You want to go somewhere **with someone...**

Think about location, date and time.

Who do you want to go with you?

Is that person available?

Yes

No

Make transportation arrangements to and from the event.

Can you choose a different date or time?

Do you need a meeting place?

Yes

No

What assistance do you need?

Choose a new date or time together.

Talk with your natural support person about your plan.

Who else could go with you?

Attend the activity together.

Planning Guide



Planning Guide



Planning Guide



Planning Guide



Planning Guide



Planning Guide



Planning Guide





UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Dedicated to *Life* Without Limits

Center for Disabilities

1400 West 22nd Street, Sioux Falls, SD
www.usd.edu/cd | cd@usd.edu