



Moving into adulthood & Getting a Life

Finding the Right Support

About these guides

The 'Moving into Adulthood and Getting a Life' guides are a series of guides, written *by* and *for* families of young people with learning disabilities. However, some of the information contained in them may also be helpful for families of other disabled young people or those who have additional or special educational needs.

Each guide covers the many issues that families have to think and know about during the stage when their child is preparing for adulthood. This stage is often referred to by services as 'Transition'.

- **Getting started:** Starting point & things to think about. 'Jargon buster'. An introduction to person centred thinking, planning and approaches. The start of the preparing for adulthood stage. The Year 9 Review. Person centred thinking tools
- **Finding the right support:** What support are you looking for? Finding support providers. Checking out support providers. Employing your own staff. Keeping safe
- **Education Matters:** Further education - Staying on at school or going to college. Residential colleges. Adult education and lifelong learning
- **Money Matters:** Benefit changes at 16. Managing money. Court of Protection
- **Social care matters:** Personalisation and choice and control. Personal budgets. 'Just enough support'
- **Health Matters:** Staying healthy and safe. Health action plans
- **Social Life, Having Fun, Friends and relationships:** Social life and having fun. Staying safe online. Growing up – sex and relationships. Circles of Support
- **Becoming an adult:** The Mental Capacity Act. Supported decision making
- **Finding a job:** Work experience. Volunteering. Supported Employment.
- **Finding a somewhere to live:** Independent living. Supported living.

All of the guides stem from the belief that all young people, whatever their ability are capable of achieving a good quality of life as an adult.

As parents we know that our children are all different. They are unique individuals with their own gifts, talents, difficulties and challenges. The "one size fits all" approach has never worked for young people and families like ours and so throughout this guide we have included information about how you can tailor the support your child needs and wants to live a good life. This approach is called **person centred planning** and everything in this series of guides centres around person centred thinking, planning and approaches.

Introduction

In this guide we will look at how to find good support. This could be full time, living away from the family home, in their own home with support provided from a support provider. It could mean a certain amount of time a week, (*depending their assessed needs and personal budget allocation*) living with you, with staff provided by a support provider (*sometimes called outreach*) or you may chose to employ your own staff. These are usually called Personal Assistants or PA's for short. Whatever you decide with your son or daughter the following information should be useful...

We've included, **things to think about and questions to ask** under the following headings:

1. What support are you looking for?
2. Finding support providers
3. Checking out support providers
4. Employing your own staff
5. Keeping safe

What support are you looking for?

Start with your son or daughter...

- What's important to them – the things that make them happy and make for a good life
- What's important for them – these are the things that keep us healthy and safe
- What's working and not working for them at the moment – this helps you to hang on to the good stuff and lose the bad.
- Who are the important people in their lives – people who you think can help you plan as well as those they want to keep in touch with
- What does a good day look like?
- What does a bad day look like?
- What would a good week look like? What would in involve, what activities do they like doing
- How do they communicate?

Once you have gathered all this information you have the beginnings of a person centred plan. Remember you are doing this from their perspective not yours.

An example from part of a person centred plan can be found [here](#) you can find more by visiting Helen Sanderson Associates website www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

Finding a support provider

The local authority has a list of organisations that provide support to people with learning disabilities. This is called the Learning Disability Framework (or preferred provider list) ask your son or daughters Care Manager (Social Worker) for this list. N.B *With a personal budget you don't have to choose from this list but the local authority would prefer that you do.* (See Appendix 2 at the back of this guide for an explanation of Personal Budgets and Direct Payment)

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and social care services. They regulate, check and inspect all services that provide care and support. Reports from inspections are also available to view on their website.

Find out more about the CQC, what it does and how it inspects by visiting their website at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/>

Checking out Support Providers

There are many different kinds of support providers. They can be large, small, local or national. They can be not for profit, charitable or private. There are pros and cons to each type but what really matters are the values of the people running them, the management and the attitudes of the support staff.

Some providers provide support to a range of people with different needs – older people, people with mental health issues and others who only provide support specifically to people with learning disabilities. Even if they specialise in learning disability it doesn't necessarily mean they have the right values or are good at supporting people to live ordinary lives.

It's important to choose a provider who understands that your relative, with your support, needs to be in control of the support they are getting, is listened to and that support can change as needed. Support providers who are keen to talk about your son or daughter and the kind of support that would work for them are preferable to the ones who only want to talk about paperwork and routines.

What are the most important things to look for in a support provider?

“How do I choose? They all sound the same” [parent]

The most important attribute in any support provider are their values and their attitudes, but it can be a bit of a minefield because most organisations that provide support to people with learning disabilities say pretty much the same things about the kind of support they provide. So, how do you know which one is right for your relative? How do you know they can actually deliver what they say they will?

Most of us go with our instincts – a bit like when we looked at schools for our children but below are some things to think about and some questions to ask to help you decide.

We know of some families that have tried a 'Dragons Den' approach. i.e. invited the provider organisations to 'pitch' for their relatives 'business' – after all, with a personal budget your son or daughter is a 'customer', a 'consumer' in a competitive market. You should always shop around and contact at least three providers, preferably more if you can. Check out their websites – are they up to date? Are they full of useful information? Are they affordable? Talk to other families. Recommendations from others are useful but remember what works for one person may not work for another, so do your own research.

