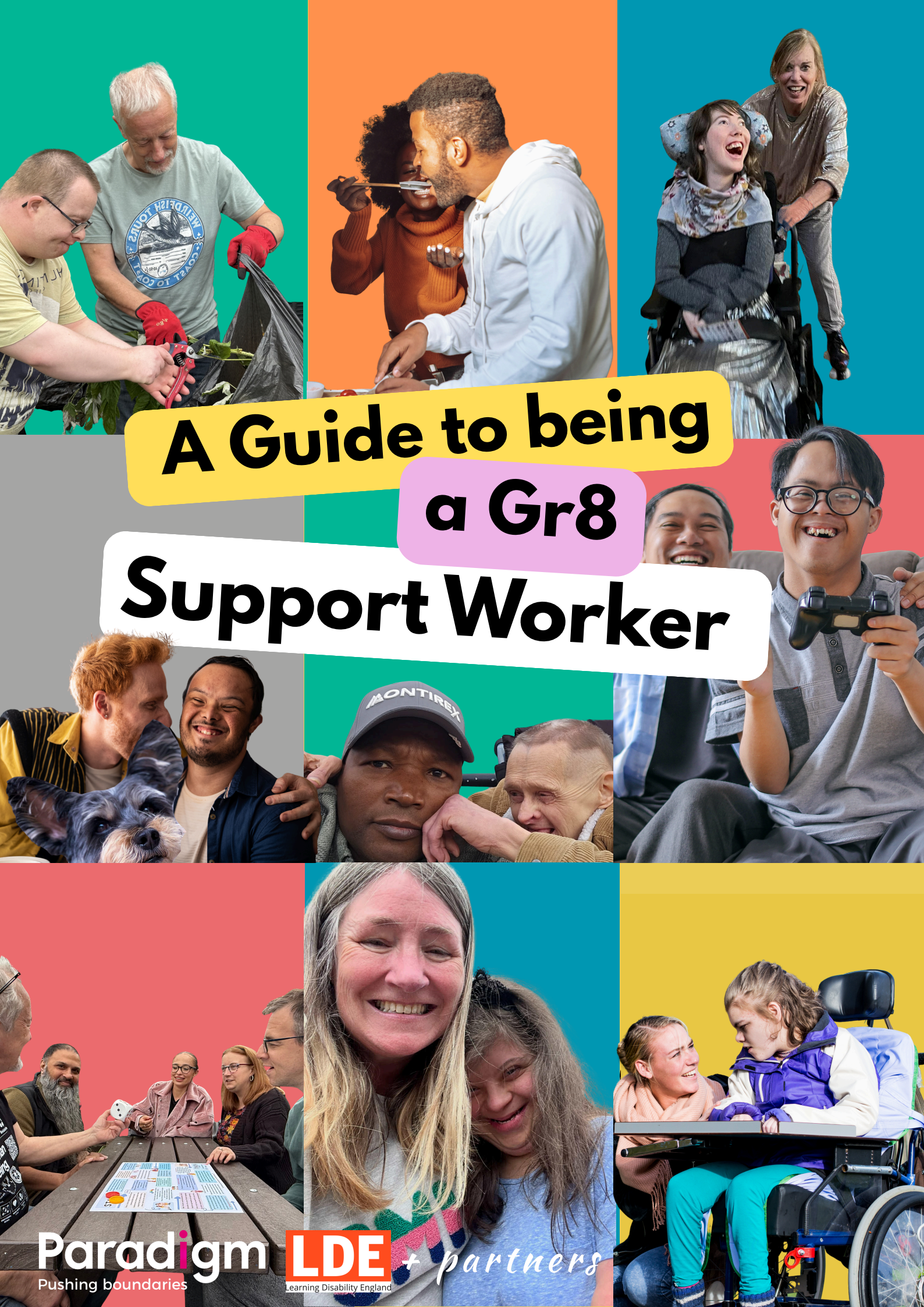


A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Paradigm
Pushing boundaries

LDE
Learning Disability England

+ partners

This booklet is for you Support Workers and Personal Assistants*...

It exists because we know - and want the world to know - that your work is important. Every day, you take on one of the most demanding and skilled roles there is. Yet too often, society overlooks the depth, complexity, and value of what you do.

Our message to you:

What you do matters more than you may ever realise. You hold in your hands the power to open up lives or, without meaning to, to close them down. You can help someone discover their voice, their confidence, a dream and the beauty of steering their own life. That is no small thing. That is life-changing.

Within these pages, we've tried to capture the heart of your role: the skill, the compassion, the courage, and the deep human connection it requires. We have also included a section to help you look after yourselves. We hope the words inspire you to keep growing, learning, and daring to be the best version of yourself. We hope they help you stand up for what is possible for people you support, so that they can live really great lives, full of choice, humanity and dignity just like anyone else. Lives in which they are supported through life's highs and lows.

Your work is not 'just' a job. It is the voice that says, 'YOU MATTER'.
It is the patience that helps someone take one more step forward.
It is the empowerment for a person to live a life that reflects their needs and wants; a life that gives them pleasure and a life that is supported through the hard times.

Enjoy reading this guide and use it to help you give the best support possible to people with a learning disability ... because that is what they deserve.

*Throughout this booklet, we use the term 'Support Workers' to refer to both Support Workers and Personal Assistants except where people themselves have quoted. We recognise that these roles are not identical. Each carries its own responsibilities, skills, and challenges. However, for the sake of clarity and ease of reading, we've chosen one term to represent both. Wherever you see 'Support Workers,' please know it includes and honours the unique role of Personal Assistants too.

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This resource was co-produced by a diverse group of people, including people with learning disabilities, family members, support workers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, trainers and coaches. Co-authors reviewed and approved the use of their contributions. Editorial responsibility and final approval rested with Paradigm and Learning Disability England.
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In 2026, Paradigm gifted its body of work, including this resource to **Learning Disability England**. Please note also that because this resource has been co-produced over a period of time, some people's roles and where they work may have changed.

Why you'll want to read on:

'This brilliant guide may be written for Support Workers, but it's a touchstone for all of us: supported people, families, service leaders and commissioners.

It offers a powerful, human way to recognise, name and expect support that honours a person's life, choices and relationships.'



Katie Peacock
Support Worker

'I know how important Support Workers are in people with learning disabilities living good lives.

How great to have something like this resource to remind us of how in-depth their roles are and how we need to nourish Support Workers.'

Mel Giedroyc
Comedian, Actress and TV presenter



Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License. Bryan Ledgard.

'Read this guide for a better understanding about the role a Support Worker plays in an individual's life. It will open your eyes!

We [*people with learning disabilities*] have the right to live full, enriched lives, just like anyone else . . . and Support Workers can help us do this!

Read this now, to find out how!'



Leon Jordan
Self-Advocate, Admin Assistant and Poet

'This guide celebrates the skill, compassion and commitment it takes to deliver truly great support every day.

It is a must-read for anyone committed to making a real difference.'



Lisa Hopkins
Chief Executive

'This guide is such a fantastic tool for everyone.

The focus on the crucial partnership between families and Support Workers is spot on!

I am excited to have a better understanding to see how the insights can enrich our lives.'



Kiran Dattani Pitt
Sister, International Development Worker

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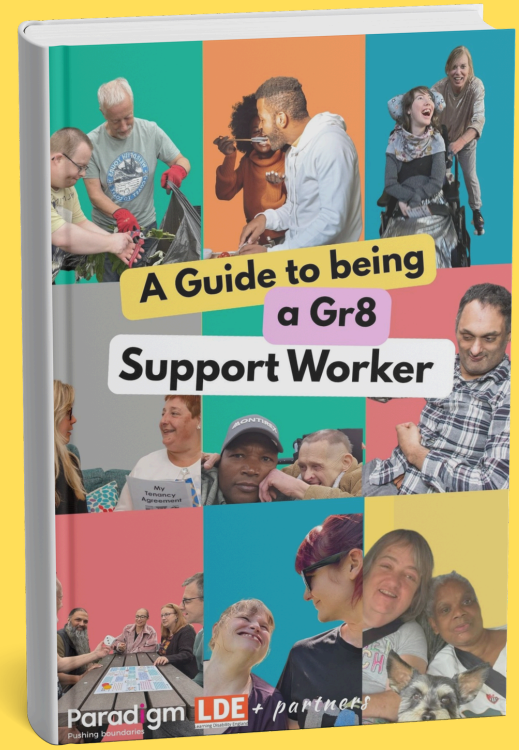
7 TOP TIPS for using this

1 **Read this if you are new to support work or if you'd just like a refreshing reminder** about: **why what you do is so important** and **how you can give the best support.**

2 **You can find the guide as a PDF or as web pages here**: www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/

3 **Explore the guide your way: Dip in or read it all.** There are 6 chapters:

1. **Why are Support Workers so important?**
2. **Getting to know the people you support.**
3. **Supporting people to live good lives.**
4. **Making people's rights a reality.**
5. **Nurturing Support Workers.**
6. **More about this guide.**

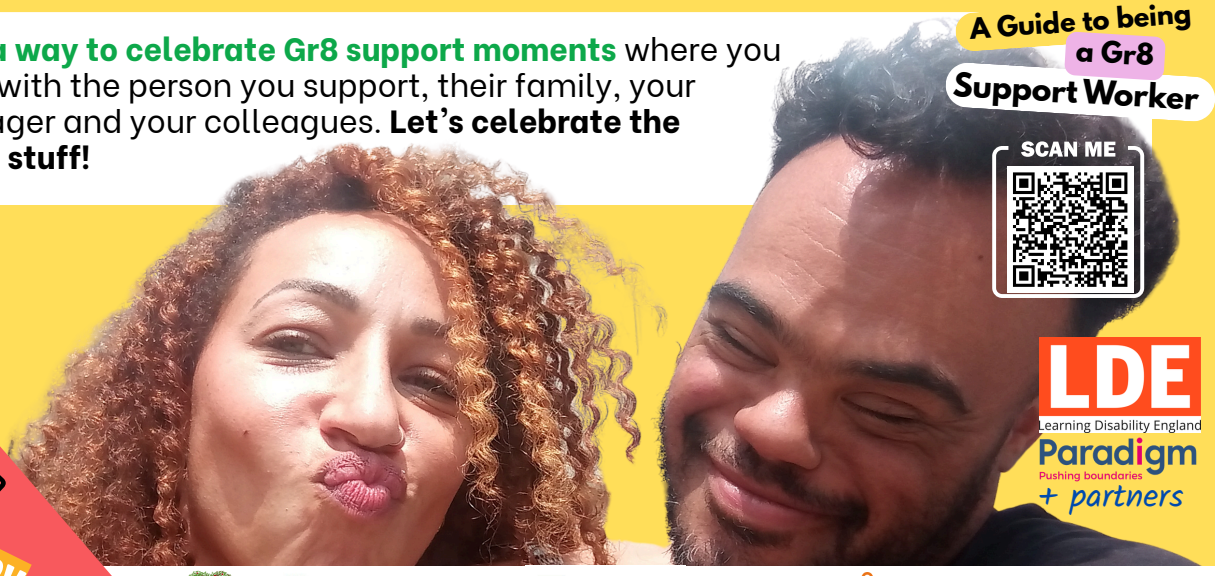


4 **To get around the resource quickly/easily**, view the contents page online and click on the page number of the section you want to look at.

5 **There are reflective questions, do's and don'ts and stories/case studies that you can use in your team meetings** to encourage thinking and discussion about the support you all give. There's even a self-care session plan you can use with your team, **so why not go inspire the rest of your team!**

6 **Use the guide in your supervision** to talk about how you can improve your practice and inspire your colleagues and organisation.

7 **Find a way to celebrate Gr8 support moments** where you work with the person you support, their family, your manager and your colleagues. **Let's celebrate the great stuff!**



BE BRAVE AND REVOLUTIONARY

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Chapter 1

Why are Support Workers so important?

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Chapter 1

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Hazel Hendrickson
Sister



Jo Clare
Leadership Coach

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There are people with learning disabilities who wake up and go to bed feeling like a name on someone else's schedule, a bit player in other people's lives, unimaginably lonely, bored and unfulfilled.

Imagine, instead...



... waking up with a sense of expectation, excitement about the opportunities which lie ahead, and a feeling of comfort and confidence about the day's challenges. Imagine going to bed with the glow of new sensations or experiences, a sense of learning and achievement, or feeling the warmth of connections, old and new.

For many people with learning disabilities, this is only made possible by the dedication and spirit of great Support Workers, and those who have an unwavering belief that their job is not just a shift or a pay packet, but someone else's life.

This chapter introduces us to the extraordinary role of Gr8 Support Workers and the essential characteristics of Gr8 support. These are people who do not merely 'clock in' for a shift, but who are fully present and invest themselves, with passion and compassion, in the wellbeing of others. Individually or as a team, they are resourceful, finding creative solutions to everyday challenges. They are respectful, treating every person's wishes, culture, and identity as central to who they are. They are encouraging and friendly but have good boundaries and understand the critical difference between being friendly and being a friend. They connect, not just helping introduce new friendships but nurturing old and new alike and promoting wider community ties. They advocate fiercely, ensuring people's voices are heard and their rights protected. They support loving relationships, encourage new experiences, and see risk, not as a barrier, but as a gateway to opportunity and adventure.

In the captivating story of Ella (who you'll read about in this chapter)- a young woman whose life could all too easily be defined and confined by her physical, sensory and learning disabilities – the doors to possibility are flung open by great support. There is no risk assessment with the dial stuck on 'No!' or 'Never!'; no 'Yeah buts'; no kid gloves. Instead, the natural concerns of those who care are channelled into understanding Ella: her anxieties, her feelings and experiences, and, crucially because she does not speak, what she is communicating. In collaboration with family, whose involvement and trust make success possible, intuitive Support Worker Vanessa, attuned to Ella's needs and intentions, helps Ella re-engage with the world and realise her utter joy in dance and performance.

Implicit in this chapter is the message that the full richness of Gr8 Support is only possible when Support Workers and families work in open and respectful partnership together. Far from stereotyping families as overbearing and risk averse,

there is recognition that their love and care is primary, that they bring unique insight, history, and expertise about their loved ones. Far from being bystanders in the journey, they are vital collaborators whose voices matter at every turn. To the Support Worker who once said to a family member, 'What's it got to do with you?'. The answer is 'Absolutely everything!'

As you read on, consider the questions at the heart of Gr8 Support: How can we see the person, not the plan? How do we nurture independence without sacrificing safety? Would this be good enough for ourselves or our loved ones? It is in seeking these answers that we find the true meaning of support - not as a set of routines, but as a relationship built on mutual respect, understanding, and shared humanity.

This chapter, and indeed this book, is a call to action.

It asks us to see people's abilities, not their disabilities, and to write no-one off.

It asks us to reimagine the role of Support Workers not as bystanders or background helpers, but as essential partners in the journey toward an inclusive, vibrant, and gloriously ordinary life.

When you next see that colleague missing the point and the joy of the job, try saying 'Get off your phone, get into the room, **connect**'. Make sure that no-one in your team thinks it is okay to walk ahead of the person they are supporting, distanced and indifferent, treating them as a 'paid inconvenience'. Insist on walking in step, being in sync, staying attuned, and sharing the journey.

It is time to be assertive and honour the transformative power of Gr8 Support and celebrate the true value to people and society of Gr8 Support Workers.



Chapter 1

A glimpse: What Self-Advocates want from Support Workers

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker



Leon Jordan
Self-Advocate



Ella Peters
Self-Advocate



Richard Keagan-Bull
Self-Advocate



Sunny Sokhal
Self-Advocate



Vicki
Self-Advocate



Jason O'Neill
Self-Advocate



Charlie Barker's
team



Jane Glover
Self-Advocate



Kaitlin McNulty
Self-Advocate



Sammy Butcher
Self-Advocate



Gareth Pratt's
team



Christopher Porter
Self-Advocate

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‘What we want from Support Workers is not only to listen but support and respect our decisions, so we can achieve our visions.’

Leon Jordan



‘A good Support Worker keeps me safe; keeps me comfortable and relaxed - is helpful, is funny and makes me laugh. I can trust them.’

Ella Peters



‘A good Support Worker should be kind, understanding, able to listen to what I want to say and be patient with me and be friendly. A Support Worker should arrive on time and not be busy looking at their phone all the time. They should make sure that we are their priority.’

Richard Keagan-Bull



‘Be calm with us. Be considerate. Be respectful. Make reasonable adjustments. It’s important you get on with me and you get to know me and bond with me.’

Sunny Sokhal



‘Be loving. I don’t want them (Support Workers) to do everything for me because I can do things for myself.’

Vicki



‘Great support is when you let the person you’re supporting do the things they like and support them in a positive way, not negative. Being able to understand their choices and decisions and getting to know them properly.’

