

Deciding Together Guide: Instructions



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH SERVICES

This resource is for
families and SSCs.

The Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Program uses a team approach to service planning called **Deciding Together**. This document provides a participant and family centered framework for the team on each of the **Deciding Together** steps. It includes factors to consider and examples to help guide service planning.

Deciding Together: The Five Steps

- ▶ Step 1: Identifying Outcomes
- ▶ Step 2: Thinking Creatively
- ▶ Step 3: Weighing Options
- ▶ Step 4: Developing the Plan
- ▶ Step 5: Evaluating the Plan

The Deciding Together Process

The goal of Deciding Together is to create participant and family centered service plans that are meaningful, effective, and sustainable. Each family has a unique story and life experience. Knowledge of their strengths, interests, hopes, dreams, priorities, and resources helps the team create an individualized service plan. Deciding Together supports shared decision making among families, Support and Service Coordinators (SSCs) and other team members. This process helps ensure supports and services are meeting the child's outcomes and goals within program rules. It promotes transparent and collaborative decision-making, increased follow-through by all team members, and better outcomes for the child and family. All team members—including the child or youth, family, SSC and others—bring important knowledge and perspectives to inform service planning. All team members contribute to understanding the child and family as a whole and developing goals and outcomes.

Who is part of the team?

- The child (participant)
- Family members
- Support and Service Coordinator (SSC)
- Service providers and health care professionals
- Other important people included by the family

Each team member brings unique strengths and perspectives that enhance service planning. The child and their family are experts on their own lives. They explain their needs, routines, preferences, and goals. SSCs offer knowledge of the CLTS Program rules, benefits, and other available resources. They can share how other families have worked through similar challenges.

Service providers and professionals may contribute their clinical insight and experience relevant to the child's support plan. All team members participate actively in each decision-making step, ensuring that service plans are tailored to the child. Together, the team combines their expertise to support the child's best life.

Before the team begins the service planning process and uses the steps in Deciding Together, the SSC, child, and family must first complete an assessment. The assessment forms the basis for service planning. It captures the strengths, challenges, interests, dreams, and priorities for the CLTS Program participant. It's also a time for the child, family, and SSC to review records and related information from medical, educational, and other service providers.

1 Step 1: Identifying Outcomes

What are the strengths, concerns, problems, hopes, and dreams that impact the child and family's goals?

Outcomes are the specific steps that help participants meet their overall goals. They reflect a participant and family's unique interests, preferences, and strengths. Supports and services are selected to help meet the outcomes and are listed on the service plan. At this stage, it's important to:

- Listen while the family shares their strengths, concerns or challenges.
- Explore what the child and family would like to work on or improve.
- Ask the child and family what kind of results they would like to see.
- Envision the child's best life and what this would look like.
- Explore what goals would help the child and family enjoy new activities, build relationships, and learn new skills.

Purpose

Step 1 in the Deciding Together process focuses on understanding the participant's needs and strengths to help create clear outcomes that guide service planning. The team must start first by understanding the participant's strengths and needs to develop outcomes. A service plan cannot be developed until outcomes are developed and agreed upon. It is essential to start with the outcome so the team can decide on what supports and services will meet that outcome. The goal is to work together as a team to develop outcomes that reflect what the child and family hope to achieve. The team should listen actively, ask thoughtful questions, and gather a full picture of the child's functioning, the family's culture and routines, and their vision for participation in home and community life.

Service planning typically starts from either a proactive or reactive perspective. Proactive planning occurs during initial plan development and at regular intervals throughout the course of ongoing engagement with a family. Proactive planning is strength-based and starts with the focus on outcomes. Reactive planning typically occurs when a problem is presented to the team. Reactive planning focuses on responding to a problem.

A proactive planning conversation starts with strengths and goals. It then explores barriers or limitations to achieving these goals. A reactive planning discussion starts with fully unpacking the core problem first, then identifying how it relates to current or new outcomes.