VODG the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group have put together 10 top tips for choosing a support Provider which can be found [here](#) OR

Top Ten Tips When Choosing a Support Provider: *Top Ten Tips When Choosing a Support Provider, a user-friendly guide to purchasing care. The guide is aimed at anyone who needs to buy support for themselves, a friend or relative. It aims to help you learn what to look for when choosing a provider and the questions to ask in sourcing and paying for support.*

[Download 'Top Ten Tips When Choosing a Support Provider' \(PDF 72Kb\)](#)

[Download easy-read version \(PDF 2.5Mb\)](#)

The questions in the table provided can be used to test out reactions from providers... If they say 'that's a good idea, let's see how we can do that' this is a good sign. If they say, "oh no, we don't/can't do that" you might want to try someone else.

This is what we believe 'good' should look like and it may help to get you started but you will probably have other questions and things to think about related to the individual needs of your son or daughter. You may not find a provider that does everything listed here but they are willing to listen to suggestions, think about doing things another way and show a willingness to want to listen to and include you and your son or daughter... then this speaks volumes!

Some questions to ask	A good provider should...	Things to think about & further questions
Does your the organisation know about person centred thinking, planning and approaches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Understand the importance of a detailed person centred plan - and follow it, regularly review it and update it ✓ Understand what a person centred review is ✓ Understand person centred thinking tools and how they are used ✓ Talk about people they support as people, not 'clients' or 'service users' – <i>most still do this, so we need to help them change</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Organisations that advertise saying they provide 'care' rather than support may not truly understand personalisation and choice and control. ✓ Labelling people by their diagnosis, syndrome (e.g. <i>we provide care to people with Down syndrome or Fragile x</i>) or a specific condition can also be an indication that they are not person centred in their thinking or approaches - i.e. It's a bit 'medical model of disability' – not everyone with the same syndrome needs the same support. If they do this then you might want to ask how they will treat your son or daughter as an individual
Can you tell me what you understand about person centred support. Support that fits around the person instead of the person fitting around the available support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have flexible rotas for staff shifts – fitting with what the person they are supporting wants to do not staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If staff change-over time is in the middle of the day will this mean that the activity your son or daughter is doing has to stop to accommodate this? ✓ What about holidays? Will your son or daughter be supported to go on holiday?
I want my son/daughter to live an ordinary life. How will you make sure he/she has the same life as everyone else	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be ambitious for the person they are supporting – encourage them to try new things, improve their skills, get a job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask what kind of activities they have supported other people to do ✓ Ask how many people they support have jobs? ✓ What about carrying on at college or in adult

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Help your son or daughter have a social life, keep in touch with old friends –and make new ones ✓ Help and encourage your son or daughter to stay in touch with brothers and sisters and the wider family ✓ Not only look for specialist learning disability activities or support but will help them join in with activities in their community ✓ Support the person to have choice and control in their own lives but encourage them to make healthy choices and wise decisions ✓ Use supported decision making agreements to help people stay in control. 	<p>education – will they support your son or daughter to do this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Friendships are important to all of us but people with learning disabilities need more help to make new friends and keep in touch with old ones. Ask how they will support them to do this. ✓ Families matter and brothers, sisters and other family members are important. How will they help your son or daughter keep in touch and stay involved? ✓ How do they encourage people they support to be involved in their own community? ✓ Do they have a good understanding about community connecting? ✓ How do they encourage choice and control? Can people choose what to eat, what to wear and manage their own money (if able) – ask how they respond to people who make bad choices? If they say <i>“they’re an adult, it’s their choice”</i> then you may want to look elsewhere. ✓ Ask the support provider how they help people they support to make decisions about their life on both a day-to-day basis and when making bigger decisions. How the person will be supported to make
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		<p>decisions should be set out in their support plan. Good support around making choices and how the staff support decision making is really important and says a lot about an organisation. Ask them to evidence how they do this</p>
<p>Do you welcome the involvement of parents, brothers and sisters, and wider circles of support? And if so how involved can families be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Value the input of families and see them as partners ✓ Encourage the involvement of families in all aspects of their relatives lives ✓ Communicate with you regularly in a way that works best for you – let you know what they are doing and how they are –<i>good things, not just when things go wrong</i> ✓ Invite you to meetings and reviews ✓ Involve you and your son or daughter in staff recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do they mention families in their publicity? ✓ Remember that your son or daughter may have the capacity to decide not to involve you in certain aspects of their lives (<i>just like the rest of us do with our own families</i>) but make sure you know how the provider will decide and evidence this (<i>see information on the Mental Capacity Act in the Becoming an Adult Guide</i>) ✓ Ask how they will do this. Are they thinking creatively about helping people stay in touch with their families? E.g. using technology like Face Time or Skype, sending update emails, photos and videos, sending cards on special occasions (Birthdays etc) ✓ Ask how often these are held and how you will be involved ✓ Good providers will involve you (and your son or daughter) in recruiting their staff. Even if you don't have the time to go along to formal interviews