Jason O’Neill

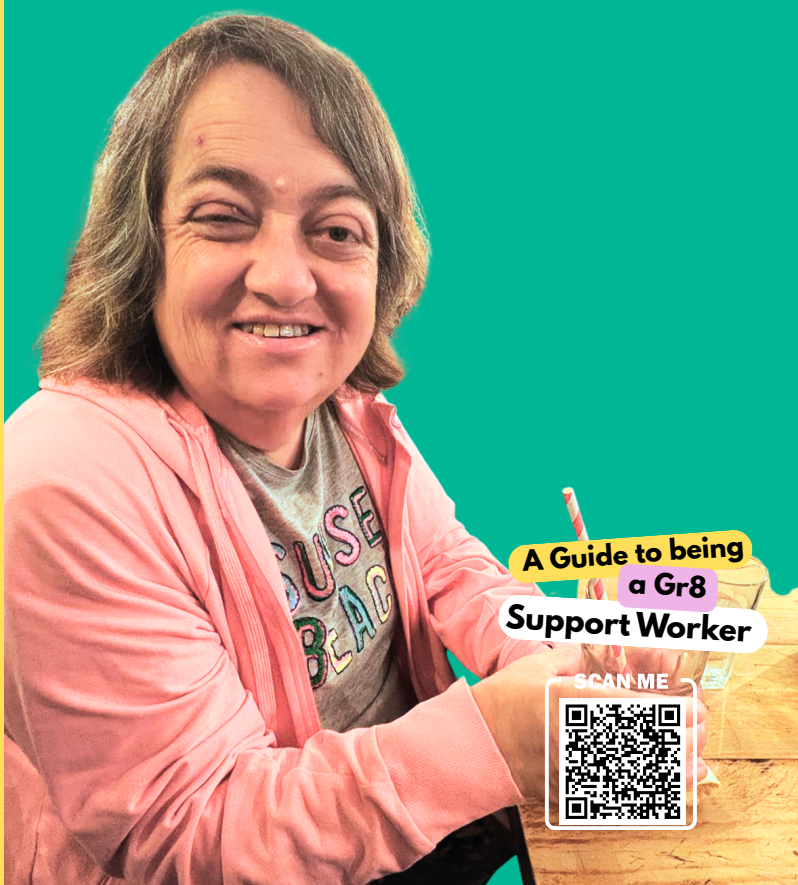


Charlie needs his Personal Assistants to notice the subtle ways he communicates and give him time to respond. With enough time, Charlie can express himself well.



‘I love talking about love and romance with my Personal Assistant.’

Jane Glover



‘Good support talks to me, not at me and listens. Good support doesn’t treat me like a child.Good support doesn’t play on their phone.Good support understands the things I find hard and helps me overcome them. Good support doesn’t say mean things about me.’

Kaitlin McNulty



‘I want them to be kind and helpful.’

Sammy Butcher



Gareth Pratt’s Support Workers notice that Gareth’s face lights up when they give him their full attention and genuine warmth. Gareth needs them to read his non-verbal communication carefully, responding to the nuanced ways he invites connection.



‘Great support leads to making real choices for yourself.
Sometimes that means having a bit of preparation and help first,
so you can understand your rights.’

Christopher Porter



Chapter 1

The heart of Gr8 support: 8 qualities

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Sally Warren
Managing Director
Paradigm



Michelle McDermott
Associate, Self Advocate
Paradigm



Jo Giles
Associate
Paradigm

Support work is powerful. Done right, it's life-changing - not just for the people we support, but for us too. It's not about ticking off tasks or 'looking after' someone. It's about walking alongside people as equals, helping them build lives filled with joy, purpose, and connection.

The truth is, society often underestimates what support work really is. People might think it's about giving medication, helping with meals, or managing budgets. And sure, sometimes that's part of it. But great support work is so much more. It's about relationships, rights, risks, love, laughter and everything in between.

Back in 2016, Paradigm spoke with over 350 people with learning disabilities and their families. They were asked a simple but powerful question: What makes a truly great Support Worker? The answers were full of life and heart. And from those conversations, 8 key characteristics were distilled. These are what we now call the 8 qualities of a Gr8 Support Worker.

These 8 qualities don't just describe what great support looks like. They describe how to bring life, possibility, and freedom into someone's world. Let's explore what they really mean and how you, as a Support Worker, can bring them into every day.

1. Adventurous

What it means: Being open to new things, trying stuff out, and gently encouraging others to take safe, healthy risks.

In practice: Life gets better when we step outside our comfort zones. Being adventurous doesn't mean skydiving (unless someone wants to!). It could be supporting someone to try a spicy curry, join a local Zumba class, or go on a weekend trip away for the first time. It's about saying yes more than no, helping someone discover what's possible and being by their side as they give it a go.

Why it matters: It builds confidence and keeps life exciting. It stops people getting stuck.



2. Friendly

What it means: Being warm, open, genuine and kind. It's about not just doing your job, but showing up as a real human being.

In practice: This is about really listening. Putting down your phone, making eye contact, laughing together, and treating every interaction as a chance to connect. How you greet someone matters. How you respond to them matters. People can feel whether you enjoy being with them. Being friendly doesn't mean being best 'mates'. It means being present, respectful, and human.

Why it matters: People thrive in relationships where they feel seen and valued. And let's be honest, this will also feel better for you.

3. Encouraging

What it means: Helping people believe in themselves, even when they doubt. Cheering them on as they chase their goals, no matter how big or small they are.

In practice: Encouragement can be quiet or loud. It might be nudging someone to make their own tea, or celebrating them when they travel solo to see a friend. It's being their mirror when they forget how capable they are. Encouraging Support Workers don't do things for people, they help people do things for themselves whenever possible.

Why it matters: Confidence doesn't grow overnight. It grows with practice, belief, and having someone in your corner.



4. Supportive of My Loving

What it means: Respecting and supporting people's right to love, be loved, and have meaningful relationships, including romantic and sexual ones.

In practice: Relationships matter deeply. You can support people to stay connected with family, grow friendships, explore romantic interests, or even navigate breakups. It might mean helping someone invite their partner over, supporting safer sex conversations, or making sure a person can access LGBTQ+ spaces if they want to. You don't have to have all the answers. You just need to care, listen, and help uphold their rights.

Why it matters: Love, friendship and intimacy are part of a good life. No one should be left out of that.

5. Advocating

What it means: Standing up with and for someone so their voice is heard, their rights are respected, and they're treated as equal citizens.

In practice: Sometimes people need help to be taken seriously. You might help someone speak up about poor care, challenge a housing decision, or prepare for a GP appointment. Advocating is about noticing injustice (no matter how small or big) and being brave enough to challenge it, whether that's calling out disrespectful language, or helping someone write a complaint.

Why it matters: People with learning disabilities still face discrimination and exclusion. Advocacy helps stop this.

6. Connecting

What it means: Helping people build and maintain meaningful relationships with friends, family, and their wider community.

In practice: Ask, 'Who's in your life?' and 'Who do you miss?' Support people to reconnect or build new friendships like finding a local gaming group, an art class, or a volunteering role. And if someone's isolated, don't wait! Start exploring their interests and community together.

Why it matters: Belonging is a human need. Isolation damages health and wellbeing. Connection heals.

7. Respectful

What it means: Treating every person with dignity, honouring their identity, choices and boundaries all the time.

In practice: It's the small things - knocking before entering, calling someone by the name they prefer, turning up on time, respecting prayer times, or helping someone feel safe to express their gender or cultural identity. It's also about recognising power. You're not 'in charge' - you are a guest in their life, in their home.

Why it matters: Respect is the foundation of trust. Without it, nothing else works.



8. Resourceful

What it means: Being creative and solution-focused. Spotting opportunities and thinking outside the box.

In practice: Can't find a group that suits someone's interests? Start one. Stuck for new ideas? Use a 'jar of motivation notes' filled with options. Know someone who's anxious about the shop? Help them get to know the local shopkeeper. Being resourceful is about always asking, 'How can we make this happen?' instead of saying, 'We've tried that' or 'Someone else is probably doing that'.

Why it matters: When something feels stuck, resourceful Support Workers unlock possibility.

So, how do you bring these to life?

Being a Gr8 Support Worker isn't about being perfect. It's about showing up with heart, staying curious, and committing to growth. Ask yourself:

- Which of the 8 qualities comes naturally to me?
- Which one could I grow more of?
- What would the people I support say?

You could use these qualities in supervisions, team chats, or personal reflection. You could even use them to shape your goals or start conversations with the people you support. 'What would you like me to do more of?' is a great place to start. Remember: you don't have to be everything all the time. But every time you choose to be friendly, adventurous, or respectful, you plant a seed. And over time, those seeds grow into real, lasting change in someone's life.

Final thoughts

Gr8 Support Workers don't just 'help' people. They believe in people. They don't just show up. They show care. They're not superheroes but they ARE the reason someone feels safe, known, and free to live life on their terms. So keep going. Keep growing. And never forget the difference you make because it's bigger than you know.**The very heart of support work is helping someone find their own voice and way.**



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Connecting

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Respectful

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Friendly

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Resourceful

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Adventurous

A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker



Advocating

A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker



Encouraging

A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker



Supportive of my loving

A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. HOW DO YOU HELP THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WHERE THEY LIVE ON A REGULAR BASIS?
2. HOW CAN YOU SHOW THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT THAT YOU RESPECT, VALUE, AND BELIEVE IN THEM?
3. WHAT QUALITY E.G. 'SUPPORTIVE OF MY LOVING' COULD YOUR ORGANISATION STRENGTHEN? YOU COULD WORK WITH YOUR MANAGER OR TEAM TO DO THIS.

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** make a note of which qualities you use each time you support a person.
2. **Do** think about what you are strongest at and not quite so strong at. How could you develop these more?
3. **Do** always honour people's choices, privacy, and identity.

1. **Don't** ignore these Gr8 qualities! They're so powerful! People will live better lives and you will enjoy your job more if you use them.
2. **Don't** rush or take control. Being supportive doesn't mean doing things FOR people. It means doing things WITH them. Let people lead their own lives - follow their pace.
3. **Don't** forget the power of connection. Support work isn't just about tasks. It's about relationships. Don't let busy days stop you sharing moments of real human connection.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://communitylivingmagazine.com/can-people-profound-multiple-learning-disabilities-belong/
https://www.choicesupport.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/supported-loving/supported-loving-toolkit

Case Study: Bringing the beauty of support work to life



When Oluchi found out about the 8 Gr8 qualities from another organisation, something clicked in her. Oluchi spoke to her team and team manager about it. The team realised how much the 8 qualities made up the essence of great support. Together and with the rest of the organisation, (and over time!) they worked to make the 8 qualities the foundation of everything they do: the foundation of people's new inductions, how they give support, team meetings and very importantly supervision.

Induction with heart

Every new Support Worker at the organisation now starts by exploring the 8 qualities together. How the qualities would impact on their own life and then of those they will be supporting. They look at how people can connect with their communities, they discuss what resourceful means, they explore what supported loving looks like etc. It springboards new Support Workers' thinking so it is aspiring and inclusive. So that it is questioning and challenging of barriers that stop important things happening. It moves people to thinking about not 'the easiest option' in supporting a person but the option that steers the direction of the person's life in the way the person wants. It explores the power of bringing the right people together to make change happen. It encourages staff to use all the open ended questions like 'Why' 'What if' and 'How'.

Supervision that grows people

The 8 Qualities are also used in every supervision. Managers use them as conversation starters, asking, 'Which qualities do you use each time you give support?'. Then it explores, 'Which quality do you feel strongest in?' and 'Which one could we grow together? What would help you do this?' One worker, Assif, said he struggled with supporting one person with a different religion to his - the quality about being respectful and perhaps also encouraging. Together he and his manager worked through how he could manage this, in a way that respected the religion of the person he was supporting without impacting on or disrespecting his own faith. It immediately eased the blockage for Assif and strengthened his relationship with the person he supported.

Real change, real impact

Over time, the team noticed a big shift. Supervisions became more open, genuinely curious, powerfully reflective, and positive. People felt proud of their work. They could see and feel the changes they were making and felt so much more connected to those they support. One Support Worker said, 'It's not just about what we do anymore - it's about how we do things- how we deeply listen and notice. I'm not JUST a Support Worker. I unlock things with the people I support. And THAT is amazing!'. The 8 Qualities can create a culture where everyone in it keeps discovering, growing, learning, and exploring how to create a Gr8 Life.

It’s not about ticking tasks,
it’s about sparking joy,
purpose, and connection.

The Paradigm Team



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 1

Natural, compassionate and powerful support

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Andrea Heverin
Parent, Psychologist
Registered Intermediary



Ella Peters
Self-Advocate and
Dance Leader

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I'd like to tell you about Ella.

Ella is a vibrant 26 year old young woman. Friends and family are really important to Ella. Ella has often been described as a 'people person', even as a newborn. She is also one of those people who has a knack for finding joy in any situation – what a gift to have. Ella is passionate about dance, singing and performing. She shines on stage and that's when she comes into her own.

Ella is my beautiful daughter.Ella also happens to be someone who has cerebral palsy and dystonia and uses a wheelchair. She has epilepsy and sometimes her seizures can be life-threatening. Ella is blind and because her cerebral palsy affects the muscles in her mouth, she is non-speaking. But she has a lot to say for herself. Ella uses a partner-assisted communication system on a tablet, but it can be very hard for her to express herself or make herself heard. She can worry and become extremely anxious as a result. Being anxious makes Ella's dystonia worse, which in turn triggers muscle spasms and sometimes seizures.



The Covid-19 pandemic was very hard for everyone. In our family's case, we had to shield Ella who is clinically extremely vulnerable. To make matters worse, her sister became seriously ill with Covid. We had no care and support for Ella during this time and had to continue to shield long after the rest of the world began to resume their lives.

When Ella finally went out again with new Support Workers, she started having panic attacks, which her Support Workers struggled to understand and seemed ill-equipped to manage.

Ella's fear of infection along with her fear of having a panic attack created a horrible cycle of anxiety, dystonic spasms and seizures. And her panic attacks continued. A Wellbeing Recovery Action Plan (**WRAP**) was developed to support Ella's wellbeing with the aim of building resilience, and to help Support Workers focus on what triggered Ella's difficulties, what to avoid, and how to respond during times of distress. But, nothing seemed to change.

There were times when Ella was so anxious about leaving the house and facing the risk of what she knew was a potentially serious illness, that she had a seizure when she went out of the back door. Input from the clinical psychologist at the Learning

Disability Service did not seem to help, and Ella continued to struggle each time she attempted to leave the house, compounding her sense of fear and isolation.

Throughout the pandemic, Ella had singing sessions online with a Support Worker, Vanessa. These sessions provided precious moments of joy and connection for Ella. Finally, when life began to return to some sort of normality. Vanessa began working with Ella as a Support Worker in our home. A couple of days after starting work with Ella, Vanessa asked Ella if she would like to go out.



Astonishingly, Ella agreed, they headed out the door together, and a couple of hours later they returned, all smiles and keen to tell me about the outing. No panic attacks, no seizures, no anxiety. It was as if Ella's struggles over the previous 2 years just evaporated. It was hard to fathom how this could happen in such an effortless way.

I now realise that Ella and Vanessa had built a strong connection during the online singing sessions. Vanessa had become attuned to Ella's emotions, even her breathing and was able to support Ella to regulate her feelings. This meant Ella felt safe with Vanessa and so she was better able to manage her own anxiety. The power and magic of a Gr8 Support Worker.

Ella and Vanessa's relationship is a great example of compassionate support where co-regulation plays a central role. Co-regulation involves creating a nurturing and supportive connection between two people that helps individuals feel safe and supported, especially during times of stress or overwhelm. Being attuned to each other's emotions meant that with Vanessa's support, Ella was able to manage her emotions and feelings of overwhelm. This vastly improved Ella's sense of wellbeing, her resilience, and helped her go out into the world feeling calm and safe.

The little things aren't little at all.
They're what turn good support into great support.
Because small actions make a big difference.
David Hingsburger, speaker and author

Compassionate support goes beyond simply offering help. It requires the Support Worker to 'give of themselves' and try to understand the person's experience from their perspective and to actively join the person they are supporting in whatever activity they are engaged in (rather than sitting off to the side, scrolling on their phone).

Support Workers are in a unique position to support a person's emotional wellbeing. To do this, the Support Worker has to be able to not only create a safe, reassuring and nurturing environment, but also develop and maintain a connection and become attuned to the individual they are supporting. We all need to feel understood, and providing support in this way can help reassure and validate the person's feelings. This approach helps people like Ella who depend on support to really thrive.

So once the team are 'onboarded', it's just a question of them (the Support Workers) learning Ella's routine.

A Case Manager talking about how quickly a new care team could be set up and running for my daughter.

My daughter Ella relies on care and support to live her life, and is so much more than just a series of tasks. But often the 'business' of care loses sight of the individual receiving that care. Over-reliance on care plans, frequent Support Worker changes and the lack of continuity this brings, alongside generic rather than person-centred online training, simply makes it harder to keep individuals like Ella, who depend on this support, in mind.

Words and how we use them really do matter. Our choice of words can make someone feel engaged and included or ignored and excluded. The term 'onboarded' makes Ella sound more like a service or product, rather than an actual human being. It's also crucial that Ella's Support Workers talk directly to her, and that they don't talk about her to other people as if she isn't there. Just because she is non-speaking doesn't mean she doesn't understand language. Communication is about so much more than language. Tuning in to the non-verbal communication and behaviour of the person you are supporting is just, if not more important.