Practice

Identifying outcomes

To identify outcomes for service planning, the team will take the time to fully understand the child and family's needs, strengths, challenges, and dreams before they begin problem solving. It may be stressful for a child and their family to talk about problems. Be sensitive to how the conversation may impact the child and focus on strengths and goals. The team does not offer solutions at this step. It can be easy to skip to a solution to the problem or a service to meet the need. You will start thinking about solutions or services in the next step, so in Step 1 spend time fully learning and understanding the needs.

Asking questions will help with exploring goals, strengths and needs that will help the team develop participant and family-driven outcomes. Creating an outcome actively includes the participant and family's voices in the discussion.

Participants and their families may share problems expressed as:

- I want to learn how to apply for jobs so I can make my own money.
- I'm not allowed to use the stove, but I want to learn how so I can make my own lunch.
- I need a break.
- I need someone to be home with my daughter while I go grocery shopping.
- The school keeps calling us to pick my son up during the day because of challenging behaviors.
- I want to make more friends and be able to do fun things with them.
- The CLTS Program purchased a support that no longer helps.

Good discussion prompts include:

- What does it look like when things are going well?
- What are your priorities for your family?
- What types of activities would you like to do as a family?
- What types of activities is your child interested in exploring?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- How could that go better or feel easier?
- What do you hope to see happen?



Developing outcomes

When developing outcomes, it can be helpful to encourage the child and their family to imagine what they would like for their future. Shifting from identifying items or services to developing outcomes is a change in thinking for many people. Sometimes it can be easy to identify supports or services available, but more challenging to identify the desired result. This step asks all team members to identify or clarify potential outcomes. It is important to include the child in all service planning to make sure their voice is included in the development of outcomes and the supports and services to help them.



Asking questions and learning more about the problem being expressed helps create outcomes that:

- Are expressed in the participant and family's own words
- Reflect the participant's unique interests, preferences and strengths
- Are written in family friendly language that make sense to the whole team.
- Describe what achieving the outcome will look like

Examples of participant and family-driven outcomes:

- Child: "I will learn how to cook my own lunch so that by summer, my parents do not have to make lunch for me. I want to learn how to make my favorite foods, like mac 'n cheese and scrambled eggs, by myself."
- Parent: "I want our family to be able to go grocery shopping together by the end of the school year. I want us to know how to keep our child safe in public and what steps to take if they become unsafe."
- Child: "I want to find a summer job so I can earn money to buy my own games."

2 Step 2: Thinking Creatively

What are all the potential ways or options to help the child and family achieve their outcomes?

- Start with the participant and family's input and ideas.
- Gather everyone's ideas.
- Include opportunities to increase independence and inclusion, to develop new skills, and to develop social connections for both the child and family.
- Consider natural (friends and family), community, and other potential support systems.
- Include options that are culturally responsive and preferred by the child and family.
- Include ideas and options that other professionals on the team have.

This step is often where the values and interest of the participant and their family and the knowledge and experience of the SSC and team start to build together.

Purpose

In Step 2, with a clear understanding of the child and family's unique strengths, needs, and goals, the team can now start thinking creatively about potential supports that might move them toward their vision of full participation in family and community life. The discussion now evolves to imagining possible solutions. Think of this step as brainstorming options.



Practice

Once the team fully understands the problems and goals and how it relates to the child and family outcomes, creative thinking comes easier. This is an open process in which all team members consider ways to address problems and meet the desired outcomes. This is a time to gather everyone's suggestions— all ideas are welcome at this stage. It is not the time to analyze, critique, or reject any ideas. In the next step, the team will work together to narrow the list and ensure outcome focused solutions can be funded by the CLTS Program and are cost effective.