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Understand about circles of support and the importance of people being part of, and connected to the community they live in ✓ Provide you with a list of key contacts and the people you need to get hold of if there is a problem 	<p>they will use other methods to make sure you're are involved – sharing prospective staff profiles, job descriptions, inviting you to informal interviews/meetings etc. They will also use the 'matching tool' to make sure that the people who are being recruited have the rights skills and personality to support your relative –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make sure you set out your expectations for involvement when discussing your son or daughters support needs ✓ A really good provider will not only know about circles of support but they will be actively helping people they support to set up their own circles, that includes families, friends and people who know them well ✓ If it's a large organisation you might want to ask about the structure. Who is in charge and who can make decisions? Who can you contact with day to day issues and who should you contact with bigger concerns. It might be worth asking for a structure list – a who's who of the organisation
<p>Can you give me references and can I talk to other families (<i>and if possible people supported by the provider</i>) who have used your services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be able to put you in touch with other families who are using their services locally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Remember they will probably only put you in touch with families who are happy with the support they get and everyone has different standards ✓ Search out other families who use their services to

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sometimes offer to let you visit <i>(and get consent from the people who live there before doing this)</i> ✓ Invite you to family meetings to get a feel for some of the issues that are being raised and meet other parents 	<p>get a balanced view. Everyone will have different experiences but common concerns, like not involving families or poor communication should be a bit of a 'red flag'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Visiting people's homes can be helpful to give you an idea of the kind of support the provider offers. Please remember this is someone's home and permission should be sought from the individuals who live there (or by their family if they are unable to themselves)
<p>Do you have a complaints procedure?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All support providers should have a complaints procedure – ask to see this ✓ See the complaints process as a way of improving services ✓ Have a written accessible version for people with learning disabilities and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask how are complaints responded to? <i>(timescale etc)</i> ✓ It would be better to resolve issues before they get to a complaint... ask how can I raise smaller concerns?
<p>What training do your staff have? And how are they supervised?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be able to clearly tell you about all mandatory training that their staff undertake ✓ Train their staff in person centred approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask what training staff have or can access. Are staff trained in specific skills such as communication, behaviour support or epilepsy management. You might want to ask about this is your son or daughter has needs that require any of these skills ✓ Above all look for the values of their staff. This is

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Involve families and the people they support in training of their staff and staff appraisals 	<p>more important than qualifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask whether families are involved in training and staff appraisals. If not ask if they are open to this idea
<p>Do you use a lot of agency staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Try to limit the use of agency staff and have a reserve (<i>sometimes called 'bank staff'</i>) of regular workers who are known to you and your son or daughter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Most providers have to use agency staff occasionally. Ask how they ensure the agency staff know your son or daughter well ✓ Ask about bank staff
<p>Do you provide different kinds of support workers for different kinds of support?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use person centred approaches to recruit staff, using the 'matching tool' to ensure they have the right skills, characteristics and share interests in similar activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If your son or daughter likes football or swimming then it helps if the person supporting them enjoys these activities too. Ask the provider how they will enable this to happen. ✓ Find out whether there will be different support workers who sleep overnight and if they are then make sure that these staff also get a chance to work with them during the day, to get to know them
<p>How do you know that the support my relative is getting is good and remains so?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have a quality assurance system in place to check how they are doing. This may vary depending on the size of the organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask how the provider is monitored by the Local Authority ✓ Check whether the provider is registered and inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) ✓ An organisation called Paradigm developed a set of national standards Called REACH (c) for supported living. These were designed and developed with people with learning disabilities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Involve the people they support and families in checking/auditing their services (<i>sometimes called 'experts by experience'</i>) ✓ Ask for regular feedback from the people they support and their families via surveys and other methods like meetings/forums ✓ Respond appropriately and quickly to concerns or complaints and work with families and staff to put things right 	<p>and their families. Ask if the provider uses these and are delivering their services in line with these standards. If not ask what they do to quality check their own services. The REACH standards are listed in the Appendix 1 at the Back of this guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask how this is done ✓ Ask if families and people supported are routinely asked their opinion on what's working and what's not working. Look on the website for survey results, if not there you could ask to see the results of any surveys. ✓ Mistakes happen and things can go wrong but we believe that it's how an organisation responds to concerns. Will they keep you informed? Will they get back to you quickly? How will they work with <i>you</i> to put things right?
<p>What will you do to keep my son or daughter safe and protected from abuse?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Has policies and practice in place to keep people from harm ✓ Is open and honest and happy to share all policies with families ✓ Recognises that people with learning disabilities are citizens with the same rights as everyone else, including being able to take risks but, risk assesses appropriately ✓ Should respond quickly to address poor staff attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make sure that the support provider has policies and practice in place to protect people from harm and to help people if they have been abused. How organisations respond to allegations of abuse is very important and tells you a lot. Open communication in an organisation usually helps problems to be picked up

