

Beyond the Binary

Using a Supported Decision-Making Lens in Evaluating Competence

Evaluating an individual's competency is a daunting task.

Competency varies by issue – many people who may be incompetent to handle their funds are still fully competent to choose where to live and whom to live with. People who may have difficulty with medical decisions may nonetheless be fully competent to live independently.

Competency varies by health status and external stressors – an individual who is normally competent may lose that competency when physically ill or extremely stressed or distressed.

Competency may even vary by time of day – with some seniors 'sundowning' and others on medications whose side effects may hinder evaluations at different times of the day.

What we do know is that **competency is NOT a binary question**. It is not a switch that is off or on. It may wax and wane, it may be reduced by the situation, and it may be increased by circumstances or advisors.

Typical competency evaluations often involve tests of IQ and reasoning, problem solving that is removed from an individual's day-to-day life and regular decisions. Tests are always administered without any supports or help, even when an individual would know when and how to get that help.

This tool tries a different approach. It focuses on daily life skills, and asks for each skill – whether the individual can do the activity or task unaided, with support, or not at all, even with support.


Needless to say, if an individual can do most tasks independently or with support, that person should not be a candidate for conservatorship – but may be a good candidate for Supported Decision Making.


The best evaluation would be in an individual's home, with many hours spent observing how the individual navigates activities of daily living, safety, travel, and


finances. But, because that is seldom financially or administratively feasible, this form comes in two versions – one for the individual, and one for the evaluator. It may be helpful and more efficient to encourage the individual to review with family or friends before discussing with a medical professional.


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Competence Evaluation Tool

	Check this box if the person <i>makes their own decisions</i> or can do this task <i>independently</i> .	Check this box if the person <i>can make decisions or do this task with support</i> . Describe supports needed or in place.	Check this box if the person <i>cannot make decisions or complete this task even with supports</i> . Describe why supports don't work.
COMMUNICATION			
Can express preferences			
Can provide detailed information			
Can explain means of communication			
PERSONAL CARE			
Choosing what to wear			
Getting dressed			
Choosing what to eat, and when to eat			
Taking care of personal hygiene (for example, showering, bathing, brushing teeth)			
Remembering to take medicine			
STAYING SAFE			
Making safe choices around the house (for example, turning off the stove, having fire alarms)			
Understanding and getting help if being treated badly (abused or neglected)			
Making choices about alcohol and drugs			

	Check this box if the person makes their own decisions or can do this task independently .	Check this box if the person can make decisions or do this task with support . Describe supports needed or in place.	Check this box if the person cannot make decisions or complete this task even with supports . Describe why supports don't work.
HOME AND FRIENDS			
Choosing where to live			
Choosing who to live with			
Choosing what to do and who to see in free time			
Keeping the room or home clean			
Finding support services and hiring and firing support staff			
HEALTH CHOICES			
Choosing when to go to the doctor or the dentist			
Making medical choices in everyday situations (for example, check-up, medicine from the drug store)			
Making medical choices in serious situations (for example, surgery, big injury)			
Making medical choices in an emergency			
PARTNERS			
Making choices about dating, and who to date			
Making choices about sex			
Making choices about marriage			
Making choices about birth control and pregnancy			

	Check this box if the person makes their own decisions or can do this task independently .	Check this box if the person can make decisions or do this task with support . Describe supports needed or in place.	Check this box if the person cannot make decisions or complete this task even with supports . Describe why supports don't work.
TRAVEL			
Traveling to routine places (for example, getting to work, stores, friends' homes)			
Traveling to new places (for example, doctors' appointments, special events)			
JOBS			
Choosing whether to work			
Understanding work choices			
Choosing classes or training needed to get a job, and taking these classes			
Applying for a job			
Going to work every work day			
MONEY			
Paying the rent and bills on time			
Keeping a budget			
Making big decisions about money (for example, opening a bank account, signing a lease)			
Monitoring funds for abuse or misuse			

	Check this box if the person <i>makes their own decisions</i> or can do this task <i>independently</i> .	Check this box if the person <i>can make decisions or do this task with support</i> . Describe supports needed or in place.	Check this box if the person <i>cannot make decisions or complete this task even with supports</i> . Describe why supports don't work.
BEING A CITIZEN			
Signing contracts and formal agreements			
Choosing whether to vote and whom to vote for			
OTHER (write any other choices or activities here)			