Considerations

- Talk about how this outcome might be addressed for any other child, including children without disabilities. This can help to promote more creative ways to consider resolutions.
- Be sure to think about all types of supports, such as:
 - Birth to 3 Program, CLTS Program, Children's Community Options Program, Comprehensive Community Services, and other Medicaid programs.
 - Resources through schools, child protective services, youth justice and other public agencies.
 - Other local resources, such as community centers, libraries, nonprofit agencies, religious organizations, and support groups.
 - Natural supports, including extended family and friends.
- Include opportunities to increase independence and inclusion, to develop new skills and social connections for both the child and family
- Explore child and family preferences

Multiple resources may be needed to fully support the goal or outcome. Examples:

- Could a mentor help the child experience greater inclusion in the community?
- How can the child participate in an activity that matches their interests (playing soccer, drawing, or other hobbies)?
- What natural supports in the child's life could be drawn upon to contribute?
- Would a safety plan or behavioral health crisis plan help ensure safety?
- Are other resources, such as FoodShare and housing assistance, available?



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Step 3: Weighing Options

What options would work well?

- Consider the cost and the cost effectiveness of the options.
- Consider which options are reasonably expected to work.
- Include options that have a positive impact, without causing undue hardship, harm, or risk.
- Consider the cost and the cost effectiveness of the options.
- Decide which options meet the outcomes, are allowable (comply with regulations), promote quality, and promote long-term results at the best value.
- Consider other systems, like school, human services, community agencies, and other health insurance.

Purpose

In Step 3, the team evaluates the ideas identified in Step 2. They identify which options are likely to:

- Fit well with the family's priorities, values, and culture.
- Be cost effective.
- Promote independence, inclusion, development of new skills, and social connections.

The goal is to select the option that best meets the child's current needs and outcomes in an effective and responsible way. Not all suggested supports will be the appropriate fit or the most cost-effective option. When multiple options could meet the outcome or goals, the team is expected to choose the most cost-effective choice. The SSC will also verify funding responsibilities, including Medicaid coverage, and coordinate benefits to ensure CLTS Program funding is used appropriately.

This step provides an opportunity for SSCs and families to share their expertise with one another as they work to develop the best course of action. SSCs will bring insights about available services and supports in the community and what has worked for others. Families may also have knowledge in these areas. Additionally, they bring expertise about their child, family, culture, preferences, and which supports and services are most likely to achieve their desired outcomes.

Practice

This step is where the team thoughtfully compares each option to determine which one best meets the child's identified outcome, aligns with CLTS Program requirements and is a responsible use of public funds.

The SSC plays a key role in facilitating this conversation by helping the team:

- Understand the CLTS program, available benefits, and service types.
- Clarify how each option helps meet the child's outcomes or goals.
- Discuss considerations like durability, portability, and ease of use or implementation.
- Identify available and qualified providers.
- Evaluate cost effectiveness principles based on current needs while still acknowledging longer term needs when appropriate.
- Coordinate funding sources per CLTS Program policy .
- Ensure options are CLTS Program allowable.

Families play a key role in contributing to the conversation by helping the team understand the child and family's daily routines, the unique needs of the child, and their experience. Example questions:

- What strategies make the most sense for this child? This particular family? These goals?
- Does it suit or fit the family's culture and values?
- What supports and services are likely to be most effective?
- Is it cost effective?
- Does it meaningfully address current needs?

Considerations

The options the team explores should include positive risk-taking. This model recognizes that some risk-taking is a vital part of a good life for all people with or without disabilities. Independence, self-direction, community inclusion, employment, and best quality of life are long-term outcomes to be promoted for every child (within the family's cultural framework).

Funding Options and Cost Effectiveness Principles

The SSC must verify all funding options (called coordination of benefits) and cost effectiveness principles when multiple supports or services have been identified as functionally equivalent. "Functionally equivalent" means the quality and effectiveness of the supports or services are comparable and are reasonably expected to achieve the child's outcome. Using cost effectiveness principles as a factor ensures that the team finds the most appropriate ways to use resources by balancing costs, benefits and quality to achieve the greatest outcomes for the money spent. Decisions are not made solely on costs alone; decisions are always about a balance of costs and degrees of effectiveness.

Requirements for using other sources for funding

The CLTS Program is the payer of last resort. This means the CLTS Program can only pay for the support or service after exploring other sources of funding and their respective responsibility. Before CLTS Program funds can be used, the team must check if it's the responsibility of another program or system (such as ForwardHealth, private insurance or schools) or parental responsibility to pay for it.