Routines and tasks can easily be learned, but a willingness to be present and take a real interest in the person you are supporting through active listening, to try and see and understand who they are and what they want from their lives, requires curiosity, energy and empathy. This is what helps people like Ella be truly seen and valued in a society that might otherwise look the other way.

If you were relying on care and support, what would you want for myself? How would you like your support to be delivered? This is what I ask myself when I am

thinking about how Ella's care is delivered. As a family we have sometimes struggled to find Support Workers who share our understanding of what it means to be a good Support Worker. We have also had the privilege of getting to know some truly amazing and wonderful human beings who support Ella and who have taught me so much about how to connect and build relationships with others. Support that is compassionate and yet comes naturally in the context of a relationship has the greatest impact.

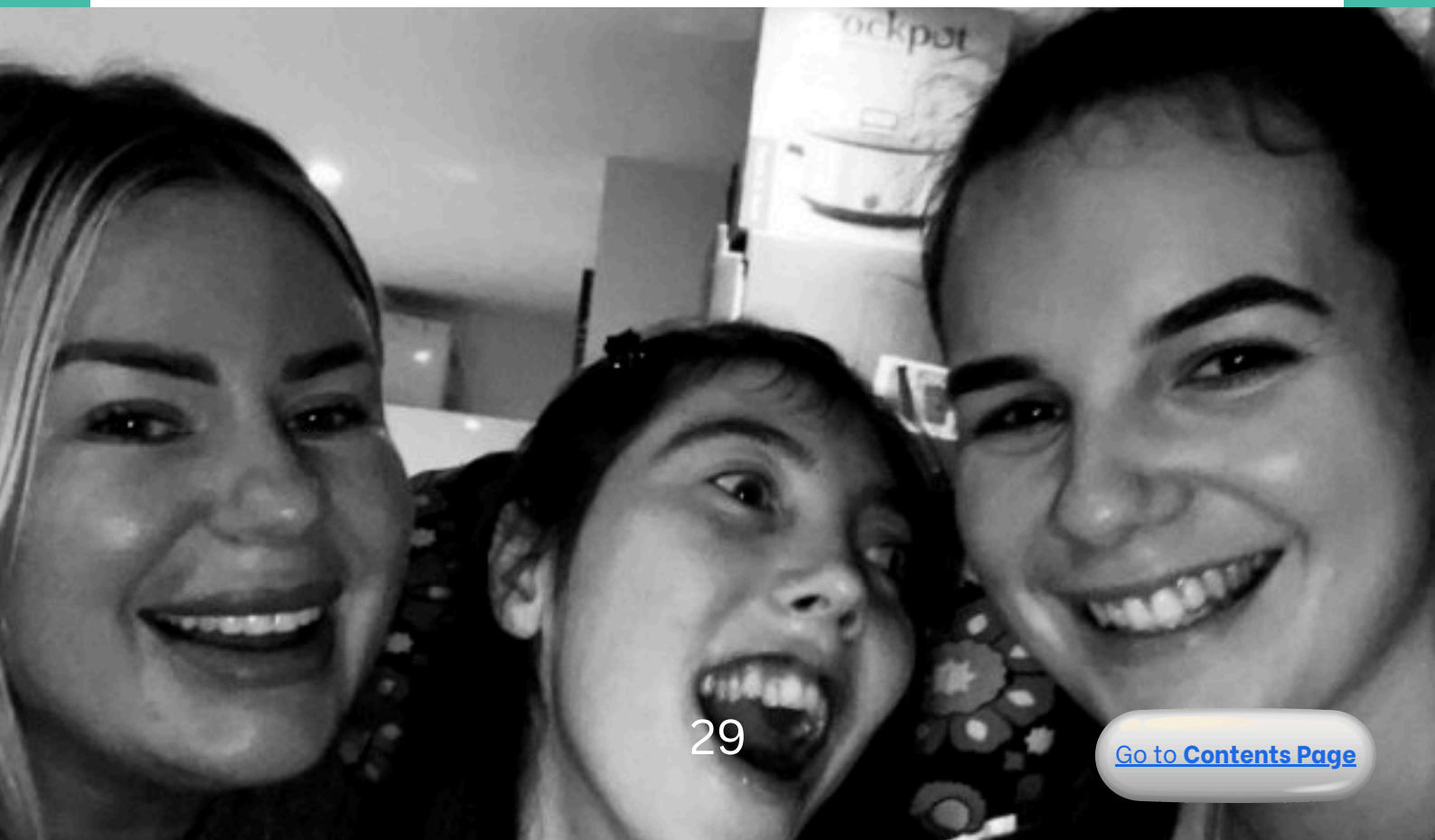
Ella's brilliant Support Worker, Emma, asked Ella about her views on what makes a good and not so good support worker. Ella used her communication system to say:

A Support Worker who is not good talks over me,
sits down all day, looking at their phone,
and doesn't help me,
ignores me when I am trying to say something
It makes me feel left out.
It makes me feel worried.

Support Workers who are miserable make me feel cross.

A good Support Worker keeps me safe
keeps me comfortable and relaxed -
is helpful, is funny and makes me laugh.
I can trust them.

... **Sounds about right Ella.**



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THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. HOW CAN YOU BE MORE PRESENT FOR THE PERSON YOU SUPPORT?
2. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SHOW THE PERSON THAT YOU GENUINELY WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH THEM?
3. IF YOU WERE RELYING ON SUPPORT FROM A SUPPORT WORKER, WHAT 5 QUALITIES WOULD YOU WANT THEM TO HAVE? DO YOU NEED TO BE THESE MORE FOR THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** find ways to get to know the person you support fully.
2. **Do** find out 3 things that give the person you support joy in their life.
3. **Do** make sure that these 3 'joys' are present on a regular if not daily in a person's life.

1. **Don't** spend time on your phone when you are supporting someone.
2. **Don't** forget to find out what makes a person feel safe and secure and able to make their own decisions.
3. **Don't** assume you know what people's answers are when they are making decisions.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.mmu.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/story/learning-disability-professionals-need-more-support-provide

https://echoperformingarts.wordpress.com

Case Study: Supporting Ella to dance



Ella goes to inclusive dance classes run by the incredible **Echo Performing Arts**.

Dancing is Ella's favourite thing to do, and she enjoys her dance classes tremendously. She is now training to be a Dance Leader.Ella is blind, has very limited movement and is non-speaking due to her cerebral palsy. As a result, she needs full support to participate in dance classes.

Sometimes Support Workers struggle to understand what is required of them when they support Ella in a class. They might expect to sit down to the side on their phones, but Ella needs their ongoing attention and support in order to fully engage.

On one occasion, Ella's Support Workers tried to involve themselves in a class by dancing around together loudly and self-consciously, oblivious to Ella's needs, and in fact disrupting what was meant to be happening in the class. They did not understand their role and completely lost sight of Ella in the class. The dance teacher had to liaise with me about what had happened to make sure they didn't disrupt the class again. This is an example of when things go wrong.

Ella is now supported by people who understand that they need to be fully present and attuned to Ella's needs and intentions.This requires ongoing focus and intentional thought at Ella's pace, noticing how she is responding in the class and communicating with her at every step to ensure she is doing what she wants to do. They are in fact part of the class with/alongside Ella. There's no sitting on the sidelines. It's not about being task-focused; it's about seeing the whole of Ella - what she wants and needs. When Ella is enjoying and fully engaging in her dance and her Support Workers are totally focused enabling this to happen, **that's when the magic happens.**

Chapter 1

Friends or friendly?

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Bethan McDermott and **Nicola Payne**
Self-Advocate and Best Practice Manager,
MacIntyre



Sally Warren
Managing Director
Paradigm



Jo Giles
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Relationships are what matter in life;
when they're right,
everything else is more likely to be right.
Sue Deeley, Director of Gettalife

Friendships are a crucial part of living a good life.

Imagine your life without friendships that you truly value and love in your life. Life would be very dull and lonely. It would lose its spark and joy.

Let's think about what a friendship is. A friendship is a bond between two people that is built on mutual affection, trust, respect and support for each other. A friend is someone you talk to about difficulties you are struggling with. A friend is someone you might call late night when you are feeling down or someone you might regularly go out to the pub with. Neither of you are paid to do this, you just both want the other person in your life as a friend because of the connection you have.

Dave Hingsburger talks in **this film** about how some Support Workers bound into new roles, describing themselves as friends with a person with little or no understanding of what that means or the impact it could have.

The reality, as he describes, is that this behaviour can create more loneliness for people supported. When the Support Worker leaves their job, that's it – they're just gone – out of the person's life, mostly never to return. A real friend simply wouldn't do this.

'So, we use the lie of friendship to cover up the social isolation of someone with a disability. The moment we don't do that anymore, we see that isolation in stark, stark ways. And then all of a sudden people say, 'Oh my god, oh my god!' You know what ... Well, you know what, if we're not friends and they don't have any friends at all anymore, what are we supposed to do? Well, that's where you start isn't it.'
Dave Hingsburger, speaker and author

This is where we should start. Seeing the situation for what it is. If people we support are lonely or have limited friendships, as Support Workers we need to spot opportunities where we can help people connect with other people and make friends locally. This could be through a local group that does an activity someone is passionate about, like Alex's gaming together project or Gig Buddies connecting people through music on **p100**. To do this, we have to discover and understand what a person's passions are.

If they don't know what I like, how can I do things I enjoy and want to do, not what they think I should do. I love dancing and singing, and this is important to me (Bethan's mum said if they know what Bethan likes, then they can look for opportunities for her, it's a two-way relationship then)

Bethan McDermott, Self-Advocate

We need to have a fuller sense of a person, how they communicate, what they love in life and what they need in life. A lack of knowledge of this, can, in itself, create a deep sense of isolation and loneliness:

The most terrible loneliness is not the kind that comes from being alone, but the kind that comes from being misunderstood; the loneliness of standing in a crowded room, surrounded by people who do not see you, who do not hear you, who do not know the true essence of who you are. And in that loneliness, you feel as though you are fading, disappearing into the background, until you are nothing more than a ghost, a shadow of your former self.

George Orwell, critic and writer



We need to have a sense of what the person might need to help them connect with others and grow and nurture friendships whether it's a connection through their faith, their college, their local pub or local gardening group. There are all sorts of opportunities out there. We need to be creative in how we spot opportunities and create opportunities.

We aren't saying in this piece that you can't become friends with someone with learning disabilities. There are, of course, times when you develop strong bonds over time with a person and you both want to form a friendship where you see each other out of work time. Many a beautiful friendship has been born this way BUT this needs to be done in the right way.

First, it's important to take a moment to pause and think … are you really wanting to open up a genuine friendship with the person, because it's very likely that the person will have been let down by numerous professionals, people in power, in their life. You must avoid doing this. Then, it is essential that you talk to your team leader and your line manager. They can help you work out whether your reason is well thought through and if and how they can support this friendship to develop thoughtfully and safely.

One provider organisation called Beyond Limits suggests that a Support Worker and their manager should discuss the following (in their '**Employee and Friendship Policy**'):

- Do you genuinely like the person as a friend? (i.e. what would you bring to each other's lives if you had a friendship?)
- Do you genuinely want the person to become part of your life outside work?
- How might the person you support feel about being your 'friend' rather than you as a paid employee?
- What effect could a friendship have on your ability to support the person professionally?
- How will your professional role be affected if the friendship does not work out?

Why not ask if YOUR organisation has a 'Friendship and professional boundaries' policy? These policies are there to support the growth of genuine potential friendships and prevent avoidable loss in trust, disappointment, hurt and exploitation. You will be expected to follow any such policy and guidance that your organisation has.

If your organisation does not have a policy on this, why not show the Beyond Limits one to your organisation so that this can inspire the creation of a '**Friendship and professional boundaries policy**'?

So, friendships are absolutely possible, of course, but it's important we don't mislead ourselves and more importantly, that we don't mislead people we support. We hold big responsibilities as Support Workers and in this, we need to think carefully how we set up expectations in the relationships with people we support.

Not being friends with people we support, doesn't mean the relationship can't be wonderful and hugely empowering for people we support. Being friendly is a hugely important part of our role as a Support Worker (see p16 on 'The 8 qualities of a Gr8 Support Worker'. **In fact, it is what we should build strong, genuine and warm relationships on – strong relationships that support people to live good lives.**

And that is what it is all about.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. ARE THERE **BOUNDARIES YOU FIND HARDER TO KEEP** THAN OTHERS?
2. WHAT **SUPPORT** DO YOU NEED? MAKE SURE YOU GET IT.
3. WHAT IS YOUR ORGANISATION'S **POLICY ON ACCEPTING FACEBOOK FRIEND REQUESTS** FROM PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT AND THEIR FAMILY?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** support the person to meet others and build friendships.
2. **Do** talk openly about changes and how people will come and go. Support people through these. Don't walk away.
3. **Do** encourage independence, be the person's cheer leader.

1. **Don't** over-share. It can distract from what the person you are with needs to talk/work through.
2. **Don't** make promises you can't keep; especially about staying in touch when you leave.
3. **Don't** give personal contact details unless you are forming a friendship the organisation is aware of and is supportive of.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yakEqrbRr0c

https://beyondlimits-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BL-PP-Employee-and-Friendship-Policy.pdf

Case Study: A friend request

Yasmin is a new Support Worker for Yanix , a man in his 30s with a learning disability. They get along well, and Yanix often says he sees Yasmin as a best friend.

A few weeks after Yasmin began supporting Yanix, Yanix sent Yasmin a friend request on Facebook. Yasmin sees it pop up on her phone and panics. She knows her organisation holds strong professional boundaries on this but she also doesn't want to upset Yanix or make him feel rejected.

Yasmin doesn't accept the request, but she also doesn't say anything to Yanix, hoping it will be forgotten or brushed under the carpet. The next time Yanix sees Yasmin, his first question is, 'Did you get my friend request? Did you forget to say yes?'

Yasmin feels awkward and unsure what to say. She worries Yanix will feel hurt or embarrassed if she brings up professional boundaries now, as this has never been discussed between them both.

Yasmin gets some direction from her manager, and when she's with Yanix next says: I really enjoy spending time with you and supporting you, but I can't be friends on Facebook because I am your Support Worker which is a little bit different to being friends. Our organisation says that none of the Support Workers are allowed to accept Facebook Friend requests. That is how I keep things fair and safe for everyone. I'm sorry but it's a work rule. Have you got any questions about this?

Yanix is a bit quiet at first, but after lots of discussions, reassurance and good support, Yanix seems to understand. Overtime, Yasmin supports Yanix to join and go to a local friendship group where people connect through their music taste. Here Yanix makes some new friends, some of which she connects with online as well.



Reflective questions:

- Does your organisation include guidance on 'becoming friends' in their induction package so that Support Workers are clear right from the beginning about what they could say if asked to become a friend on facebook?
- If you have to talk about why you can't be Facebook friends, how can you do this in a kind and compassionate way?
- How can you support people to develop new friendships, whether in person or online?
- Who should you talk to if you think the relationship could become a friendship?

‘I’ve supported someone for over 20 years, we’ve built a real connection with fun and shared interests. It feels like a friendship, but I’ve learned the importance of knowing the difference between being friendly and being a friend.’

Paul, Support Worker



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 2

Getting to know the people you support

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 2

Introduction

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Ramandeep Kaur
Parent



Harry Cartmill
Self-Advocate

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Getting to know someone is essential. It is the starting point to building a good relationship with someone who may need your support for a day or two, or who may need support for several years. So, let's make sure we get it right and that it works for everyone.

This chapter will consider how you get to know the person you are supporting and how they get to know you. There is nothing better than meeting someone new and finding out as much about them as possible. This, however, might prove tricky when supporting someone with learning disabilities, but this chapter will help guide and support you in building strong, trusting relationships.

There are many ways we can get to know people. Start by listening to them first and foremost, and then others around them. Ask questions, remain inquisitive and always keep an open mind. Everyone is an individual with experiences, quirks and nuances that are significant to them. People with learning disabilities are not a homogenous group. It can be easy to fall into that trap if you have never supported a person with learning disabilities before. As they say, if you've met one person with learning disabilities, you've met one person with learning disabilities! And remember to see the human before their disability.



Families are important too as they can often be the experts in the person you are supporting and will offer up advise from a place of love and knowledge of their family member.

Families can give you a history from childhood to the present, explain if there have been any traumatic events, tell you about what brings the person joy or what may cause them anxiety. They can help you make sure that any support package includes strategies to deal with situations which may upset the person you are supporting. Equally, they can help you make sure that the things they enjoy, are included in support plans.

The insight from families and friends can be particularly important for people who may have difficulty in communicating or who communicate differently. Families can help their loves ones to be heard and can teach you about the best ways to communicate. It's important to ensure that you listen to people who may have

different cultural backgrounds as so often they feel unheard. If you need a translator to help you, please employ the services of one. Also remember that it may be friends and neighbours who know the person you are supporting. They can be invaluable guides.

Communication is key. It's not always about words! Learn to listen with all your senses.