	<p>and disrespectful behaviour towards the people they are supporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have clear and transparent whistle blowing policies for staff and systems in place for families and friends to raise any concerns ✓ Makes sure where a person lives is safe and secure. Staff are trained in first aid, fire safety, food hygiene etc ✓ Ensures that the people they are supporting have the opportunity to speak up and make a complaint in a way that makes sense to them 	<p>quickly and addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We would have grave concerns about any organisation that states they don't have abuse ✓ Do they provide easy read information for the people they are supporting ✓ Do the people they are supporting understand about their rights to complain – how easy do they make this? ✓ How do they support people who have been the victims of abuse? (Physical, emotional, sexual, financial)
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We know we have included an awful lot of questions but, choosing who will support your son or daughter is a big decision. With a personal budget if your son or daughter (or you as an advocate for them) can choose to change providers if you are not happy with the support they are receiving. If they live in supported living this doesn't mean they will need to lose their home. Residential care provision will be different – see our **'Finding Somewhere to Live' guide**

What to look for in a support worker

We've used the term support worker rather than 'carer' in this guide because we want to emphasise that we are employing people to support our relative to live the life they want and not just be 'cared' for. 'Carer' is also a term more commonly used for family carers, i.e. people in an unpaid caring role.

What should you expect from a support worker in their day-to-day work?

Here are some things you might want to be aware of:

- Are they respectful and aware that they are working in someone's home. E.g. do they ask if they can have tea or coffee or do they just help themselves?
- Are they friendly, warm and approachable without being patronising?
- How do they engage with the person they are supporting? E.g are they watching TV instead of doing an activity or doing their own shopping when taking the person out to theirs.
- Do they only use their mobiles for essential personal use while at work or are they chatting to friends, using social media etc?
- If there is more than one person supporting your relative do they create a genuine three way relationship, or will they talk to each other and talk over the person they are supporting?
- Are they flexible, adaptable, imaginative and creative or do they just do things by the book and no more?

How to keep support workers fully involved

Support workers may get to know your son or daughter in a different way to you and may have some new ideas about helping them to have the life they want. A good relationship with the people who support your son or daughter is vital and depends on good two way communication. Involving the support worker in person centred planning meetings or circles of support is helpful as they will have things to contribute and will feel valued and motivated because you've asked for their views, opinions and contributions. *More information about circles of support can be found in the 'Social Life, Having Fun, Friends and Relationships' Guide*

Employing your own staff

Person centred recruitment –*The following information has been taken and adapted from the 'Can't get the staff' course developed by Liz Wilson, Family Consultant at Dimensions UK and funded by Skills for Care. Further guidance from Skills for Care in the form of a toolkit can be found on page 20 of this guide*

When looking for the right support for your relative you may decide that the best option is to go through a support provider agency or organisation. However, increasingly families are looking at employing their own staff for/with their relative.

One of the biggest barriers to employing your own staff using a Direct Payment or Personal Budget is the thought of recruiting a person or a team of people to do the job. Most of us with a relative with a learning disability are incredibly busy and it can be difficult to know where to begin. A new member of staff is after all a big investment, even if they are only supporting the person a few hours a week. Then there's the paper work to manage and keeping records etc.

Some families find the idea of employing their own staff pretty daunting but in this section we have provided to tips to get started and things to think about. This option may give you and your relative far more flexibility, choice and control in the type of support they receive and the life they live. The following information and examples can be used when employing your own staff or equally when being involved in recruitment through the support provider if you choose that route.

Matching staff

Use the information you've gathered about your son or daughter (e.g. important to/important for, good day/bad day etc) or the information in their person centred plan to start thinking about the right kind of person for the job. You can use the Matching Tool template in the person centred planning section of the **'Getting Started guide**. An example of this is below

Be clear from the start about what you want and who you want it from!

Matching staff	
<p>Skills needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking and cleaning • Clear communicator • Good listener • Able to break tasks down into small steps • Organised and methodical • Swimming • Computer skills, word, power point, email and internet • Know when to empower, when to support and when to take a back seat • Able to work to a plan • Good team member with lots of initiative 	<p>Support wanted & needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To learn how to travel independently on familiar routes • To be able to plan, shop for, prepare and clear up a range of simple meals • To organise and take part in social activities with friends • To explore different healthy activities and become an active member of a chosen group • To develop confidence in new situations
<p>Personality Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self confident • Open and friendly • An enabler, not a carer • Creative and a problem solver • Totally reliable • Easy going • Eager to try new things 	<p>Shared Interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Films, cinema, DVD's • Theatre, especial musicals • Acting and dancing • Parties, planning and going along • Swimming and healthy activities • Talking about anything and everything

Creating an advert

A clear and positive advert is a good starting point for finding the right person. Even if you already have some candidates in mind it can make the nature of the work clear and avoid any awkward surprises later.

The advert should include:

- ✓ A headline statement **about me** (the person needing support), which includes some great things about the person and what is important to them.
- ✓ A who are we looking for statement: **About you** (the applicant), which includes highlights from the matching tool, including any 'deal breakers' such as driving license, age, gender etc
- ✓ Some useful details including pay, hours and location
- ✓ Information about how to apply for the job and a closing date for applications

Example advert:

Personal assistant needed

John is a friendly and easy going young man with learning disabilities who lives with his family in Oxford. He loves swimming, walking, music and spending time friends and family. He needs support and encouragement to take part in daily activities and get the best out of life. He's very sociable and loves people and wants to be helped to become a more active member of his community.