Requirements for using CLTS Program Funding

Once the SSC verifies coordination of benefits, the team then must determine if the support or service options meet other CLTS Program requirements. The support or service must:

- Directly help with the child's disability-related outcomes.
- Be cost effective and an appropriate use of public funds.
- Be something unique to the child's disability and not things that families would typically be responsible for or are general household expenses.
- Be intended for the child's outcome, not for general use.

Guiding Principles of Cost Effectiveness

When the team has two or more options that are functionally equivalent (meaning they work about the same to meet the outcome), then the team must choose the most cost-effective option. These principles can help guide conversations about cost effectiveness.

Determine what support or service has the best value by considering:

- Overall cost and benefits of the different options
- Comparison of costs and benefits over time. This means that if the participant's needs can be met with a lower priced support or service, then the team should consider that to be the most appropriate and cost-effective fit.
- Portability of the support or service to ensure community inclusion. This means that features of the support or service make it easier for use in the community or other settings.
- Durability of the support or service. This means assessing how long the support or service will last to reduce the need to buy it again.

Determine if the cost of the support or service is reasonable by asking:

- Is the cost comparable to other similar supports or services?
- Does the support or service meet the child's needs without adding costs that don't improve how it meets the child's needs? For example, the team would not choose a support or service that is more expensive because of a brand name or features that do not specifically address the child's outcomes and goals.

Determine if the support or service meets the specific requirements for the environment it will be used in.

- Confirm it meets rental agreement terms, zoning codes, or homeowners' association (HOA) requirements.
- Ensure the support or service fits safely and intended within the intended space.
- Make sure there is adequate space to store the item and that the family can safely and appropriately maintain the support or service.

Ensure the support or service promotes inclusion in the participant's home and community to the maximum extent possible.

- For example, the support or service provides the opportunity for the participant to live in and have access to their community to the same extent as others who are not in the CLTS Program.

4 Step 4:

Developing the Plan

How can we develop the support plan together with the child and family?

- Link supports and services to current outcomes.
- Choose supports and services that are appropriate in scope, quality and cost.
- Confirm all coordination of benefits and Medicaid coverage.
- Ensure the plan is complete, clear and ready for implementation.
- Ensure the plan reflects shared decision-making and voice of the whole team.
- Identify who will be the provider(s) of the supports and services.
- Prioritize goals, establish timelines, and identify team members' responsibilities.
- Maximize community resources, such as other Medicaid services, school, housing assistance, food stamps, natural supports, and community.
- Identify how and when to evaluate the plan for success.
- Stay engaged, work to understand all perspectives, and seek solutions.

Purpose

Step 4 is to finalize the team's decisions into a clear, outcome-based service plan. The team identifies which supports and services will be included in the plan based on current goals and outcomes, aligned with CLTS Program policy, and responsible use of public funding. Each chosen support or service funded by the CLTS Program must be directly linked to a specific child-focused outcome and reflect the shared understanding developed in previous steps.

The plan must clearly document the rationale for each decision, including coordination with other funding sources and how cost-effective choices were made. The SSC plays a key role in documenting the decisions and ensuring the plan is complete, actionable, and ready to implement. All team members should feel confident the plan supports the child's full participation in home and community life.

The plan will indicate if another agency (such as a school district, mental or behavioral health provider, child protective services, or other health care plan) is responsible for providing and paying for a service. The service plan also includes any relevant natural supports, such as friends, family, and community resources.

Practice

It is important to establish timelines, identify who is responsible for what actions, and schedule follow-up contacts with the participant, their family, and selected providers. It can be easy to leave a planning meeting in which everyone thinks that someone else is taking the next action steps, so be sure to document each person's role and responsibilities. Determine in advance how often the team will meet to review the effectiveness of the support plan and what will be measured to determine success.