Acknowledge the importance of communication in all its forms. Some of the most persuasive people are those who do not use words, so embrace the varied forms of communication you come across. Find the most appropriate way of communicating and ensure that you keep an open and inquisitive mind. Don't be afraid to try new ways of communicating. Use resources such as **signing** or **PECS** or something that is individual to the person you are getting to know. Once you have found the best way to communicate, you will open a whole new world for both you and the person you are supporting.

Be considerate of people who may not have English as their first language. Don't be afraid to use translation services. Most NHS services can now provide information in other languages, so use these resources where you can. Also be aware that some words may not be directly translated into another language so always check what is being said to someone as it may not be correct! Be aware that there may be cultural differences which might be alien to you but are key to the person's life. For some people, you might need to know about religious holidays and festivals. For others, it may be that going to the temple is important as they can meet their friends there. Take time to find out about these things and help them enjoy and celebrate their culture.



It is essential that we get the support right for a person. In fact, we want it to be great support! So, keep asking yourself these questions: Are you looking to put in place the right support for that individual? Will it meet their needs? Have you fully understood what the person wants and needs? Are you following their lead or just doing what is expected? We all have a right to ask for certain things in life and they may not be what others expect. Don't let this frighten you! This is where the 'What are your 10 minutes of Britney Spears?' comes in. What are the things/moments that make people feel happy and supported? How do we find out what these moments are? And how important are these moments to people with learning disabilities? What difference do they make to their lives and how you can best support them? These are all questions you need to be asking as they will help guide you when supporting someone. And make sure you are using a person-centred approach.

It is crucial that anyone who provides support to people with learning disabilities, has a clear understanding of the sometimes ugly history of the treatment and exclusion they have faced by others. This includes, public services, educational institutions, care settings and general lack of support by the wider community. You will also need to be aware of cultural attitudes in different communities, towards people with learning disabilities. There is often stigma associated with disabilities in some communities. Try to be aware of this and the impact it can have on families – some people can end up leading isolated lives, and others can feel shunned by the community they belong to. Here's **my blog** that might be helpful.

By getting to know someone, we can make sure that we have all the information required to put together the best support for them. The end goal is for people with learning disabilities to be supported in a dignified, respectful, individualised way, and to enable them to live ordinary lives. You can do this by following the guidance in this chapter and remembering that

we are all human and deserve great support.



Chapter 2

The importance of discovering who a person is

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Have you ever experienced being at a party and you've met someone for the first time and an hour later you are buzzing from a great conversation with them? You feel excited about it. Can you remember that buzz? Isn't it lovely? These conversations don't happen often enough! What makes them so great? What makes them stand out so much?



When you start to unpick these conversations, these moments, what makes them so great is the way the person was curious about you and genuine in the way they asked questions that really encouraged you to open up, to share and reflect. You felt valued, heard, seen. And no doubt this was two way. It's a magic feeling when this happens.

When we are about to start supporting someone with a learning disability, how do we typically start this relationship? We might be handed a document or asked to read a file on a person, before we meet them. This maybe from a Social Worker who has met them for an hour or so and completed an assessment of need. It may be a Support Plan developed by your organisation. It might be a person-centred plan. Some of these documents may have been created very genuinely including people and their families and those close to them. Too often, they are documents created by a professional, often with good intent and limited time, that gives a narrow lens of a person.

What the Support Worker has to do next, is to go in and meet the person, building the relationship from there, spring-boarding from the information given in the file/document.

You as the Support Worker have a choice here. You can just base your relationship on that information with that small lens or you can choose to go in and use every opportunity to discover more about the person, building on this every time you meet. This could be a conversation that happens when you are cooking together. Why do you love scrambled eggs so much? Oh it reminds you of camping with your dad when you were little. Oh you loved camping? What did you love about camping? Would you like to camp again? Who would you go with?



And so, a magic conversation and moment of discovery happens.

We have a chance, as Support Workers, to keep discovering more and more and more with the people we support. Whether we are sitting on a bus together with the person we support, getting paperwork out to sort some bills, having a coffee, or walking to the station. We make a choice to keep being curious about a person, to discover and understand more about a person. It's important for the person but it's also magic for us when this happens. It keeps our relationship with people fresh and growing.

Imagine you have a partner. Imagine your first date together. You had a blast! You bounced off each other, you learnt so much about each other. Then, imagine that after that date, everything just became functional. You didn't ask any more questions. What would happen to that relationship do you think? The relationship would become dull and feel like it was dying. It would not be a place where magic happens.



When we support people with learning disabilities, we choose how we create the relationship. We choose the lens we see with. We choose if we are curious or not. If we choose not to discover with a person, we are, in effect, shutting down a person's world. We are closing down opportunities and possibilities. We are choosing a way that is more dull. By choosing to want to be genuinely curious, we can open up possibility. Think about that scrambled egg moment and that conversation. In no time, a conversation revealed a part of the person we didn't know. Camping. Who knew! It's a possible joy that can be brought into someone's life. In two seconds, you shared a magic moment that opened up a new possibility for the person. And life should be about creating magic moments shouldn't they - for and with the people we support and for ourselves.

One way of truly discovering who a person is to understand their life story. To understand this, you can gather together people that know and love a person and create a space for people to comfortably share memories and stories of that person's life. It may be of difficult times, funny memories between brothers and sisters, a whole range of moments. A powerful starting point is asking the group about when the person was born and then listening to the unravelling story that follows. During those conversations, what you see is the light bulb moments of why someone reacts in certain ways, what's important to them etc. The lived experience of the person and of the family has a direct impact on how they live, think, behave, and experience life now.

In our opinion, this way of working should be a foundation block for beginning to support people and informing support plans to guide the support team.

The question for you is which Support Worker will you be? Will you be the Support Worker who is curious and keeps discovering who a person is or will you be the Support Worker with the narrower lens?

It's over to you!



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT EVERYDAY MOMENTS WITH PEOPLE CAN YOU USE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT A PERSON E.G. TRAVELLING BY BUS.

2. WHAT WAY OF ASKING QUESTIONS HELPS YOU FIND OUT THE MOST ABOUT SOME-ONE?

3. WHAT RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT COULD DO WITH A LITTLE CURIOSITY INVESTMENT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** make sure you are genuinely curious.
2. **Do** discover in everyday moments – use time together (cooking, chatting) as chances to learn more.
3. **Do** keep the relationship alive – continue asking, listening, and learning so the connection grows and stays fresh.

1. **Don't** rely only on documents –they offer a limited view and shouldn't define the person.
2. **Don't** stop being curious after the first meeting – a relationship becomes dull if you stop discovering.
3. **Don't** shut down possibilities – by losing the interest and failing to explore more, There's always more to learn.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/a-practical-guide-to-supported-decision-making/

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/A-Practical-Guide-to-The-Reach-Standards-2019-compressed-1-2.pdf

Case Study: How many times?

Imad, a man with learning disabilities in his 50s, was told that he was going to have to move because the house he lived in was closing down. Imad's behaviour started to change. He was clearly distressed about this. The organisation wanted to figure out how to support Imad.

They asked Paradigm to facilitate a conversation with Imad and his family to explore how best to support Imad moving forward. Paradigm invited Imad, his family, Social Worker and Psychologist and Imad's Key Worker to come together to create a plan for moving forward.

The conversation started by Paradigm, asking Imad's family to talk about when and where Imad was born. This led to a whole conversation of the family sharing memories of love, challenge and upset. Imad listened with fascination and then started to join the conversation with memories of school, college, first residential home, parents dying ... so by the end of the conversation, Paradigm had the whole story of Imad's life to date.

For the family, it was a hugely emotional experience. No-one had ever spent time to truly listen and understand who Imad was to ensure that Imad would get the right support to live a good life. They could not believe what it revealed. The Social Worker was surprised how much was discovered in this short time.

The biggest insight was that Imad had moved a staggering **9 times**, and only once had this been a move of his choice. Every other move had been a crisis response to things like bullying, services closing down and isolation.



People were shocked. Suddenly Imad's distress made sense. They could see all the important elements needed to plan a positive move where he was included in deciding where he lived, who he lived with, and how he lived his life with the right support.

This would not have happened without the space being created to discover and understand who Imad is and the impact his story had on his life today.

Chapter 2

The love and knowledge of a family

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Andy Clarke
Parent



Nadia Clarke
Self-advocate

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When someone needs support, bringing the right people together, as a team, can work wonders - especially when it's all centred around the person. You, as a Personal Assistant or Support Worker, are the connector and the bridge to people living life to its fullest. But it's important to remember that it's the person's family who have been and may still be, the steady foundation holding everything together:

The vital importance of good personal assistance is the foundation for our daughter's full independent living, through development of trusted, respectful and professional relationships. Offering a welcoming, flexible and compassionate environment for Personal Assistants and our daughter to thrive and achieve the maximum possible from life.'

Katie Clarke, Parent



Family can be an essential ally to Support Workers and Personal Assistants, not just through their love and involvement, but also through their insight, experience, and deep understanding of what's possible for their loved one.

Here are some important points to consider when you give your support:

Family have precious insight and knowledge that no-one else will have

Family members will often have a deep and lasting understanding of a person's history, personality, preferences, and emotional needs. This unique insight can help guide how you support a person that aligns with their likes, lifestyle and values.

Good communication and working collaboratively is key

Families can help you understand and be clear about a person's needs, desires and ambitions, through good lines of communication. Family members with a good healthy involvement and working relationship are a key part of the feedback loop – being able to identify what's working and what's not working, reinforcing positive practice and helping you find solutions when things get tough. Family members may be the ones who know about what has worked well in the past and they may know of additional resources and opportunities, helping to make these connections for your support team.

Family make great advocates!

Valued family members are often good advocates for people with additional needs because it's likely they have been doing this for many years!

And this ability to advocate can be crucial when things are uncertain and important decisions must be made. With their support, families can help you and the person you both support navigate the path to getting what's needed.

Respect boundaries and the family's knowledge



Family have played and may continue to play a very important part in a person's life. Having good links and connections with family who are important to a person alongside clarity and honesty about each person's involvement, can really help with your role, the family's role and boundaries being respected.

Celebrate achievements, no matter how big or small

It's important to recognise and celebrate a person's achievements with family members. This fosters a sense of community and shared success and celebrates everyone's involvement.

Family are likely to have spent many years fighting for their adult child to get the right support (since their birth). It's important to understand that whilst Social Care is supposed to provide people and their families with the support they need, families often have to keep fighting for this and it's often one battle after the next. This takes a lot of love and energy. It can be exhausting, challenging, disempowering, isolating and repetitive which can be very draining and disheartening for families.

When you step into the role of a Support Worker or Personal Assistant, it's important to remember that family members (whether parents, siblings, or others) don't stop being family. Their love and their want to connect remain strong, and in most cases, they still want to be actively involved in their loved one's life.

Being able to celebrate and share in someone's successes is important to family and helps them continue to be part of their life, beyond the challenging moments, as any parent would naturally want to do.

By prioritising family involvement and support, you can really enhance the quality of care you give to people and create a more holistic approach in your practice, enriching the support and care you give and empowering families.

You can maximise this by your connections and relationships with families but also by making sure that families, where appropriate, are part of training for new Support Workers and Personal Assistants, helping to explore the ways and means to balance the freedom needed to explore preferences and to take some risks. Involved family members can help people and their support team to believe and explore: What is out there? What is possible? How do we safely get there?

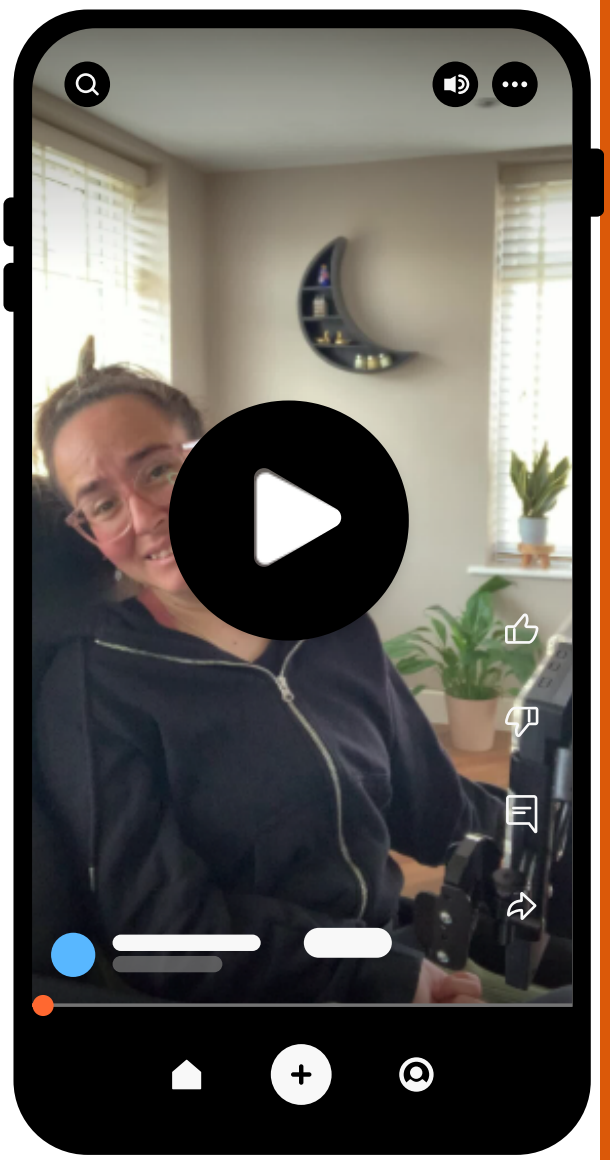
Nadia's Experience

Growing up my parents wanted me to go into mainstream education with my siblings. We had to move to Halifax in West Yorkshire because schools in Northumberland were not able to support this. My parent's campaigned for 2 years because they believed that disabled children need the same opportunities as other children in education.

At 8 years old, I got my first Direct Payment budget and was able to employ Support Workers (Personal Assistants) for the first time. They supported me after school to do my homework and I had lots of fun at weekends with them.

Leaving college had a huge impact on my mental health as I didn't know what I wanted to do. There were no work opportunities and the council wanted to reduce my budget. The council and Social Worker wanted to have agency staff visiting me for 20 mins at my parents' house! Luckily this didn't happen because we campaigned and challenged the council - and we won!

For years I looked for some voluntary work, but I face many barriers because I have Cerebral Palsy, I am Deaf and an AAC user. Working full time is difficult because of my disability and needing PA support. With support from an amazing team of PAs I have achieved my goal and now volunteer at People First.



I've been living independently now for 2 years with 24 hour support from my PA team. It's amazing, I love it. I still have the support of my family, but I feel free not living with my parents, I make all my own decisions and choices.

As part of my work and volunteering I do presentations at conferences, universities and workshops. In my leisure time, I love to travel, go swimming, skiing, climbing, walking, cinema, gigs, festivals and meet with my friends and family. This is really important to me and it works because my team of PAs have regular communication and the support of my family. Staying busy helps massively with my mental health. In the future I would like a dog, do more travelling and I really want to be an aunty.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT OTHER RESOURCES MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO YOU ABOUT PERSON-CENTRED AND SOCIAL MODEL WORKING PRACTICES?
2. HOW CAN I SUPPORT OTHER WORKERS IN THE TEAM AND THOSE WHO ARE PART OF THE NATURAL COMMUNITY?
3. DO I HAVE ALL OF THE NECESSARY INFORMATION REGARDING EXTENDED FAMILY SUPPORT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1 **Do** communicate with wider family members in a person-centred approach.	1 **Don't** allow personal feelings to dominate your working and professional approach.
2 **Do** value the knowledge and experience of family members.	2 **Don't** be afraid to share your beliefs and give constructive feedback.
3 **Do** provide and encourage everyone to be involved in a range of training.	3 **Don't** be afraid to try new things, whilst making sure you have good risk assessments.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/

https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Planning-for-the-future-England.pdf

Case Study: Family wisdom

When Maya started supporting Sam, a man in his 30s with profound disabilities, she quickly saw how much his brother, understood him. Sajib knew every small sign : the lift of an eyebrow that meant yes, the strong hum that meant no.

At first, Maya felt unsure how to connect with Sam in the same way. Instead of guessing, she decided to learn directly from Sajib. Over a few cups of tea, Sajib shared what had worked over the years: Sam loved being outside, but sudden noises made him anxious. He relaxed when people spoke softly and gave him time to process. With Sajib's help, Maya built these insights into Sam's Support Plan.

Together, they explored ways for Sam to enjoy his garden safely. Maya spoke with a local Occupational Therapist about outdoor seating and sensory plants, and the neighbours agreed to keep the side gate clear so Sam's wheelchair could get through easily. Soon, short trips outside became a regular joy.

The change was huge. Sam was calmer, smiled more, and even began responding to his support team more clearly. Sajib felt listened to and valued, saying, 'For the first time, it feels like we're all on the same team.'

This experience reminded Maya that families often hold a lifetime of knowledge – things no file can capture. By working with them, and linking up with others in the community, support becomes not just effective, but deeply human. Families are partners, not bystanders. Their wisdom can help us see a person more fully.



