



Supported Decision Making: What Does It Look Like?

Case #1:

Coffee and Donuts for Breakfast

Fred Burroughs is a 46 year old male living in the community in a supported living environment. He has an unorthodox communication style such that it takes most people a few months to learn to understand him, but he can make his desires known and, once he's established a rapport with someone, can explain his reasoning processes. Fred is also a diabetic and faces amputation of his lower legs if his diabetes is not kept under control. Donald Cowie is a new member of the team that provides support to Fred and his housemates and has been on the job about three weeks.

Fred repeatedly tells Donald, through signs and gestures, that what he wants for breakfast is coffee and donuts instead of the high-fibre cereal and fruit that he has been offered. Donald is clearly upset when he's told that he has to eat the cereal and fruit instead and spends most of the morning in his room, refusing to join his housemates in activities such as going for a walk. This happens almost every morning – how should Donald proceed?



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Case #2:

Selling the Farmhouse

Hilda Craig is an 87 year old woman who grew up on a farm and worked on it, essentially running it as her father got older, until her father died. After her father's death, she sold off most of the farmland to neighbours but kept the house with its large garden and was happy and content with her life there, cherishing her independence. Her nephew, Bruce, spent many summers there as a child with her and they developed a very close bond.

Hilda has been admitted to a continuing care facility by her family due to concerns about her safety since she has become increasingly forgetful and confused and she would often leave things on the stove and then forget about them once she had left the room. A neighbour comes and takes her back to her house on a weekly basis, which is one of the high points of the week for Hilda, and Hilda talks frequently of what she's going to do when she goes home. Hilda still recognizes older family members, but doesn't seem to be able to remember new people in her life, such as her great-niece's new husband and baby, between visits.

Hilda has given Bruce power of attorney and has identified him as her health care proxy. The cost of the continuing care facility has nearly drained Hilda's savings and Bruce can't afford to pay for it himself. In addition, Hilda has developed pneumonia and staff are asking Bruce whether Hilda should be transferred to the local acute care centre should her condition deteriorate. What should Bruce do?