

Finding the Right Fit

Least-Restrictive Alternatives in Action

What are Least Restrictive Alternatives?

Least Restrictive Alternatives (LRAs) are supports and services that help individuals meet their needs while preserving as much independence, choice, and autonomy as possible.

Choosing the right option depends on each person's unique circumstances, goals, and values. LRAs take into account an individual's preferences, abilities, and life experiences while still ensuring they receive the support they need (Administration for Community Living, 2024).

This decision-making matrix is a tool for guardians, families, and other decision-makers considering guardianship. It connects areas where an individual may benefit from support, such as daily living, finances, or health care, and matches them with potential interventions and practical examples.



By using this as a resource, decision-makers can move beyond a “one-size-fits-all” approach and explore flexible supports that respect each individual’s rights and preferences.

Guardianship may still be necessary in certain situations but it should be considered only after LRAs have been carefully explored and tried.



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Decision-Making Matrix

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First, consider this:



Capacity is task-specific.

A person may need help with some decisions but still be able to make others.

Look at what has already been tried.
Were supports or services used before?
How long did they last, and did they help?

Match the solution to the need.

Choose the option that solves the specific problem without taking away more rights than necessary.

Day-to-Day Activities

Some individuals may benefit from assistance in daily activities such as dressing, bathing, eating, or preparing meals.



LRAs to Consider:

- Supported Decision-Making (SDM) – trusted supporters help with decisions without taking away rights.
- Home & Community-Based Services – in-home supports for meals, medication, transportation, and personal care.
- Assistive Technology – devices such as medication reminders, mobility aids, or smart-home tools.

Example: Maria chooses a trusted supporter to help her plan her day. She receives home-delivered meals, uses a medication reminder app, and makes her own choices with occasional help from her sister.

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Financial Management

Some individuals may benefit from assistance in managing money, paying bills, or using banking services.



LRAs to Consider:

- Representative Payee – manages Social Security or government benefits.
- Power of Attorney (POA) – a trusted person handles bills and accounts.
- Joint Bank Accounts / Authorized Signers – shared access for support and oversight.
- Financial Counseling or Money Management Programs – help with budgeting skills.
- VA Fiduciary – manages benefits for Veterans.

Example: James receives SSI benefits through a representative payee who pays rent and utilities. James uses his debit card for daily purchases, while his sister (with POA) oversees larger financial responsibilities.

Medical Decision-Making

Some individuals may benefit from support in understanding healthcare choices and in consistently communicating their preferences.



LRAs to Consider:

- Medical Power of Attorney – designates a trusted surrogate for health care decisions if needed.
- Advance Directives (Living Will) – documents care preferences in advance.

Example: David names his niece as his healthcare proxy. He still attends doctor visits and makes everyday health choices, but his wishes about future care are documented in an advance directive.



Insufficient Social Support

Some individuals may need support to live independently or may benefit from alternative supports when family caregivers are not available.



LRAs to Consider:

- In-Home Services & Supports – help with meals, medication, and daily living.
- Home & Community-Based Services – grocery delivery, personal care, and transportation.
- Supported Housing or Group Homes – safe housing with regular staff support.

Example: Sam lives in his own apartment but receives weekly help with cleaning, groceries, and transportation. Later, when he needs more support, he moves into a small group home while still choosing his daily activities.

Partial Capacity or Crisis

An individual may benefit from guidance in managing certain decisions or may require temporary supports during a crisis.



LRAs to Consider:

- Limited or Temporary Guardianship – authority given only in specific areas (e.g., medical decisions).
- Emergency Orders – temporary protection during hospitalization or crisis.

Example: During a health crisis, Ana is placed under emergency guardianship while in the hospital. Once stable, she returns to making her own decisions with support from her family.

Resources

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