Chapter 2

Getting to know each other

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Sakander Najib
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Katie Peacock
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Getting to know someone well is at the heart of Gr8 support. It's about building a relationship based on trust, respect, and mutual understanding. This section is about what happens in the early stages of getting to know each other and how that can be built on. It's about the everyday moments that gradually build connection - a shared laugh, a familiar routine, a bit of music in the background while making a cuppa. Real relationships grow in the small things.

Why it matters

Support isn't something we do to someone. It's something we build **with** each other, together.

When people feel understood and respected, they're more likely to feel safe, confident, and in control of their own life. Support becomes more meaningful, more personal, and more effective.

It's not about having all the answers - it's about being curious, being present, and being open to learning from each other. Take your time.There's no fixed timeline for getting to know someone. Sometimes you click straight away. Other times, especially if someone has been through difficult experiences or lots of change, trust might take longer to build.

Relationships develop through everyday interactions - not just through paperwork or planning meetings. Something as simple as finding out someone's favourite biscuit, taking time to sit quietly together, or picking up on what helps each other feel calm can speak volumes.



First meetings

Maybe you've already met during the recruitment process but if not, a bit of preparation goes a long way. Maybe consider swapping photos, or one-page profiles, or just a few things you'd like each other to know. This creates a sense of shared anticipation, a friendly curiosity rather than anxiety.

First meetings don't have to be formal. In fact, they often work better when they're not. A relaxed setting can make all the difference. It might be someone's living room, their favourite café, a walk in the park, or a bus ride to somewhere familiar. Meeting someone where they already feel at ease helps create a more natural connection. If someone they already know and trust is there too, it can ease any nerves - and help bridge the gap between 'someone new' and 'someone I might feel comfortable with'. Sometimes, just sharing a photo or a short 'about me' beforehand can make that first meeting feel less like starting from scratch.

It's the little things that show thoughtfulness - checking if the café menu fits the person's dietary or cultural needs, making sure the space is accessible, or even just knowing someone's preferred name or pronouns before you arrive.

A few things that help

When you're getting to know someone, be genuinely interested. Ask open questions - not just 'Do you like music?' but 'What kind of music makes you feel good?' or 'What's a song that reminds you of something happy?'



Pay attention to body language and energy. Give people space to answer in their own time. If someone finds it hard to express themselves with words, notice how they show joy or discomfort in other ways. Sometimes it's a smile, a pause, or a shift in posture that says the most. Its important to share a bit about yourself - it doesn't have to be personal or heavy. Just letting someone know, 'I love being near the sea' or 'I'm not a morning person either!' can help build mutual understanding.

Connection is 2 ways.

What we both need

Support Workers need enough time, space, and meaningful information to start well. Not just risk assessments or notes - but real insight into how someone communicates, what helps them feel calm, and what's important to them.

People being supported need choice and control - to know who's coming, what to expect, and to feel like they have a say. Familiar faces, clear communication, and a pace that suits them all help build rapport, confidence and safety. It's not about rushing - it's about having the time, space and pace to listen and get to know each other.

Sometimes someone else can offer insights - a family member, friend, or person who knows the person well. They might share what puts the person at ease, what to avoid, or what really interests them up. Don't be afraid to ask. When we take time to really get to know each other, people feel more relaxed, more in control, and more able to express their needs. Trust begins to replace anxiety. Support becomes more responsive, more flexible, and more human leading to Support Workers feeling more confident, connected, and grounded in their role.

Respect and boundaries

Getting to know someone well doesn't mean forgetting that you're in a professional role. Good support always includes clear, healthy boundaries. That means being mindful of what's appropriate, following your organisation's policies, and always respecting the person's and their family's wishes. Boundaries aren't about being distant, they're about creating a space where trust and partnership can grow. It's okay to build warmth and connection, but it's also important to know where the lines are, and to be able to talk about them openly if things feel unclear.

Getting to know someone isn't a task to complete - it's something that unfolds over time and a practice to keep alive - remember people change! Every conversation, every laugh, every shared experience builds a stronger foundation.

The better we know each other, the better life can be.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT SMALL THINGS DO YOU TEND TO NOTICE FIRST ABOUT SOMEONE AND WHAT MIGHT YOU BE MISSING?
2. WHEN HAVE YOU TRULY FELT CONNECTED WITH SOMEONE YOU SUPPORT AND WHAT HELPED THAT HAPPEN?
3. HOW DO YOU BALANCE BEING FRIENDLY, CURIOUS, AND HUMAN, WHILE STILL HOLDING CLEAR BOUNDARIES?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1 **Do** create an engaging, fun 1 page profile to introduce yourself.	1 **Don't** assume anything. Always ask and check.
2 **Do** have 3 interesting, open questions ready before you meet.	2 **Don't** make decisions and choices for a person. Give them control.
3 **Do** make sure you are fully listening and present with person. It's obvious if you are not!	3 **Don't** assume a non-verbal person can't communicate. They can. You need to notice what they are communicating.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/learning-disabilities-toolkit-top-tips.pdf
https://teamdsc.com.au/resources/35-years-at-the-front-line-what-i-wish-every-support-worker-knew

Case Study: Meeting Gareth

‘When I first met Gareth, we went out for a drive in his car, which he loves. He really enjoys the feeling of movement, and it helped him feel relaxed. We stopped for an ice cream along the way, and just spent time together with no pressure.



Someone who knew him well came with us, which was really helpful. They were able to give me little insights and support the conversation in a gentle way. It wasn’t formal at all, no long introductions or information overload. Just two people meeting for the first time.

Because we weren’t rushing, I had space to take things in, and Gareth had space to be himself. It felt like a proper moment - personal, positive, and really different to the usual interviews or inductions.

That first meeting became something I will always remember, and it gave me so much more confidence to support him.’

Jade Owens, Support Worker at Exclusively Inclusive

Reflective questions:

1. What are the 3 most important ingredients to helping you get to know someone, and them get to know you.
2. How can you prioritise having time to get to know someone new that you are supporting in your practice?
3. How can you make sure this is prioritsed in your orgaisation?

‘We can’t ever claim to know someone fully.
But we can keep showing up, keep listening,
and keep learning -
always on their terms.’

Fi Jenkinson, Support Worker at Exclusively Inclusive



Chapter 2

Gr8 communication

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Gr8 communication is about more than words. It's about truly connecting with the whole person, being curious, present, and noticing not just what someone says, but how they say it. It means tuning in to facial expressions, gestures, body language, silences, and behaviours. It's **Total Communication**. It's how we build trust, connection, and a sense of belonging. It's the foundation of Gr8 support. Every day, Support Workers build relationships through thousands of communication moments: understanding a look, recognising a familiar gesture, or simply knowing when to pause and wait are moments of beautiful connection. **It's about being with, not doing to.**

Everyone Communicates

A smile, a sound, a pause, or a shift in posture can say more than words. If we focus only on speech, we miss the many ways people express who they are, what they feel, and what they need. Communication is not just about talking it's about expressing and being understood.

Gr8 communication is rooted in patience, empathy, and presence. It requires going at the speed of trust, and being okay with not always getting it right. What matters is the willingness to keep showing up, to keep listening, and to keep learning. Sometimes the quietest moments hold the deepest meaning: the gentle touch of a hand, a shared smile, or comfortable silence. These are the building blocks of connection. Gr8 communication happens when someone feels that you're really with them, that you care and that they matter.

Making Space for Communication

Being a Support Worker means creating space for someone else's voice to shine through. It means discovering what the person is really trying to say, how they are feeling and what matters most to them in that moment.

We must listen with curiosity and respond with care. A person may use few or no words, but they're still telling us a great deal. Every sound, movement, or behaviour carries meaning.



If someone becomes withdrawn or distressed, consider what they might they be communicating. Are they in pain, overwhelmed, seeking reassurance, or simply asking for space. Someone might clap their hands when excited, go quiet when unsure, or glance toward something they want. These are meaningful ways of expression.

All behaviour is communication, every action is a message!

Presence matters most

Communication is always happening, in the routines, the pauses, the laughter, and the relationships we build. It might be playing a favourite song, sometimes someone might like you to simply sit quietly with them. You might mirror what they are doing, showing that you are noticing what they do and that you are responding to their actions by doing the same or something similar. This communication style is often described as '**Intensive Interaction**'. This is a powerful yet sensitive way of being with, engaging with, and responding to someone by following their lead.

Being present doesn't mean always having something to say. It means being open to what's being shared, in whatever way it's shared. When we slow down and match someone's pace, we create safety, trust, and a chance for connection to grow. Some people use symbol boards, communication apps, or objects of reference to communicate. These are great tools, but without presence, patience, and empathy, even the best tools won't lead to connection.

Gr8 communication means showing someone: 'I see you. I'm with you.' It's about creating the time, space, and encouragement for them to express themselves in their own way.

Nothing About Us Without Us

People with learning disabilities are too often left out of conversations about their own lives. Even with good intentions, it can feel like decisions are made for them, not with them, this can lead to feelings of exclusion and to them facing inequalities.

Gr8 communication means actively including people in choices and conversations that affect them. This might mean using Easy Read materials, breaking things down step by step, using photos or objects, or just checking in more often.

People are experts in their own lives and everyone has a right to be part of decisions about their own life. Support Workers play a vital role in making that possible, by listening deeply, and championing someone's voice however it is expressed.

Identity and Culture

People who have learning disabilities and are from minoritised communities are doubly disadvantaged. They have often experienced misunderstanding and discrimination which can affect how safe they feel communicating and lead to further significant inequalities.



Gr8 communication means creating emotionally and culturally safe spaces, where people feel free to express who they are. Being mindful of one's own assumptions or biases and working to remove barriers to communication that lead to people facing inequalities is key.

Learn what matters to someone: faith, food, gender roles, language, clothing, and family dynamics. If someone uses a particular name or pronoun, reflect that. If they need interpretation or cultural support, help make that happen. You don't need to have all the answers, just be open, respectful, and ready to learn. A thoughtful question can open the door to real connection.

Learn the person's story



Everyone communicates in their own way. Learn someone's personal style, their humour, routines, signs of joy or stress, preferences, fears, and comfort zones.

Knowing someone's story helps you understand how and why they communicate in the ways they do.

Learning where they've come from, what they love, what they struggle with, gives depth to how you understand their communication.

Supporting colleagues

Team support strengthens how the team works and communicates together so team members can support each other and the people they support even better.

When Support Workers understand each other's ways of communicating, they create a more effective team, that is ready to listen attentively and respond with care, to tune in not just to someone's day, but to their hopes, wishes, and how they want to live their life.

Gr8 communication is not about perfection.

It's about being real, being respectful, and always being willing to listen to everyone involved.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHEN HAVE I PAUSED TO CONSIDER, 'WHAT MIGHT THIS BEHAVIOUR BE COMMUNICATING?', RATHER THAN JUST REACTING TO IT?
2. HOW DO I CHECK MY OWN ASSUMPTIONS OR BIASES, ESPECIALLY WHEN SUPPORTING SOMEONE FROM A DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUND OR COMMUNITY?
3. HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT A PERSON'S STORY?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** be curious, stay open to what someone may be trying to tell you, even if it's not in words.
2. **Do** learn the person's story and personal beliefs.
3. **Do** support your colleagues, remember its not about perfection, its about being real and willing to listen to everyone involved.

1. **Don't** fill every silence: Pauses are spaces where meaning can grow.
2. **Don't** speak FOR someone without involving them.
3. **Don't** assume one size fits all. What works for one person may not work for another. Communication is deeply individual.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.communicationmatters.org.uk
https://www.hpft.nhs.uk/services/learning-disability-services/useful-resources/

Case Study: ‘I Broken It’ – Understanding Julie’s Communication

Julie spent many years in a long-stay hospital. One of the ‘villas’ on site was used for people whose behaviour was seen as ‘challenging’. Julie ended up living there for long periods.

The environment was noisy and overwhelming, and Julie often became distressed and smashed things, such as furniture or TVs. When this happened, she would shout, ‘I broken it’. Staff would then ‘remove’ her to an isolation room to punish her. This had the unintended effect that she escaped from the unbearable noise and learned this was an effective way of having some peace.

Years later, Julie moved into her own home. She had more control over her life; her environment was calm and supportive. Her new team noticed something that puzzled them at first: Julie would sometimes say, ‘I broken it,’ even when nothing was broken.

With time, her supporters realised this phrase had become a way for Julie to communicate distress, a learned expression from her time in hospital. It wasn’t about an object being damaged anymore. It was her way of saying, ‘I feel overwhelmed’ or ‘I don’t feel right.’ Once this was understood, the team could respond with reassurance and help her feel safe again.

Julie also had a unique and distinctive way of speaking and pronouncing words. At first, this led to frequent misunderstandings and frustration, for both her and the people around her. As her team spent more time with her, they began to understand her speech. They worked with Julie to create a personal phonetic ‘ dictionary’ of key words, phrases and meanings. This helped everyone communicate more clearly. New team members could learn Julie’s language too, so they could understand what was important to her and respond with interest, care, and respect.



Julie’s story is a powerful reminder that behaviour is communication, and that to really understand someone, we need to learn their unique communication style and consider their history.

Gr8 communication starts with listening attentively, staying curious, and being open to what someone is really telling us.

‘Never underestimate a person’s potential –
they might just need your support
to develop their potential.
It’s your role to create the space and
opportunities for people to explore possibilities.’

Tom Henscel, a coach of leaders and teams



Chapter 2

Getting support right for the person

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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This chapter has been co-written with Roxanne and Leanne, twins who live together with Ann and Joyce. Ann and Joyce are part of their support team.

To get things right for the person you work for, you need to be curious, interested to learn more and take time to know someone.

'To be truly seen and heard, to be truly known is a deep human need,'
Charles Eisenstein, public speaker, author, and activist

On first meeting someone, your work is to hang out together and work out how to be in the best relationship together. You will need to read the person's Support Plan, talk to people who know them well. Friends and family are invaluable source of rich information about the person. They have been in the person's life for all of it. You are passing through.



On first meeting Roxanne and Leanne you will see two beautiful, strong powerful young women, who love fashion, are very clear about what's right for them and have negotiated a way to live together despite being very different. You must be able to sign to know them as they are both deaf and signing is how they communicate. They both use photos, their mobile phones and actions to support their communication. You must listen to them, understand them and respond to how they need things to be. If you don't get things right for them they will retreat upstairs to their bedrooms and avoid contact with you. This is easily misunderstood as them wanting space. Actually, what it means is that you are in our space and not working with us in the right way so we will keep out of your way.

Communication in a way that is right for the person is essential. You can't have an ongoing conversation if you can't communicate together. All of Roxanne and Leanne's team have done **Makaton** training. Ann, the Team Manager, has done a higher level of training in Makaton so that she can teach new staff how to sign. We use things like Makaton sign for the week on Instagram to extend our range of signs. Noticing when they like someone and might want to spend more time with that person is also important. Helping people to develop friendships and relationships is part of your work too.

Here is a link to a living library provided by National Development Team for Inclusion https://www.ndtismallsupportslivinglibrary.net/. These short stories demonstrate how to get things right for the person.

Each story demonstrates the importance of knowing someone and their family well.

You need to know the person you work with well enough in order to be discerning about the professional advice that might be provided. The advice from the sensory processing assessment carried out by an Occupational Therapist was invaluable for helping the team get things right for Roxanne and Leanne.

Understanding that Roxanne and Leanne both have a need for varied different sensory diets to help them to self soothe, and manage their emotions and feelings is essential. Being prepared to do whatever they need to do each day with them to get this sensory diet is a non-negotiable of being their Support Worker.

For Leanne, this means walking every day for between one to two hours, going to the gym using the pool and jacuzzi, dance classes, stretching and movement classes, trampolining, running, going to the cinema each week and opportunities to do fun exciting and varied things.

Roxanne needs to walk each day, to plan what's for dinner, to be in charge of the shopping list, doing the household shopping, being able to negotiate a treat when she wants them, going to work and being an artist.

It's important to Roxanne and Leanne that they can trust their staff team. They are able to work out if people are genuine and committed. To establish trust as staff we need to show up, listen, respond and keep doing this every day. We need to be resilient and strong and be able to sit alongside Leanne or Roxanne when they are struggling. There are times when each of them is less able to regulate themselves and their team need to be able to keep them safe and hold the space while they are struggling. Staff need to be curious to work out what's wrong and then put it right if we can. Being curious and noticing slight shifts and changes can help to understand what is happening when Leanne and Roxanne can't explain. It's



equally important that their family trust their staff team. This enables her parents to be able to get on with their work and being a family, knowing that they will be told if there are problems and that Roxanne and Leanne are living good lives. Openness and honesty are the key building blocks of trust if you demonstrate both in your work people you work with will feel safe and trust you.



You should also believe anything is possible with the right support. Thinking about how to support people to do what they want encourages them to grow and become strong. Often people we support are limited by what people around then believe is possible. This short film shows the impact of that:

It's important to both that their support team are the same people, no agency staff and the team cover all of the relief. It doesn't work for Roxanne and Leanne to have people in their home who don't know them or people who can't communicate with them. This makes them anxious and unsettled. The day doesn't go well if they are not supported by the right people. You have to work at being the right person.