He's looking for a confident, outgoing person to support him with all aspects of his life, including personal care. If you have:

- ✓ Great verbal and non verbal communication skills
- ✓ A problem solving and solution focussed approach
- ✓ Good email, internet and word processing skills
- ✓ The ability to keep clear records
- ✓ A desire to be part of a small, committed team
- ✓ Whatever it takes to swim and walk a few miles every day

.....you could be the right person!

Full training will be given and previous experience as a support worker is not essential. DBS checks and full reference required.

You will be working flexible shifts, 30 hours a week with the possibility of extra hours. *Bank staff also required*

For information please email: me@email.com leaving a telephone number if you would like an informal chat

Closing Date: October 4th

Interviews: October 10th

What do you want to achieve? – Setting clear outcomes

When you are clear about what your son or daughter wants to do and achieve in their life it's easier to start constructing the support needed to reach their goals. For some people it might simply be keeping things as they are and maintaining their current quality of life, for others it might be changing things that are not currently working. During the moving into adulthood stage there are likely to be many changes. E.g leaving a school they have been to for a long time and going to college or moving into their own home. Whatever the plan is, it takes effort to achieve these goals and even keeping things the same isn't quite as easy as it sounds.

Most Personal Budgets and Direct Payment support packages are linked to agreed outcomes, set out in the support plan when the budget was agreed. You will need to be able to demonstrate why support is needed to achieve something, as well as how you are meeting it to get and continue to get support.

It is useful to be able to take an active role in agreeing outcomes with social workers and care managers. The new Education, Health and Care plans for 0-25's will be outcome focussed and encourage services to work in a coordinated way with children, young people, families and communities.

When you have clear outcomes it's possible to build them into the day to day support that your son or daughter receives, whether it's from paid staff, family, friends or other support services. When you know what you are trying to achieve and outcomes are clear you also know when they are not happening and this enables you to take action to change the way they are being supported so that outcomes can be achieved.

Person centred outcomes

These are outcomes that the person themselves (And/or with support of their family and friends) has been involved in shaping and has control over, not those that are imposed externally.

How do you clarify outcomes?

Outcomes and solutions are often confused, for example:

'John can communicate his choice of activity to family, friends and support staff' is an outcome.

However, *'one hour a week speech and language therapy'* is a potential solution and *'John is provided with an ipad'* names a useful resource

The outcome leaves an opportunity for creativity and for building in opportunities to practice and develop communication outside of the hour with the specialist.

An outcome needs to be a personal goal, not one designed around a service and resources and needs to be specific, measurable and overcome any obstacles.

To check whether something is an obstacle or a solution you might want to ask yourself the following questions:

- Does it describe what it would give you – **Outcome**
- Do you know what it would do for you? – **solution**
- Does it say when and where it would happen, and what people will be involved? – **solution**
- Does it describe what it would make possible for you? – **outcome**
- How will you know when you've got it? -**outcome**

Of course, once you have described an outcome you will need to look at resources, strategies and solutions needed to achieve it, but it's important not to be led by potential solutions as this could limit achievements, stifle creativity and focus only on service options.

Thanks to Jo Harvey from Helen Sanderson Associates for her work on Person Centred outcomes

Potential problems and ethical dilemmas

A personal assistant works very closely with the person they support, and their family and friends. They often work within the family home and sometimes accompany people on holiday and to family events. It's not surprising that boundaries can become blurred and people can find themselves in awkward situations.

It doesn't have to get complicated though, and a little planning ahead can avoid some of the common pitfalls. Setting the ground rules at the start of any employment is key, but thinking about what some of the potential problems may also help. You may also want to think about your own families values and try to ensure that the person you employ respects these values.

Each employer and individual situation will bring different concerns. Some people like to employ family friends, rather than total strangers as personal assistants. However this is not without its difficulties too and you should be aware that if something goes wrong this can have far reaching consequences.

There can be a conflict of interest in the family too. You might want to employ someone nearer your own age because you feel they will be better able to keep your child safe. Your son or daughter however is more likely to want someone nearer their own age to support them with social activities and, after all, they are entitled to choice and control in their life, including who supports them.

The Mental Capacity Act offers some useful guidance and sets high standards for ensuring choice and control for people with learning disabilities. It states that everyone should be assumed to have capacity to make decisions unless its proved otherwise. You can read more about the Mental Capacity Act in the **'Becoming an Adult'** guide.

Roles and responsibilities

Setting out the clear roles and responsibilities for everyone at the beginning and help avoid difficulties later on and can be used to form part of the job description and the contract that will help keep everything on track.

Who	Core responsibilities	Creativity & Judgement	Not your role
Employer			
Shared			
Personal Assistant			

Job Descriptions and Contracts

The local authority should be able to give you a template contract for using with your staff but you will need to amend it to suit your own circumstances. If it is essential that someone should be flexible about their hours, or you must have someone Tuesdays 9am to 11am then do say so. Check that your budget allows for holiday and sick leave and don't offer more than that or you will be unable to pay people.

The job description should list the key tasks, responsibilities, skills and experience that people need to do the job while also leaving flexibility to develop the role and respond to changing needs. You may want to create a **person specification** as well.

We have provided a few examples. These are for a person who lives in his own tenancy, with 3 other people and has 24 hour support. You can adapt these if you are employing a person in different circumstances. This is to give you an idea of the detail that will be needed.

