

Guardianship and Alternatives

At age 18, a youth becomes his or her own guardian. Some youth are unable to totally manage their own affairs. If so, parents may face tough legal choices. Questions parents should ask include:

- "Will my child be able to make decisions on his/her own?"
- "What decisions will my child need assistance making?"
- "What are my main concerns for my child's future? Are they financial, medical, or emotional concerns?"

Parents should think about how they would like to secure their child's future. Below is a list of choices a family may consider. The list does not include all options. Parents should seek legal advice to assist them with decisions impacting their child's future.

- Full guardianship provides full decision making rights to an appointed guardian.
- Partial guardianship provides rights in certain areas of decision making to an appointed guardian.
- Durable Power of Attorney allows health care decisions by an appointed guardian. Power of Attorney can cover other decisions.
- A patient advocate acts for the individual receiving care. Most hospitals and providers have information on this choice. The appointed individual might be a family member or friend.
- In a conservatorship an appointed individual manages a person's finances.
- A representative payee manages the finances for a person with social security income (SSI) or Social Security disability insurance (SSDI) benefits. Application and help are available at local Social Security Administration offices.

Many of these actions must be done through the court system. Start exploring these options early, or at least by the time your child turns 17.