Roxanne knows herself well and she likes people who are friendly but who can help her with boundaries, so they need to be strong like her. Roxanne needs to be in charge so you need to be a good negotiator, be fair and reliable.

Leanne needs to be able to do her own things around the house, she will decide where things go and she arranges the washing, wardrobes and shoes. It's important not to interrupt Leanne when she is putting stuff away or folding things as she is very precise and if you interfere, she will be compelled to go back and put it right before she can get on with her day.

The reality of the other person is not in what they reveal to you
but in what they cannot reveal to you. Therefore, if you would understand them,
listen not to what they say but rather to what they do not say.
Khalil Gibran, writer and philosopher

Roxanne and Leanne need you to work in a way that enables them both to be independent and directing their support. This takes a lot of skill as its very different to caring for someone., You need to be a follower and a leader at different times in the day. You need to be able to step in if things are getting unsafe and you need to be able to respect their choices and preferences. **This is your work.**
You should be doing it with a smile and from your heart.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHEN YOU MEET SOMEONE NEW IN YOUR LIFE HOW MUCH DO YOU SHARE ABOUT YOURSELF IN THE EARLY STAGES OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP?
2. WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU USE TO KEEP YOURSELF EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY OK? WHAT IS YOUR SENSORY DIET?
3. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PUT THINGS RIGHT IF TRUST HAS BEEN LOST BETWEEN YOU AND SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT? HOW DO YOU REBUILD AND REPAIR TRUST?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** have fun with the person you support. You'll see the best of someone if they are having fun.
2. **Do** know that each day you can make a difference and make someone's day if you do it right.
3. **Do** check your understanding of the person and how they want to be supported. Don't assume you know.

1. **Don't** dismiss new thoughts or ideas without testing them out
2. **Don't** stop listening to family and friends of the person you work with. They will know the person's story.
3. **Don't** be a Support Worker if your heart is not in your work. The person you support will know if you are not genuinely there for them

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://youtu.be/yakEqrbRr0c

https://www.gettalifeonline.co.uk

Case Study: Roxanne, the Artist

Being an artist is central to Roxanne's identity and sense of self. Roxanne is a member of 'Art Riot collective' and has regularly exhibited her work and been an artist in residence at a number of galleries.

Roxanne's team had to learn to help her get to the space for art or the gallery for her residence but not prompt her at all while she is creating. This required a different style of support, less active and more facilitative. It took everyone some time to get this right. Once we did, Roxanne loved working in her own time frame, she gets into a flow and cannot be interrupted then. In effect, our role as her Support Worker is to wait until she is finished and ready to go back home.

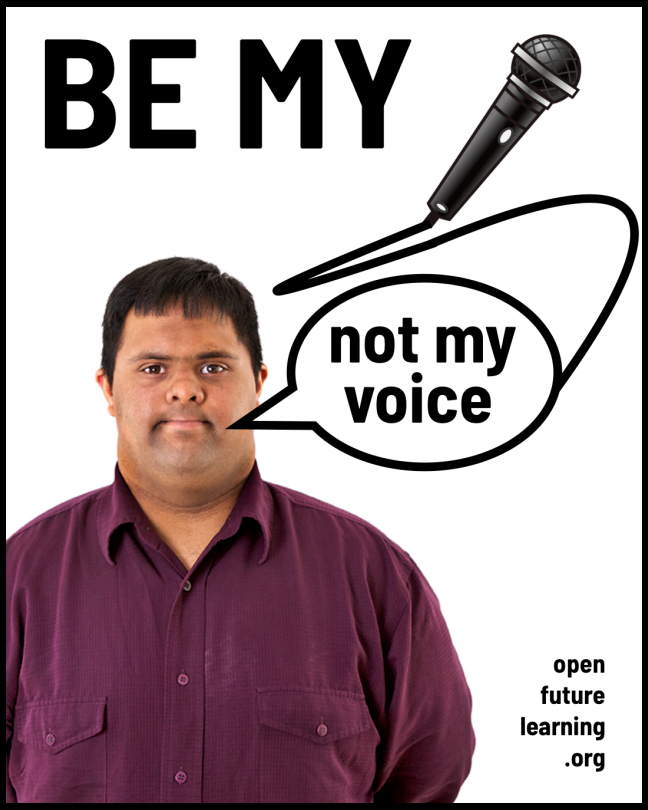
Roxanne has had her own exhibition and was successful in securing a grant from The Arts Council to develop her practice as an Artist. This work has largely been led by Art Riot Collective, Coventry. Essentially her Support Worker's role is just to get there to the right place at the right time. So, support staff need to be able to work collaboratively with other projects and accept other ideas and work with feed back to develop their work.

Kyla from Art Riot Collective often gave the team feedback and instruction about how best to support Roxanne's work in the art studio. This work has been what has helped Roxanne develop her sense of self and her identity as an artist. Roxanne is recognised as a founder member of Art Riot Collective and she has developed as a leader. This is supported by good support from her team who know her well and understand how important this is to her.











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A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker
SCAN ME

Chapter 2

Awareness of the history of people with learning disabilities

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Jan Walmsley
Professor of Learning Disability History
Open University



Donna Harrison and **Nathaniel Lawford**
Self-Advocate and Activist Historian, Self Advocate

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Why is it important to understand the history?

You may wonder why you, as a Support Worker, are asked to learn a bit about the history of people with learning disabilities. Isn't it the present and future that matters? There are some obvious answers to that question, and some which are perhaps less obvious, but we think are equally important. The obvious answer is that knowing about the history might help you understand the people you support better...

Betty, approaching 80, told me when we were recording her life story:

> I never went to school. Learnt me-self to walk holding onto the furniture in our sitting room. Never did nothing when I were younger.

If we know nothing of history, we might wonder if Betty was telling lies? Could her family not be bothered to get her to school? It's neither of those things. Betty did not go to school because she was labelled 'ineducable'. Until 1970, children whose IQ was measured below 50 did not go to school. It is quite likely that people born before the mid 1960s did not receive an education at all.

It's helpful to be aware of things like this as you are getting to know a person's story. Their experiences might well explain some behavioural quirks which are otherwise incomprehensible, like not knowing how to read or write.

The less obvious reason for why it's important to understand the history of people with learning disabilities is this: History is littered with big changes and new words. Over time, we have found new solutions to how we support people, alongside changing words too. For example, 'idiot', 'moron', and 'imbecile' were used by doctors in the 1800s and early 1900s to label people with learning disabilities. The 1913, law called the Mental Deficiency Act itself used terms like 'mentally defective' and 'feebleminded' to describe people with learning disabilities. It even suggested that these people should be kept separate from the rest of society. Over time, these words became hurtful and insulting.



But we need to be careful in this because words can distract us from what is, always has been and always will be the most important – the support systems that people with learning disabilities rely on: The families, the advocates, the friends and the workers. Use **this resource** in your teams to further bring this section to life.

Broadly, since World War 2 there have been 3 big policy changes:

1. Policy shift around institutions as society became more aware: Until the 1970s large institutions were in most places in the UK and they were the only alternative to living with family. Families were often advised, perhaps even pressurised, to give up their family member to go and live in an institution. They would have been told that their loved one would do better there, and they would be safe.

Institutions for people with learning disabilities were large, often overcrowded, and offered limited opportunities for independence and community integration. These institutions, sometimes referred to as 'mental deficiency hospitals' or 'long-stay hospitals', were characterised by a lack of individualised care, with residents often being segregated from the wider community. While some saw institutions as a 'safe haven' from poverty, others faced neglect, abuse, and poor living conditions. At their peak in 1968, 60,000 people lived in institutions. You can learn what life was like in an institution from Mabel Cooper whose story is told in this short film **No Longer Shut Up** or from the 1981 film **Silent Minority**

Eventually, institutions were discredited, in a series of well publicised scandals which revealed high levels of abuse, neglect and deprivation. The first of these at Ely Hospital, Cardiff, led the Government to begin the slow process of changing course to close the institutions. The Ely Inquiry (1969) uncovered horrors which included:



Physical Abuse:

- Patients were beaten, slapped, and dragged by their hair.
- Staff punished patients by withholding food or locking them in rooms.

Neglect:

- Many residents were left in soiled bedding and clothes for hours or days.
- There was little to no stimulation or education; patients sat idle all day.

Dehumanisation:

- Residents were treated more like prisoners than patients.
- They were spoken about and to in derogatory terms, often being denied basic dignity like proper clothing.

Lack of Oversight:

- Complaints by staff or family were often ignored or silenced.
- A culture of silence and fear permeated the institution, allowing abuse to continue unchecked.



The Inquiry marked a turning point in the way institutions and support services were scrutinised and held accountable, though the last NHS hospital/institution did not close until 2010.

2. Policy shift towards ordinary lives and people living in the community: From the 1970s on, Local Authorities were expected to provide Community Care. This initially meant hostels or group homes housing up to 50 people. Often these were people who had lived in the same large institution with the same staff who had also worked there. So unsurprisingly the same routines and culture continued.

Training Centres were created to give people something to do in the day - usually doing contract work like laundry, horticulture, assembling crackers, or packing envelopes, being paid a token sum. Although the original idea may have been to provide purpose and inclusion, in practice, many Training Centres became segregated spaces, with limited opportunities for real learning or connection with the wider community.

Gradually the social trends evolved again, to smaller Residential Group Homes, some with residential staff, others with staff who visited regularly. The Training Centres became Social Education Centres where people learned independent living skills, did jigsaws and continued to 'pass the time'.

3. Policy shift towards rights-based, person-centred support: Since the late 1990s the emphasis has been on independence, choice, rights and autonomy.

There was a shift away from residential Group Homes to supporting people live alone, or with house mates, with their own tenancies or ownership, with staff offering support. This became known as Supported Living. The focus was on choice, flexible support and community connection. The intention was to avoid a 'one size fits all' service model and to support people to live lives as equal citizens.



Supported living is not a model. It's a way of life.
Peter Kinsella, Supported Living: A New Paradigm (1993)

The change in social attitude (with its move to more person-centred support), can be seen in the White Paper 2001 'Valuing People'.

People's opportunity to have greater choice and control was increased again with the introduction of Direct Payments (1997) and later Personal Budgets pioneered by 'In Control' from 2003.

The 'watchwords' now are 'independence', 'choice', 'rights' and 'autonomy'. But loneliness and poverty, bullying and hate crime still make life difficult for many. And some institutions remain. Scandals like Winterbourne View (2011) and Whorlton Hall (2019), both revealed by TV reporters, not inspectors, remind us that institutions are not a thing of the past.

What does the past tell us?

Firstly, although policy has changed dramatically, one constant is families. Roughly 50% of people with learning disabilities lived with family even at the height of the institutional era in 1968, and that has not changed much. For many people, family are their most constant supporters. Staff come and go but family remain.

However, our little team of co-authors had a lively discussion about this!

Nathaniel's family have not been good news. He is pleased to have escaped them. And families can be over-protective, not letting people take risks and not recognising their adult status. So, the challenge for you, as a Support Worker, will be to support family relationships where possible. Not always an easy call.

Secondly, the past helps us think about community and inclusion. You no doubt want to help the people you support to be part of their local community. But history tells us that community has, from the start, been problematic for people who are seen as different. One of the reasons institutions were set up in the early 20th century was because many people were neglected or bullied, even abandoned, as families struggled to make a living. Some people may have thought it would be better to have somewhere safe for people to be.

In practice, 'community' has often meant the communities set up by local authorities for people with learning disability services like the training centres where people spent their days and also met up with friends. Local charities (like Mencap and Enable in Scotland) provided a social life for the people with learning disabilities and their parents. As segregated provision has gone out of fashion and centres have closed or are only available part time, if people are not well supported to be part of their community and maintain friendships etc, that sense of belonging and community can be hard to come by for many.

Self-advocacy groups, where they exist, are an important way for people to feel a sense of community.

The third message from history is that the experiences across generations, of being silenced, belittled, sidelined by people, by systems, by bureaucracy, can leave people untrusting, lacking confidence, anxious about new situations, fearful of those in authority, and reluctant to question them.

History offers this context, and through understanding context, we have empathy and through empathy, we reach person-centred support.

The final lesson from history gets us even closer to home. History tells us that the workforce really matters. Even in those awful institutions, there were staff who made a difference by being caring, imaginative and determined. One such person helped Mabel leave St Lawrence's.

Most people with learning disabilities will always need support from other human beings, however smart technology gets. And the quality of that support really matters. But there has never been enough attention to getting the right workforce, or enough money spent on it.

Once the workforce of institutions was medical. Institutions were run by Consultant Psychiatrists and staffed by Nurses and Nursing Auxiliaries. Once the idea that people were patients began to change, a new workforce was needed, and in 1979 the Jay Report said we need a new workforce to support Community Care. And now here you are – that new workforce of Support Workers.

Most importantly, history shows us what works: strong families and friendships, real communities, and good support from skilled, caring workers.

That's where you come in. You're part of a long line of people who've made a difference, for better or worse. You have the power to ensure that what happened in places like Ely Hospital never happens again - by recognising the equal worth of every person, and treating them with dignity, respect, humanity, and compassion every single day.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. IS THERE A SELF-ADVOCACY GROUP NEAR YOU? MIGHT THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT WANT TO EXPLORE IT TO MAKE FRIENDS AND BUILD THEIR OWN SENSE OF COMMUNITY?
2. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BUILD CONFIDENCE AND ENABLE PEOPLE TO SPEAK UP AND CHALLENGE?
3. WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO MAKE SURE THAT THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT MAINTAIN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS, OLD FRIENDS AND ADVOCATES?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** see the person you support as a whole human being with needs and wants just like anyone else.
2. **Do** find ways to help the person you support to make their own choices and decisions. This may be new to them!
3. **Do** look at the timeline to reflect on how the time the person you support grew up in might have affected how they are.

1. **Don't** EVER see the person you support as lesser than you. They are an equal human being with the same rights in life.
2. **Don't** forget the importance of helping a person to be part of their community, growing friendships and things they love doing.
3. **Don't** ignore or collude with someone not being treated well or being put in danger. Speak to your manager straight away!

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4eqzf_e4u4&t=631s

https://university.open.ac.uk/health-and-social-care/research/shld/conferences/conference-2001/weaving-tale

Case Study: Understanding the past to support the present

When Maria began supporting Elsie, a woman in her late 60s with a learning disability, she noticed she often became anxious when asked to make choices. Even simple questions like “What would you like for lunch?” made her freeze. At first, Maria thought she just preferred routine but after chatting with Elsie’s sister and finding out what went on in the 60’s for Elsie, Maria learned more about Elsie’s past.

Elsie had spent much of her early life in a long-stay hospital in the 1960s. Back then, people weren’t encouraged to make decisions. Staff decided when she ate, what she wore, and where she went. Speaking up was often punished. Knowing this helped Maria see Elsie’s reactions differently – not as difficult or ‘challenging behaviour’, but as signs and communication of old fears and habits that once kept her safe.

Maria began taking things slowly. Instead of giving lots of choices at once, she offered small, familiar steps: ‘Would you like your tea now or when your TV programme starts?’ She also built more predictability into her days, using photos and simple routines to help her feel secure.Over time, Elsie began to trust that her voice mattered. She started choosing her clothes and even chose new curtains for her room. Her confidence (and smile) grew!

The time and world someone grew up in can shape how they see life today. When we take the time to understand that history, it can stop us making unhelpful/wrong judgements and start supporting with fuller understanding, respect and empathy.



Chapter 3

Supporting people to live good lives

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Chapter 3

Introduction

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Becca Cooper
Self-Advocate



Sam Clark
Chief Executive
Learning Disability England

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Our names are Becca Cooper and Sam Clark and we have worked together on this introduction. Becca is Chair of York People First and an activist and Self Advocate who has been speaking up for people's rights more than 25 years. Becca has a learning disability and was born in Zambia. She is proud to be a black woman. Sam works at Learning Disability England. She has worked for more than 20 years alongside people building community and working for inclusion.

Let's think about what a good life is ...

A good life can vary from person to person. A good life for you will be different to a good life for us. For most people, it's usually about quite ordinary stuff like being able to go out to the places that make sense to you or doing the things that make you happy or being with people that you like or being alone if that is better for you. A good life also includes doing the boring and annoying things like cleaning, paying your bills or just sorting things out.

There must be certain things in place for people to shape the lives of their choosing (see the Good Lives Framework, Learning Disability England), such as:

- a safe home.
- good communication.
- good connections and relationships with people and places.
- to love and be loved.
- being able to speak up for yourself and be heard.
- being able to contribute in society through things like employment.
- good health.
- the right support to live your good life.

Sadly, the professional world of support and all its rules often 'flattens' people's lives and squeezes out the fun and adventure of a good life. We live in a world where people with learning disabilities are still striving to live as equals and to have the right to shape their own lives. Your role as a Support Worker can make a big difference to how much people get to do the things that matter to them and there are great ideas in this chapter that will help you do this. Becca says:

I like a night out with my friends. I enjoy going for a drink, listening to music and dancing. Some people I know do not get to do that because the service that supports them will not plan flexibly with them. They have to leave at the time the staff say, not when they are ready. This means they miss out but also I know people feel annoyed and frustrated and like their life is not important. How would you feel if it happened to you? It isn't right that people's choices are not respected or supported. Can **YOU** be part of changing this?