You also need to be aware that there are strict rules about employing people and what you can ask them at interviews. Basic things like, you can't ask people their age and whether they plan to have children. You can't discriminate either and you must make sure how you select who you want to interview (*your selection criteria*) is fair and you do not discriminate against anyone – remember about the Equalities Act.

ACAS has a useful booklet called 'Delivering equality and diversity' that can be downloaded from www.acas.org.uk. The section on recruitment and selection is particularly helpful.

Example Personal Assistant Job description and person specification

Job Title: Personal Assistant

Job Purpose: to provide high quality support to Robert

Accountable to: Tom, Janice, Robert and his circle of support.

You will be part of a small team that is employed to support Robert to live the life he chooses, to be an active member of the community and to stay healthy and safe. He lives in a house with three other people in Oxford.

Robert needs his support to be consistent and at his own pace. Good support will enable him to follow weekly routines, maintain contact with friends and family and choose how to spend his free time

You must undergo a DBS check (formally called CRB)

Hours:

24 hours/week worked flexibly (negotiable). Shifts will cover 8am-11pm and may be 6,7 or 13 hours long. Extra hours may be available

Pay:

£7.50/hour rising to £8.50 depending on experience and successful completion of a 6 month probationary period

Job Description:

Core Tasks

- Work alongside Robert and his family to achieve the outcomes set out in his Person Centred Plan
- Help Robert visit and maintain good relationships with his, housemates, family and other friends.
- Assist in devising, implementing and reviewing his support plans
- Ensuring that Robert is supported as far as possible to exercise his rights in the following areas: privacy, choice, participation in decision making affecting his life, expression of his cultural identity, entitlement to service, feedback on the service he receives and the right to complain
- Liaise with other professionals on behalf of Robert
- Liaise with Roberts service provider
- Participate in opportunities provided for training and development
- Participate in regular supervision to : receive support, increase knowledge, identify training needs, aid and assess professional development
- Attend training courses, seminar and workshops as required
- Promote equality of opportunity and respect diversity

Daily Living

- Support Robert to identify and choose his timetabled activities including, swimming, walking and arts classes and to follow his chosen routine
- Support Robert to choose what he does in his free time and develop new interests
- Develop a solid, friendly relationship with Robert based on mutual respect and clear communication
- Support Robert with household tasks including, cooking, cleaning, laundry and shopping
- Support Robert in all aspects of his personal care, continence and personal hygiene needs sensitively and appropriately to a high standard
- Assist Robert to take good care of his property and surroundings and keep to his tenancy agreement

Health and well-being

- Support Robert to live a an active lifestyle and make healthy choices
- Monitor his health and report any concerns properly
- Support Robert to take any prescribed medicine, complying with all medicine policies, including storage, administering and record keeping
- Assess risk assessments and follow health and safety procedures

Leisure and community

- Assist Robert in being a valued member of his community by:
 - o Creating opportunities for social and leisure activities
 - o Introducing him to a wide range of facilities and amenities in the local neighbourhood and wider community
 - o Support Robert to develop and maintain relationships with the people he meets

Family and friends

- Support Robert to visit and maintain contact with his family and friends
- Work alongside Robert's family and circle of support to develop his support plan and enrich his life

Administration and policy

- Keep records and participate in administration tasks necessary for the smooth running of support
- Follow policies and procedures outlined in the staff manual
- Maintain confidentiality

Team

- Participate in rotas, which may include day, evening, weekend and bank holiday working
- Take responsibility for making arrangements with colleagues if there are short notice rota changes
- Liaise and coordinate with other team members to provide cohesive, high quality service
- Be supportive, respectful and empathetic to colleagues and all others providing support to Robert and his housemates

Any other duties: Undertake any other duties consistent with the overall purpose of the post as directed by the team leader or circle of support

(*Names have been changed)

Example Person Specification

A team member might have some of the following skills or experience on appointment and would be expected to attain them all within 12 months

1. An understanding of learning disability
2. Ability to provide personal support
3. Ability to support people in chosen activities
4. Communication skills – verbal and non-verbal and written
5. An understanding of person centred support

6. Basic numeracy, IT and literacy skills

We will determine these skills through the application form, a formal interview and an informal activity session. There will be a simple IT/numeracy test at the interview.

Personal Qualities	Essential or desirable	How determined
• Ability to put Roberts needs first	Essential	Interview, activity
• Self motivated	Essential	Application form, interview
• A problem solving attitude	Essential	Application form, interview
• Confidence to try something new	Essential	Application form, interview
• Lively, chatty, outgoing personality	Essential	Interview, activity
• Enjoys gentle physical activity	Essential	Application form, interview
• The ability to remain calm and be diplomatic in a difficult situation	Essential	interview
• Patient and sensitive	Essential	Interview, activity
• A good team player	Essential	Application form, interview, activity

Skills for Care have developed a very useful toolkit which covers:

- Benefits of employing a Personal Assistant
- Recruiting a Personal Assistant
- Before your Personal Assistant starts
- Managing your Personal Assistant
- Training and Qualifications
- Sorting out problems

This toolkit can be found here <http://www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk/>

