

## 5. Assisted Self-Direction – Joint Decision-Making Processes in the Everyday Lives of People with Cognitive Disabilities

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How can people with cognitive disabilities be accompanied in everyday decision-making processes in such a way that self-direction, shared responsibility and self-determination grow, without overwhelming them or replacing them through external direction?

The planned Working Forum pursues this question using concrete everyday situations from the living and working lives of people with Down syndrome. Central to this is the concept of 'assisted self-direction': a joint process in which decisions are not made on someone's behalf, but are prepared, accompanied, reflected upon and gradually made more self-effective under suitable conditions.

Decisions never arise in isolation. They are embedded in physical prerequisites, material conditions, social relationships, societal circumstances and institutional frameworks. These factors open up or limit the scope within which people can make their own decisions and take responsibility for the consequences. Based on experiences from shared everyday life with people with Down syndrome, these conditioning factors are made visible and reflected upon in relation to self-direction, self-control, self-determination and assistance.

A particular focus of the forum is the participation of three co-presenters with Down syndrome. They will contribute decision-making processes from their own everyday lives – for example, buying clothes, planning a holiday, dealing with a broken dishwasher in a shared flat, or hurtful communication via digital media. Using these examples, participants will jointly examine which steps of action already succeed independently, where assistance is helpful, where limits arise, and how these limits can be understood not only as restrictions but also as starting points for cooperation and shared learning.

The Working Forum thus asks not only about the decision-making capacity of individual persons, but also about the quality of the accompanying relationship. What conditions support people with cognitive disabilities in recognizing their own possibilities for action, preparing decisions and assessing consequences? How can perspective-taking succeed in a mutual process of resonance? What responsibility lies with the assisting person, what with the deciding person, and how does this relationship change depending on the situation?

This also reveals that complex decision-making processes often consist of many partial steps. Some steps are already automated, others require structure, repetition, explanation or vicarious safeguarding. When an entire field of action is assumed to be fully independent, even though individual partial steps still require support, this can lead to overload, conflict, demotivation and developmental setbacks. Assisted self-direction therefore starts from a precise awareness of these partial steps: what can a person already regulate independently?

Where does she need orientation? Where does she need protection? Where does she need choices? And where must assistance step back so that self-efficacy can emerge?

The aim of the Working Forum is to develop, from concrete everyday experiences, criteria for an inclusion-oriented assistance practice. Self-advocacy, pedagogical reflection and professional responsibility are to be brought into dialogue with one another. In keeping with the conference theme 'Generation Inclusion?', the question is how inclusive practice can be passed on, renewed and jointly shaped in everyday life – not only as a claim to self-determination, but as concrete work on conditions, relationships and spaces for decision-making.