Why think about support to live a good life?

We (the co-authors) both know people who do not get to stay up late because the people supporting them can't or don't help make plans for a big night out - perhaps they won't adjust shift patterns for the day or don't think a night out is important.

There is the Stay Up Late guide to writing rotas that could be helpful for your team: [Learning disabilities and staff rotas – a 'No Bedtimes' guide for support teams](#).



We know that great things are possible when supporters focus on what matters to someone.

For example, one of Becca's friends, Andy, went to Spain because his supporter, Martin, helped make it happen. Martin listened to how important it was to Andy to go abroad. Andy chose Spain, and they then planned together the trip. As well as the excitement of going away, they had to do boring planning, sorting paperwork (like getting a passport) and plan how to save some money.

It is important to think about how you help people be in charge of every part of their lives because this is what can make life 'good'!

What we think makes a difference

To help someone live a good life you need to get to know them and be open to being led by them.

Having a good relationship with people you support makes a big difference and to build this, we think there needs to be:

Respect – if you respect someone, they might start to trust and respect you.

Open communication – listening, asking questions and honest conversations.

Both people present – we all need downtime or to do admin but don't be on your phone when you are supporting someone unless it is urgent.

Open in the way we think – not making assumptions or limiting people.

Flexible – thinking about what is possible and looking for a solution together.

Learning – learn about the person, their culture and background.

Family can be an important part of people's lives so don't ignore someone's family. We think you should listen to the family's opinions and experiences but always remember that you are supporting the person to live **their** good life, and you may sometimes need to support them to assert their wishes.

Sam has a friend called Charlie. Charlie, who is 30 years old, is now friends with the person who was his 1st Personal Assistant, Jack, when he was 15 years old. Charlie loved things like fencing, wall climbing and trips around the country. He and Jack tried lots of new things together. Then Jack went to college, but they kept in touch. They exchanged pictures and cards and met up a couple of times a year. Fifteen years later, this is an important relationship to both of them as it builds on lots of shared experiences and respect even though their lives are really different now.

You might not end up friends with someone you supported (**Link to section on friend/friendly**) but are you building a relationship of trust and shared understanding?

Some things to think about:

How can you be open to helping someone live their good life? Think about what it will take for you to be comfortable working that way. Yes, this includes following a Support Plan, but it is so much more than that. It is focusing on the small things that matter as well as big life goals.



You are not just supporting a person...

you are unlocking their world!

A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 3

Tapping into community

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Rishard Beckett with help of **Naomi Madden**
Self-Advocate
Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire

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I'm Rishard (on the right with Naomi). I'm now 31, I'm an accomplished professional actor, sportsman and all round legend. I come from a wonderful supportive family who I live with.



It's a very long story about my life. I'll start about 16 years ago. My mum approached a charity called Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire. They are the best people in the world. One is Naomi who helped me write this chapter, and Rachel who also worked there is my 'Number 2'! They take a good approach to helping people. Check out their 30 year story **here**.

I was part of a youth group at Grapevine called 'Get In', and also getting some advocacy from Naomi as I needed some help getting support from Social Care. But they also got me thinking about doing more, getting out more, meeting more people, pursuing my dreams. It was amazing to talk about and develop a dream for myself.

I was about 15 or 16 at that time, and I really wanted to start to do more without my mum. I used my direct payment and recruited a Support Worker that was young and would be fun to hang out with. They also needed to be outgoing, dramatic and willing to help me get out there and meet people.



My first Support Worker was Gordon. He's one of my best people. He was good at talking about mental health and stuff. He created the 'Curious Boys and Girls Club' and created lots of cool merchandise–I've still got the socks at home. When he was my Support Worker I went to my first gig without my mum, we went to see N-Dubz. It was so good! He didn't stop me mingling, he didn't stop me dancing my socks off!

I'd begun to feel like the dream of being an actor was close. And with the help of Grapevine, I joined a theatre group called 'Ego Arts'. That's how I was able to offer a role as PA to Connor who was also at 'Ego'. Connor was passionate about acting too. He is still a good friend of mine. I like to go to his house to party. He has a sister called Lilly and I get on with her too.

We did a performance with 'Ego' called 'Saving Brian's Privates'. We took this all the way to Ireland to perform. Connor and I had a great time as he has an Irish background. 'Ego' and the support I got from Connor, really helped me see acting as a career and I decided to pursue an acting course in London. My brother lives in London, so it made sense for him to be my PA and help me use the busy trains and navigate the built up streets of London. I completed the course and passed with flying colours.

Things change, people's lives change, PA's change too.

Sunny, another person from 'Ego' came next. He too had made his own show. It was about his life and about his family. Him and his mates took me to a gay bar. I had a great time. It was near my house so it was really convenient. Sunny helped me work behind the bar at Ego. That was my first job and I gained valuable experience. From here I got a job at a swanky bar called 'Drapers'. I worked there for a while. Everybody knew me. Having a job got me thinking about growing up, and being more independent. But I needed to learn to do more for myself.

Suzie came next. She loves cooking and she helped me create recipes and we practiced cooking. We created easy recipes I could cook myself. Maybe this is why I ended up working at a cafe. But to be honest the Cafe was mainly about the cakes and nice coffee! I can cook lots for myself at home, I nearly burnt the house down once, but we don't need to talk about that lol!

My next Support Worker didn't work out as we were very different people.

Then there was Paul, I met him through Richard. Richard and I were matched to work together for a local City of Culture project. Richard is a playwright and shared my passion for performance and acting. This led to me being in a performance at Fargo Village as part of City of Culture. Richard introduced me to Paul who became my Support Worker, also an actor and together we worked on 'life things' listened to music, went to shows that exposed me to real life things like sex and relationships. I also got involved with 'Springboard' at the Belgrade which was amazing as it felt like Paul and Richard had helped me find my people. Richard and I also performed our play 'Instrumental' together at the Coventry Shoot Festival. You can view it on Youtube:Link is here **www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ihVkldXhNs**.

My family suffered a bereavement shortly after this time. My grandad who I was very close to - we all were - passed away. This made me sad. When I am sad I get angry, when I'm angry I get into trouble. That's where Mel, my new PA helped. She is a friend of a friend. Mel had a dance background and helped me develop performances to help deal with the sadness of losing my granddad. We worked together for 3 months rehearsing in the square outside my house. It was the best therapy anyone could ask for.



Mel and I performed our work together at '#CovMindtheGap'. Performing this really helped me deal with stress, worry and gave me a means to dump my emotions.

I also took up boxing at this time too. My PA introduced me to Glen, Warren, Joe, and his brother Jordan who worked there. They have a boxing gym in Marbella now. I really want to go to Marbella and check it out.

Anyway, through the amazing Support Workers, my family and Grapevine, I've starred in BBC's Casualty and Doctors several times, plus channel 4's drama 'No Offence'. I've even done some modelling. I have an agent that helps me source acting opportunities, and I'm registered with ZBD Talent.

Last year I turned 30, my friends and family all joined me to celebrate – all wearing my face!



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT CREATIVE WAYS CAN YOU LOOK AT TO HELP SOMEONE EXPLORE LIFE, GROW AND MEET OTHERS?
2. WHAT WELL MANOEUVRED, WELL ORGANISED RISKS CAN YOU TAKE WITH THE PERSON? MAKE SURE YOU AGREE THIS WITH THEM.
3. WHAT KIND OF THINGS ARE YOU INTO? ARE YOU A GOOD MATCH FOR THE PERSON YOU ARE SUPPORTING?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1 **Do** find common interests, or take time to find out about the things a person likes.	1 **Don't** make me do things I'm not into.
2 **Do** plan WITH me .	2 **Don't** hold me back from relationships.
3 **Do** help me meet others, I need you to be confident in helping me meet people.	3 **Don't** let life stand still.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ihVkldXhNs

https://www.grapevinecovandwarks.org/grapevine-news/30-years-of-grapevine-heres-our-story-of-deep-social-change/

Case Study:
The power of community

Abiola doesn't use words to communicate, but everyone who knows him agrees on one thing: that he is wonderfully sociable. His team noticed that while Abiola enjoyed spending time with staff, most of his week was spent at home or in day activities with other people with learning disabilities. They wanted him to be part of his local community - the one just outside his front door.

After exploring ideas together, the team supported Abiola to try out a local church (as they knew that the church had been a big part of his childhood and his family life). From his very first visit, he was captivated by the singing and the friendly faces. Over time, he became a regular, greeting people with his bright smile and infectious laugh. Before long, he was invited to join the coffee mornings and a craft group.

The vicar quickly saw how much Abiola loved being part of things. He offered Abiola the chance to have a copy of the church keys and be the welcomer/opener to church rooms when different groups and activities were happening at the church ... with the help of his Support Workers. Abiola took great pride in this volunteer role.

Abiola's team also helped him get to know other local places. Shopkeepers learned his name and how he liked to communicate. At his favourite restaurant, the manager even bought a special blender so Abiola could enjoy his meals like everyone else. Now, when Abiola goes out, he's greeted by waves and smiles wherever he goes. He's not just included – he's known!

Community isn't built through services. It grows through trying things out, small acts of kindness, discovering what a person wants to do or try and giving things a shot... as you never know what can grow from this.



Abiola may not have enjoyed the church and then his team would have tried something else. The willingness, openness, curiosity and action of Abiola's team has created a beautifully strong relationship with Abiola where he feels valued and seen.

And when people are truly seen and welcomed, everyone's world becomes bigger and brighter, don't you think?

‘Community is much more than belonging to something; it’s about doing something together that makes belonging matter’.

Brené Brown, researcher, storyteller and podcaster



Chapter 3

People connecting through the things they love in life

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Alex Roland
Support Worker/Founder
Your IT Now



Florence Little
Campaigns Officer
Stay Up Late

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Have you ever done your favourite activity with someone who really wasn't interested or didn't want to be there? How did it make you feel? Did you come away feeling deflated? Sad? Like you wasted your time? What did you say to the person you were with?

On the other hand, have you ever shared your passion with someone who totally got it and was on the same wavelength? Have you experienced electric-like connectivity with another 'super-fan'?

Now, imagine you are someone for whom their hobby or special interest is something they only get to do once or twice a month. Imagine the difference having someone who is passionate and engaged with it can make. Knowing your limited time is absolutely being used to its maximum.

Whatever our passion is, when we meet others who share it, we can experience the feeling of 'finding our people'. Our very own group of people who get every detail and nuance of the passion we feel for our chosen subject. It's an instant link and leads to a recognition of who that person might be, what matters to them.



When we connect through shared interests, we can bypass whole hours of 'getting to know someone'. Our shared references and understanding of our chosen subject make it easier to relate with one another, as well as building a clear picture of who the other person is, beyond their diagnosis. Of course, as our relationship develops, we often 'circle back' to fill in the gaps of our knowledge of the person we are working with, but common passions are like finding a 'shortcut' in a game. They suddenly take you straight to the main story and bypass the long arduous journey of discovery, fraught with misunderstanding and miscommunication. That's not to say there's still not plenty to discover, and it can take time, but having an 'in' or a 'shortcut' will keep you ahead of the game.

It's easy for us as Support Workers to forget how important someone's chosen passion can be, whether it's football or video games, knitting or choir singing, rock bands or late-night DJs. The things that matter to us can be as varied as there are people.

In fact, we think society doesn't realise how important hobbies and interests are for everyone. They're seen as an 'extra' instead of a big part of what makes our lives great, as well as making us feel valued and fulfilled as individuals. When you're 'in care', how you spend your time is often decided with the involvement of others, which means you have to defend or justify just how important these things are - which isn't always an easy thing to do, but that's where you can really make a difference.

Sometimes our special interest or hobbies can seem like a 'super-power' to people who aren't involved. It gives us an area of our lives where we're not only more experienced than the 'person in the street'. We also possess knowledge and skills that go way beyond what most people would consider 'average'. An area where we can truly excel and exceed expectations! Having this space to be exceptional, or even just confident in your abilities, does no end of good to your sense of self. It helps connect you with yourself as well as those around you who share the same passion and knowledge and enables you to engage other people in the very thing you love.

On the flip side, I, Alex, tend to be a jack of all trades (master of absolutely none) and still get total pleasure from my hobbies. They open new worlds, whether it's dancing to music I love or going to new places on a kayak. They allow me to meet new people, test myself and see things from a different perspective. A lot of people 'in care' are looking for connection and something they feel is missing is a place to find it. Hobbies can give you a shared understanding with people, but they also just bring you into contact with more people. Reconnecting you with a community that already exists around you and opening a world of opportunity if these connections, and these hobbies, are given space to grow.



Something else we should mention is that we need to be careful not to prioritise which hobbies matter most. We all like different things and what makes your heart sing, might make another... shrivel?! This also goes beyond our preferences to our expectations of what might be appropriate for people. You'll never know until you try, and we can promise you, when it comes to nightlife (which we know is a particular worry), there is so much life to be lived. A good night out, provides so many opportunities to connect through shared interests – music, a silly joke, a shared moment – and it doesn't rely on your skill (or 'capacity') at singing, but how much you love singing! There are ways to do it so that everyone feels comfortable (like starting slow).

Trying out new things, learning together, will enrich your life as it does the person's you're supporting.

Case Study: Sharing a love for the ‘beautiful game’

Years ago, when I was a Social Services Support Worker, I worked in a home with Dave. Dave was passionate about football in general and Liverpool in particular. I have zero knowledge (or interest) in football so although I was obviously happy to help Dave and spend time with him, I didn’t share his passion for the ‘beautiful game’.



My colleague and mate Andrea, on the other hand, was a different story. She was just as passionate about footie as Dave and would think nothing of driving up to Anfield - we live in Somerset - for a game. Much as I enjoyed working with Dave, I never had that common bond with him that Andrea did. Seeing the joy in his face when she drove him off to Anfield for a match was just amazing! From Andrea’s point of view, she was being paid to do something she enjoyed AND she got to share it with someone who was equally passionate! Win win!

Sometimes being a good Support Worker is about knowing the best way to work with someone and recognise that if we truly want to connect people with their communities , we may not always, 100% of the time, be the best person to do that (shock horror!). But that’s absolutely fine. Why have an ‘Alex’ when you can have an ‘Andrea’?!

We need to recognise and embrace our passions, and we need to allow Support Workers to bring theirs with them. Our world of Social Care has never truly been just about qualifications and certificates, important though they are. No-one gets into this career for the huge financial rewards! We do it because we want to make a difference in people’s lives and bringing passion to our work is one way to do it.
Love Caribbean food? Cook it where you work! Know everything about Triumph motorcycles? Bring it to work! Know who the voice actor behind Mario is? Tell people about it! You will be amazed at the number of other people who will share your passion.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WOULD YOU WANT TO WORK WITH YOU?!
2. DO THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT GET TO DO THE THINGS THEY LOVE? SERIOUSLY, DO THEY?
3. WHAT TIME IS EVERYONE READY FOR BED ON A FRIDAY NIGHT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** be open to the possibility that you cannot be the total solution for the person you support.
2. **Do** bring all your life experience to the table, the most random experiences can offer the most insight!
3. **Do** prioritise and fight for people's hobbies, they are just as important as other needs.

1. **Don't** be afraid to say 'I don't know'. But do try and find out!
2. **Don't** worry if you're not an expert on every subject. Learning together is fabulous!
3. **Don't** bring your own bias to the table. Be open.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH80ibYpyXs

https://socialworkcatsandrocketscience.com

Case Study: From the back of the room to the heart of the scene

Our Gig Buddies project is designed to create friendships between people based on shared interests and to connect people with learning disabilities to their wider communities. Quite a big ask (and a mouthful), you might say! But we've found that the first step - pairing up a volunteer with someone with a learning disability - goes a long way.

Take Mike and Jay. They were matched based on their love of live music. When they first started going to gigs, Mike was really nervous and felt uncomfortable, so they used to stand right at the back.

Fast forward a year, and how things have changed! One day, Mike was out having a cup of tea with his sister in a Brighton coffee shop, having a catch-up, when all of a sudden this big burly punk-rocker strides up to them and gives Mike a massive hug and a 'Hello, how are you? Coming to the gig on...?'

Mike's sister sat there with her jaw on the floor. She hadn't realised that Mike had become so well known on the punk scene and that promoters and bands alike were now regularly offering him tickets and including him in their world.

Needless to say, Mike no longer stands at the back and he and Jay are about to go to their 20th gig together!



Chapter 3

Relationships are the bread and butter of life

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Dr Claire Bates and **Sui-Ling**
Supported Loving Leader and Self-Advocate
Choice Support

We are Sui-Ling Tang and Claire Bates, and we are part of Supported Loving, a network bringing together anyone who is passionate about good support surrounding relationships and sex.

We do a lot of training, often starting with this question: 'What's the most important thing in your life?'

The answer is almost always: relationships. This tells us that love, connection, and companionship are at the heart of what it means to be human. From our research and talking to people with learning disabilities, we know that most people want meaningful friendships and relationships. People value having a partner for the same reasons anyone does: someone to enjoy life with, to love and be loved by, and for emotional support. Good support is essential.