Keeping it all on track

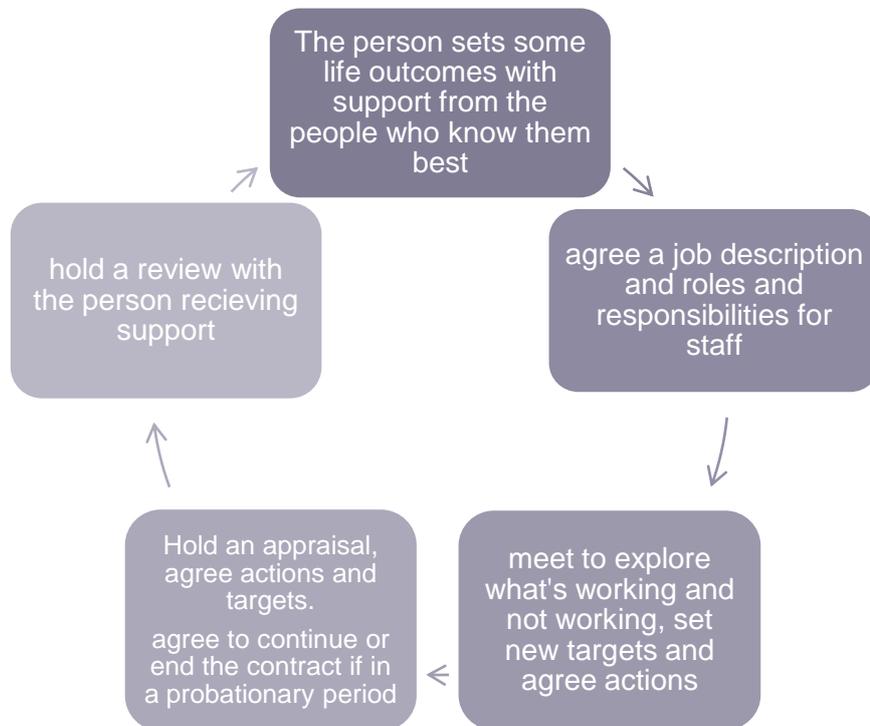
Once you've got your member of staff or team in place it's useful to keep a check on them to make sure they are doing the job they were employed to do, and the person being supported is working towards the planned outcomes.

This is called performance management and it gives you the structure you need to deal with problems as soon as they arise. It also enables you to work with the personal assistants to develop their skills and practice and make and review plans to enable the person supported to live the life they choose.

This might seem a bit too formal for people only employing someone for a few hours a week and perhaps daunting and unnecessary if you have had the same employees for a long time. You decide that that you would rather carry on as always but we think it's worthwhile you taking the time to find out more before you make the final decision. **There are real benefits to performance management in even the smallest support packages**

The local authority can offer safeguarding training to your personal assistants and families can ask to attend too. You should have a safeguarding policy and the information you need to spot abuse and stop abuse.

Performance management process



Performance appraisal or supervision

It's a good idea for you to formally meet with your personal assistant at set times to talk about the job, for example, once a month (at least every 3 months and more frequently if the person is new) This is called a performance appraisal or supervision. By carrying out a performance appraisal (or supervision) with your personal assistant regularly it will help you keep control.

Performance appraisals/supervision:

- help you to assess if your personal assistant is doing the job in the way that you want
- give you the chance to give constructive feedback and to praise staff for their good work
- give you time to address any problems, find solutions, such as offering training, and identify better ways to carry out tasks.

The 1:1 meeting

This will be different depending on the size of the support package you have and how many hours the person works.

Hours worked	Frequency of 1:1
30+	monthly
14-29	6 weekly
Under 14	6-12 weeks

A 1:1 meeting usually lasts 1- 1.5 hours and needs somewhere quiet and private. A large support package should include enough funding to pay staff for their time and to make sure the person has the support they need to get on with their life. Young people and adults can be supported to take part in the 1:1 sessions, share their views about what's working and not working and agree new targets and actions.

There are lots of different ways to hold a supervision session. We are sharing a simple person centred process that helps you stick to the business in hand and finish in around an hour.

Agenda:

- **what's working and not working**
- **review of targets**
- **any other business**
- **action plan**

Ask people to think about what's working and not working before the meeting so they can come prepared. Write everything down before you start discussing concerns.

If something is working for one person but not another talk about how you can make it work for everyone. If that's not possible then there may have to be some compromises.

Date	Performance management 1:1 meeting	
	What's working	What's not working
Person being supported's view		
Employers view		
Staff view		

If you make an action plan at the end of each session you will have a record of any plans made and will be able to tell if things have been done next time you get together. Action plans need to be SMART

SMART –Action plans

Specific	Be very clear about what will be done and who is responsible. What will success look like
Measurable	How will you measure success? How will you know when the goal or action has been achieved? Do you need to break it down into smaller steps?
Achievable	Must be within the staff/employers capacity to carry out the action
Realistic	Do you have the money, equipment, time skills to do this?
Timed	When will it be completed? Do you need to add time scales to the small steps?