The team will ensure the support and services meet coordination of benefits requirements. The team will be clear about frequency and duration of supports and services, location of services, and the start date for services. The team will also decide what to do in case of an emergency.

Considerations

Identify how the team will determine whether the established support plan is working. Ask how the team will know if it's working well. Identify what problems will be resolved, and what outcomes will be met or supported.

Appeal process

Sometimes the team will not all agree. If team members disagree, stay engaged in conversation; explain the thinking or rationale behind decisions and any relevant program requirements or limitations; and make sure everyone is heard, and individual perspectives are understood. Sometimes additional information and guidance is needed before making a final decision.

Participants and their families must receive a notice of action whenever their specific requests are not included in the service plan or when the plan changes to reduce or remove a support or service. Every family has the right to file for a hearing with the Division of Hearings and Appeals. SSCs are required to provide every family with information about their right to appeal (verbally and in writing) in any instance where services are denied, services are reduced from requested amount, and when the family's choice of qualified provider is not approved.

It is helpful to explain to families that requesting an appeal is not seen as a negative action and is simply another way for advocating for their family.



5 Step 5: Evaluating the Plan

Is there progress? Is the plan working?

- Identify what is working well for the child and family.
- Identify areas in need of improvement or new outcomes.
- Determine if the plan needs to be adjusted.
- Assess if the plan continues to be cost effective.
- Repeat the steps to update the plan as needed.

Purpose

Step 5 ensures that the supports and services in the plan are helping the child meet their goals and outcomes. It provides a regular, structured opportunity for the team to discuss:

- What is working well.
- What may need to be adjusted.
- Whether the supports and services continue to use cost effectiveness principles based on the child's needs and goals.

The evaluation should include the child and family's lived experiences, progress, and updated information from all team members. The team may need to adjust the plan if supports and services are not helping meet the outcomes, no longer needed, or if new needs have developed.

This step ensures accountability, flexibility, and shared responsibility. Cost effectiveness remains an important consideration at this stage, ensuring the supports and services are still in use and are the best use of funds to meet the outcomes. If more effective or affordable solutions are available, the team should consider those and update the plan accordingly.

Service plans are living documents that are expected to be changed and updated regularly in response to the child and family's changing circumstances, priorities, and interests. To obtain the very best outcomes, it is important to regularly review the effectiveness of the supports and services.

Practice

Ongoing engagement with the child, family, and CLTS Program providers is essential to ensure the plan remains responsive to the child's needs. The SSC engages with the family and providers at required monthly, quarterly, six-month, and annual contacts to gather meaningful feedback, observe progress, and identify potential barriers early. If changes are needed, the team should revisit earlier Deciding Together steps to consider new or alternate solutions and document the rationale for adjustments. Evaluating does not mean starting over, but, rather, ensuring the service plan evolves along with the child and family.

Service planning effectiveness can be measured by a child and family report (or review of daily or weekly journaling); reports from caregivers, school staff, or other involved persons in the child's life; and observed behavioral or health changes. The team must also determine if the chosen supports and services continue to be cost effective, or if there are better options. Regular assessment of the impact of supports and services is critical to providing the right services at the right time in the right amount.

Sometimes, despite thoughtful planning, a different approach may be needed to achieve the child's outcomes. When this occurs, revisit the steps again to see if there is another support or service that could enhance the outcomes.

Questions to consider when reviewing a plan include:

- How well does this set of supports and services meet the child and family's needs and help them achieve their desired outcomes?
- Is the plan effective? Is there room for improvement?
- Have new needs emerged because of the child's growth and development?
- Has the child or family identified changes in their goals, interests, or priorities? How well does the current plan support those changes? Can it be more responsive?
- Have changes in circumstances either made the need for one type of service obsolete, or highlighted a need for another kind of service?
- Are there any new community supports or services that could be added to the plan?
- Does the plan continue to be cost effective?
- Does providing a particular support or service to help meet a current outcome now help prevent a greater need or crisis down the road?

This is a supporting resource to other Deciding Together materials located at dhs.wisconsin.gov/library/p-02246.htm