

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Guardianship, Limited Guardianship, and Supported Decision Making

A decision framework that starts with autonomy and ends with safety, broken down by the life domain that actually matters: medical, finances, housing, social. Pick the lightest tool that protects the adult.

BY JIM PALASTY · OASIS FOR AUTISM · 9 MIN READ

3

TOOLS TO CHOOSE

Full guardianship, limited guardianship, supported decision making. Pick by life domain, not by anxiety.

How it works

THREE STEPS

Map the domains

Medical, finances, housing, social, education. Score capacity in each. The chart is the assignment.



Pick the lightest tool

Always start with the least restrictive option that still protects the adult. Add weight only where the chart demands it.



File and revisit

No tool is permanent. Annual review on the calendar. Modify or terminate when the chart changes.

Tool match by life domain

Medical	SDM, healthcare proxy/POA, limited guardianship for healthcare
Finances	SDM, rep payee, durable POA, special-needs trustee, limited guardianship of estate
Housing	SDM, conservator of estate, limited guardianship for residence
Social	SDM, advance directive, often no court tool needed
Education	SDM, designated representative for IEP and transition services
Day-to-day	SDM, clinical care plans, no court order required
Emergency	Healthcare proxy, emergency hospitalization statutes, MOLST/POLST

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

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Our attorney started the meeting saying she could draft full guardianship papers in two weeks. We asked what else she could draft. She drafted a healthcare proxy, a financial POA, a rep payee application, and a four-person SDM agreement. Total cost was less. The order would have stripped my daughter of authority she still uses for refilling her own meds on the pharmacy app. The simpler stack let her keep it.

BRIDGET, TRAVERSE CITY

What matters, at a glance

Reflexive guardianship

Guardianship is the largest possible tool. Filed reflexively because someone said so at a transition meeting, it strips authority your adult could have exercised with support.

Limited guardianship

Authority transferred only in named domains. The judge approves what the petition specifies. Do not overdraft the order.

Supported Decision Making

A written agreement that names trusted advisors and the domains in which they advise. Less restrictive than guardianship. Recognized in many states by statute and most willing providers in the rest.

Court timeline

From petition to hearing is rarely under sixty days, often ninety or more. Filing on the eve of an emergency is filing too late.

Domain-by-domain match

Medical is one decision. Money is a second. Housing is a third. A single tool is rarely the right shape for all of them.

Right to revisit

Guardianship orders can be modified or terminated. The system pretends they cannot. They can. Build the review into the calendar from day one.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Domain capacity chart, four columns | ☐ Healthcare proxy executed |
| ☐ Financial POA executed | ☐ Rep payee filed (if applicable) |
| ☐ SDM agreement signed and shared | ☐ Limited or full guardianship petition (only if needed) |
| ☐ Annual review on calendar | |

YOUR MOVE

When the team says "just file for guardianship"

- 1 Ask the team to put the recommendation in writing with the domains specified.
- 2 Schedule a thirty-minute consult with a disability-rights attorney.
- 3 Ask the attorney to map a least-restrictive stack for each domain on your chart.
- 4 File only what is needed. Set an annual review reminder on the calendar.
- 5 If full guardianship is the right tool in a domain, write that into the petition. Do not let it cover everything by default.

Less restrictive is not less protective. Less restrictive is more accurate.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

oasisforautism.com · <https://oasisforautism.com>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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