Appraisals

An appraisal is a meeting in which an employee discusses their progress, aims and needs with their employer. Most organisations do an annual appraisal with staff. This is different from the regular 1:1 meeting which is designed to support the employee to carry out their job and improve their practice. Appraisals give the employee an opportunity to reflect, take action for change when change is needed and to develop training and support to enhance the skills needed for the work. They always end with an action plan.

Appraisals usually form part of the probationary period too and are usually held after 3, then 6 months, when the contract can be made permanent or ended.

360 degrees Appraisal

The 360 degrees appraisal seeks the views of a number of people to get a rounded view of the situation which is particularly helpful when the employer isn't around to observe day-to-day work.

People to ask include:

- the person who gets support – some independent help to get these views is helpful
- Colleagues
- People who see them at work regularly, for example in a social group
- Other family and friends

The employer collects together all the information before the appraisal and uses it to form the basis of the discussions. This is a valuable opportunity for the employee to hear what is going well and grow in confidence and to learn from the things that are not going well. The personal assistant must have the opportunity to reflect as well as receive feedback from other people. You can start the session by asking the 4+ 1 questions.

- What have you tried?
- What have you learned?
- What are you pleased about?
- What are you concerned about?
- What should you do next?

Employing your own staff can be time consuming and complicated. It's not for everyone and some families find it far too daunting a prospect. However some families have found it to be the best solution for the support needs of their son or daughter.

Skills for Care have a list of useful resources available on their website for individuals employing their own staff. These resources are equally useful for families of people with learning disabilities

<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Support-for-individual-employers/Support-for-individual-employers.aspx>

Keeping people safe

We are all well aware that people with learning disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse than the general population. Families staying closely involved with their relatives is vital to helping people to stay safe and as families we always need to be vigilant.

We would personally be very suspicious of an organisation providing support that said "we never have abuse" because actually no such organisation exists. What you should look for is what they do to keep people safe and how they deal with situations where people they have support have been abused.

It's a sad fact of life that just as paedophiles put themselves into certain roles in order to abuse children, abusers of adults and young people with learning disabilities sometimes find a way through the systems in place to keep them out. Disclosing and Barring checks (DBS - formally called CRB) only pick up those who already have a criminal record and people slip through the net. It's important to remember too that abuse comes in many forms and some abuse isn't as obvious as others. Having a good understanding of person centred thinking – putting yourself in the shoes of the individual being supported is essential. E.g. how would I feel if someone spoke to me like that, stopped me doing this etc. These are the things we need to look out for when whether employing staff ourselves or through a support provider.

If you have concerns that your relative is being ill-treated or abused in any way then you need to contact Oxfordshire's Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults service called safe from Harm . They will be able to give you advice and support

<http://www.oxonsafeguardingadults.org.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/Safe+From+Harm/Home/>

REACH Standards for Supported Living (Appendix 1)

There are 11 REACH standards, developed by Paradigm www.paradigm-uk.org that aims to give people choice and control about how they are supported and how they live their lives. These are:

Standard 1:

I choose who I live with – I live with the people I want to live with or on my own

Standard 2: I choose where I live – I live in a home that I want to be living in

Standard 3: I have my own home – I have my own tenancy or I own my own home

Standard 4: I choose how I'm supported – I can choose the right type of support for me and the right amount.

Standard 5: I choose who supports me – I choose who comes into my home to support me

Standard 6: I get good support – the people who support me are good at their job

Standard 7: I choose my friends and relationships – I get the support I need to make and keep friends and relationships that I choose.

Standard 8: I choose how to be healthy and safe – I get the support I need to stay healthy and safe in the things I do.

Standard 9: I choose how to take part in my community – I get the support I need to make choices about getting a job, going to college, volunteering, activities, hobbies and interests.

Standard 10: I have the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens – I am supported to understand my rights as a tenant, a citizen and as someone who needs support.

Standard 11: I get help to make changes in my life – I am often asked if I want to make changes in my life and get the support I need to make any changes.

Personal Budgets and Direct Payments (Appendix 2)

A personal budget is the way that councils are offering to meet their duties to provide community care services. **Everyone eligible for social care services in Oxfordshire will be given a personal budget once they are an adult.** A personal budget is an *allocation* of money given to a person to spend on their support. Basically, you will be told how much the council can provide to pay for the care the person needs and then it's up to the individual (or you as their carer if they can't do this themselves) to decide how they would like to spend it to meet the agreed outcomes in their support plan.

There are several ways to use a personal budget:

- Through a Direct Payment managed by the person themselves (*through his or her bank account to spend as they choose to meet the outcomes agreed in their support plan*);
- Through an individual service fund where an independent care provider, family member or friend spends the budget for the holder to meet the outcomes in the support plan
- By telling the council that you would like them to manage it for you; or through a combination of these methods.

What's the difference between a personal budget and a Direct Payment?

- **A personal budget** is an amount of money that the council feels is reasonable to meet a person's eligible community care needs.
- **A Direct Payment** is the way a council can pay someone their personal budget.

The aim of giving everyone a personal budget is to increase their choice and control about which services they use to meet their eligible needs, rather than the old way of doing things which meant the council decided where those needs should be met. It means you don't have to use the council's internal services and can "shop around" for the kind of support that best meets the needs of the person.

*** You do not have to accept a personal budget as a Direct Payment and can insist that the council continue to provide services as they have before**