Different kinds of relationships that matter

When we think about relationships, we often focus on romantic ones, but there are many kinds of relationships that matter:

- **Friendships:** People we care about, have fun with, and trust. People with learning disabilities are more likely to be lonely.
- **Romantic Relationships:** A partner to share love and affection with. Many want one, but fewer people with learning disabilities have a partner.
- **Family Relationships:** Parents, siblings, or extended family. People with learning disabilities are less likely to be parents.
- **Professional Relationships**: Support Workers, Social Workers, etc. Some people don't have many people in their life who aren't paid to be there.

Tips for discovering who is important to people

- Ask people who their friends are.
- Ask who they would like to meet as a friend.
- Find out who they may have lost touch with from their past.
- Ask family or professionals if the person struggles to say.
- Look for photos.
- See how people respond when they see certain people.
- Use a relationship map to explore their connections.
- Ask about online friends and social media.
- Think about the person's cultural background. Are there community, faith groups, and elders who are important to them?

Everyone's relationships look different

Everyone's different. There's no one 'right' way to have relationships. It's about what works for each person.

- Some people may have lots of friends, others prefer a few close ones or one special person.
- Not every intimate relationship is sexual. Some people may not have the capacity for this, and not everyone wants this. It's important to understand how people show affection.
- Some people prefer living alone, while others may want to live with a partner. Some might need the support to understand the practicalities of living together.
- People may have strong cultural or religious expectations around who they can marry or how relationships should look.
- Some need support to make and maintain friendships: planning meetups to understanding boundaries.

Just because a relationship might look 'different', doesn't mean it is less important. All relationships matter and should be treated as such.

How do people want to be in touch with people?

There are lots of different ways to stay in touch.
Find out if the person uses:

- Email, iPad, laptop, or smartphone
- FaceTime or WhatsApp
- Phone calls
- Social media



Some people might need support from someone to use this and need reminding to stay in touch with others. Just because they have not asked to contact someone, doesn't mean they do not want to.

Dating

There are a small number of specialist friendship and dating agencies, you can find some of them **here** .

If the person you support is interested in online dating, explain that rejection or mean comments can happen and remind them to try not to take it personally. Offer support to use the app/website, if the person agrees. Help them understand privacy settings to control what they share and help them to stay safe when meeting someone. Give information and **education** to help keep people safe online.

Our **research** found that people often have negative experiences on mainstream dating sites. Most people meet a partner through their connections (work, leisure etc.). Staff can support people to grow these connections and take part in activities where they can meet others. Helping someone join in with things they enjoy, like dancing, gaming, or crafts, opens opportunities to meet someone special. If someone likes another person, they might need support to:

- Plan what to say when asking them out.
- Think about where to go on a date.
- Talk through how they know they're ready.
- Explore their own boundaries and learn how to respect others' boundaries.
- Supported Loving's toolkit has resources you can use to help people learn about dating and relationships.

Sexuality



Everyone has the right to explore their sexuality and relationships. Gr8 Support Workers create safe spaces for people to talk about who they are and what they want, without judgement. Many people have not had the opportunity to do this. Support should be person-centred. This includes people who identify as LGBTQ+ want a relationship, want to have sex, or don't. Many people have not had the education they need surrounding sexuality. **Supported Loving** has lots of information and resources on exploring sex and relationships which Support Workers can use to help people.

It is important to encourage conversations about relationships and sexual health, ensuring people know they have the right to seek help or ask questions. Support can include making sure they know where to go for sexual health services, or finding resources that explain consent, and safe sex. Read more about this on our toolkit page (linked above). Support staff can help people to explore their sexuality by providing accessible resources, celebrating events like Pride, and supporting people to join LGBTQ+ social groups. Supported Loving has a page on supporting people who identify as LGBTQ+ .

If someone is trans or questioning their gender, support them in exploring what feels right for them, including their name, pronouns, clothing, or how they express themselves. Being respectful of their choices and providing the space to do so is essential. Your role is not to pass judgement. You can read more about how best to support trans people in our toolkit.

' I think everyone in this world has every right to be in love no matter what gets in the way. You should always fight for the way you want things. I think it has always been a big problem when someone turns around and says you can't be in relationship because you've got a learning disability. It is totally wrong. I think we need to stand our ground so we can get the word out here. '

Victoria Smith, Self-Advocate, Stay Up Late

Relationships really are the bread and butter of life for us all and people with a learning disability are NOT an exception to this. It's the foundation of the way we build our lives: offering and receiving love, friendship and connection.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU IN SPEAKING TO THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX?
2. WHAT DO YOU THINK COULD HELP YOU TO BE MORE CONFIDENT?
3. HOW IMPORTANT IS SUPPORTING PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR ROLE AS A SUPPORT WORKER?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1 **Do** treat people as adults. Staff should not interfere unless they ask.	1 **Don't** judge people.
2 **Do** take people's relationships and sexual needs seriously.	2 **Don't** share personal information about relationships with other people- keep it private.
3 **Do** ask questions around sex, sexuality, relationships and friendships in support planning.	3 **Don't** be scared to talk about relationships.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.choicesupport.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/supported-loving/supported-loving-toolkit
https://www.choicesupport.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/supported-loving/supported-loving-toolkit/sexuality-and-gender-identity

Case Study: Helping Benjamin & Georgia get married

Benjamin and Georgia are two adults with learning disabilities who love each other and want to get married. But making that happen hasn't been easy.



They live in separate flats and are supported by different organisations. Their staff don't always communicate, making joint planning difficult.

Georgia's mum worries about her moving in with someone. Benjamin's dad is concerned it'll affect his son's benefits. If they lived together, their benefits might change, and they could end up worse off financially. Georgia values her independence and isn't sure she wants to live with Benjamin full-time.

Some people around them wrongly thought they 'weren't allowed' to get married because of their disabilities. But under the Human Rights Act, everyone has the right to marry, including people with learning disabilities, if they have the capacity to make that decision. They felt frustrated. Other couples make these choices easily, why was it so hard for them?

How staff helped

Benjamin and Georgia spoke to their Key Workers, who listened and involved their managers. A joint meeting was arranged to bring everyone together.

- **Joined-up support:** Staff from both organisations met to share information and work together.
- **Talking to families:** Staff supported Benjamin and Georgia to explain their decision and reassure their families.
- **Money advice:** A Benefits Advisor helped them understand how to plan for financial stability.
- Understanding Legal Rights: A Social Worker supported them to understand their rights under the Human Rights Act, including the right to marry, and talked through what 'mental capacity' means in this context.
- **Flexible living:** They decided Georgia would keep her flat and still be Benjamin's wife.
- **Planning the wedding:** With support they created a celebration that felt right for them.

Chapter 3

Supporting people to flourish

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

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Support work isn't just about doing - it's about noticing. It's in the quiet moments, the shared laughs, the supported lows, the warm sun as you drink a cuppa together outside or belting out a karaoke classic together. This is where real connection and joy live. That's how people flourish - when we value the small things that matter most.

Life should be more than just getting through the day or living on autopilot. As Support Workers, you have the power to help people truly flourish - to find joy, purpose, confidence and the little things that make life feel great.

As a university, we wanted to find out what was needed for people with learning disabilities to flourish in their lives because ... if we could discover what this was, then we could share these findings across the country with support staff, services and commissioners. And consequently, more people with learning disabilities would live lives where they flourish.

In 2020-22, we carried out a research project at Manchester Met University, where we work, to find out how Support Workers can help the people they support to live good lives and flourish. We interviewed people with learning disabilities, family carers and ran a set of workshops with Support Workers which we called a learning community.

During the research project, we learned from the learning community how important the role of Support Workers is. We even chucked the senior managers out of the meetings to allow Support Workers to chat more openly! The Support Workers came to the meetings, despite being busy. They shared personal experiences with us. It was clear how much they loved their jobs and cared about the people they supported.

They picked out their favourite examples of the things that worked for them when they supported people - things that lit the room up for them (the Support Workers). One person told us about the shock at a meeting when they were going round the room asking people what their favourite food was. One woman said, 'Sushi' and they described the silence in the room and then the roar "WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU LIKE SUSHI?!!!" People were only expected to like burgers, chips and pizza!



We also heard the challenges of support work, though it was clear that people were up to the challenge e.g. of where to even buy sushi! We found Support Workers felt under pressure to look busy and be seen to be 'doing activities' to fill a timetable. They worried that 'just' sitting (enjoying the wind on their face) or 'just' walking (without an objective) wasn't good enough for a support plan and hard to timetable in.

This is why we did the research and this is how we arrived at 10 Minutes of 'Britney'...

10 Minutes of 'Britney'

Thinking over a period of months and chatting together at the workshops with Support Workers led us to realise the importance of having the freedom to do the things we all love to do. We don't have to do these things all the time, we just need to know that we can do them if we want to.



We thought about what those things are for each of us. One Support Worker told us she loved to listen to 10 minutes of Britney Spears; it really set her up for the day. She went on to say that she supports a man who loves the wind on his face and pondered how tricky it was to put 'enjoys wind on face' on a care plan. This was despite 'having the wind on his face' being as important to him as it was for her to listen to Britney. She asked the brilliant question: **'How do we recognise those small importances to all of us?'**

The research team came up with a one hour presentation and took it on tour to places like the Care Quality Commission, Bradford City Council, NHS England and the provider Dimensions. Beth, Angeli, Rebecca and Alan lead the tour sessions and talked about the research project findings and asked everyone what their '10 minutes of Britney' was.

We found all the examples shared during the tour sessions are pretty much free and easy to organise; sitting in the garden with a cup of tea, watching episodes of Coronation Street on YouTube, singing in the kitchen, walking the dog and hanging the washing up to dry - all things that can be easily woven into life.

Perhaps the more difficult BUT IMPORTANT challenge is to discover what these things are for each person supported. Beth who we worked with said,

> I like the presentation [in the roadshow]; it's exciting and it gets people thinking about things. And I like what they say about '10 Minutes of Britney' as well. Some things they say are new ideas that I haven't thought of, and yes, it's fun! Like the person in Manchester who said having a cold shower! I was like Wow! ok!

When asked if Beth thinks about 10 minutes of Britney with regards to herself, she said,

> Yes, now and then when I've got time. Because I'm busy, I don't really think about it. When I get in a chair and relax, I do think about it. Then it's like 'Ok, 10 minutes of Britney... **'I'll do my audio tape today'** or **'I'll do my colouring-in book or something different today'**.

What really struck us was how powerful it can be when people are supported to bring their own version of '10 minutes of Britney' into their day. It might seem small, but it's very clear that these moments lift us, ground us, and make life feel like our own.

The real challenge (and the real opportunity) is taking the time to discover what that is for each person we support. Because those little things: They're often the biggest things of all.



If you'd like to find out more about the research, look at the Flourishing Lives toolkit. Based on the research, here are 10 actions you can take to help people flourish in their lives:

1. Help people discover what truly matters to them
Don't assume, always ask. Use conversation, creativity, and shared experiences to uncover what the person genuinely enjoys and aspires to.

2. Make daily life meaningful
Support people to build their days around activities that bring purpose, growth, and emotional wellbeing - not just to 'stay busy'.

3. Promote real choice and control
Create space for informed, guided choices - even where confidence needs to be built first. Go beyond surface-level decisions.

4. Grow confidence through new experiences
Encourage small steps outside comfort zones. Celebrate effort and progress to help build belief in what's possible.

5. Build relationships that empower
Create trust, model self-advocacy, and show what respectful, empowering relationships look like. Be a role model and a coach.

6. Connect people to the wider world
Support community involvement: visiting places, meeting others, joining in. Visibility leads to belonging.

7. Highlight the value of giving back
Support reciprocal relationships through volunteering, peer support, or friendship. Everyone has something to offer.

8. Raise expectations, not barriers
Challenge passive routines or low expectations. Advocate for aspirations, development, and opportunities beyond 'filling time'.

9. Make future planning real and accessible
Help people think ahead - about home, work, relationships, or dreams - in ways that feel achievable and person-centred.

10. Fight for the resources people need to thrive
Speak up when systems or funding fall short. Connect people and families with tools, networks, and allies that make opportunity possible.





THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT IS YOUR '10 MINUTES OF BRITNEY'?!

2. WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO THE PERSON YOU SUPPORT; WHAT IS THEIR '10 MINUTES OF BRITNEY'?

3. HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THEM IN MAKING THIS HAPPEN?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** listen to people (whether through their words or their body language, sounds or movements) and help them explore what they want.
2. **Do** remember how important it is for people to do the things you love, even if they seem tiny.
3. **Do** notice how people are when they get to do the things they love.

1. **Don't** think a very small thing that people love doing (like having the wind on their face) is unimportant.
2. **Don't** feel under pressure to do a formal activity like swimming or bowling.
3. **Don't** feel you have to timetable in '10 minutes of Britney' – it's much more flexible than that!

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://flourishinglives.mmu.ac.uk/findings/
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jar.13299

Case Study:
Creating a way for Clem to flourish

When Ravi started supporting Clem, a young woman with a learning disability, he noticed that most of her week was spent either at home or with other people who also had learning disabilities. Clem was friendly and curious, but Ravi noticed that she often seemed quite lonely and sad.

One morning at the local gym, Ravi saw a poster for a Healthy Walks group that met every Wednesday in the park. He showed it to Clem when they were there, and she lit up. Clem loves being outdoors! Together, they went to the first meeting. At first, Clem stayed close to Ravi, but the walk leader, a cheerful woman from the local council, made her feel welcome.

Over the weeks, Clem began chatting with other walkers - people from all walks of life: a retired postman, a student, a mum with a pram. They laughed about the weather and shared stories about the best café for hot chocolate afterwards. Soon, Clem started reminding Ravi what day it was: 'It's walk day tomorrow!'

Ravi even supported Clem to attend a small planning meeting for the group, where she helped choose new routes. Her confidence grew, and eventually she joined a community litter-pick and even helped hand out leaflets for a charity fun run. Now, Claire is seen and known around her town. She's not just included; she belongs. Support work is about unlocking worlds. By helping people discover their passions, and try things out and connect with their wider community, you can create opportunities for real friendships, shared purpose, and a stronger sense of home - for everyone. People can truly flourish!



‘If you think you’re too small
to have an impact,
try going to bed with a mosquito!’

Ella Fitzgerald, singer, song-writer and composer



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 3

The Reach Standards and support for living

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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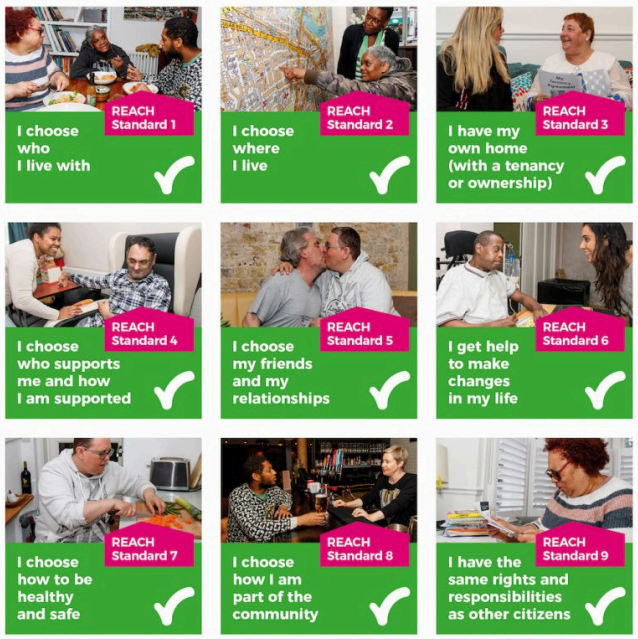
Jo Giles
Associate
Paradigm

In the world of Social Care, it's easy to get caught up in routines - medication to give, notes to write, appointments to attend. But somewhere along the way, there's a bigger question we have to keep asking ourselves: **Are we helping people live good lives, or are we just helping them get through the day?**

This is where the Reach Standards come in: **9 simple but powerful principles that remind support workers what really matters**. Not just support, but the right kind of support– support that's led by the person, not by the service. Developed by Paradigm, the Reach Standards are a framework for supported living that puts people with learning disabilities at the centre of their own lives. They encourage real choice, control, and dignity. They don't tell you what to do but they guide you to ask, 'Whose life is this?' and then act accordingly.

For anyone supporting someone with a learning disability, these standards aren't just helpful, they are essential.

What are the Reach Standards?



The Reach Standards are 9 voluntary standards that cover everything from who someone lives with, to how they're supported, to how they take part in their community. The full list is:

1. I choose who I live with
2. I choose where I live
3. I have my own home
4. I choose who supports me and how
5. I choose my friends and relationships
6. I get help to make changes in my life
7. I choose how to be healthy and safe
8. I choose how I am part of my community
9. I have the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens

Simple, right? But behind each one is a massive opportunity, not just to improve someone's quality of life, but to actually open up their world.

Why they matter to Support Workers

Support Workers have one of the most important jobs in society: helping people live the lives they want to live. That's more than just a job description. It's a calling. But sometimes, in trying to keep people safe or follow policies, support can accidentally become restrictive or even disempowering. The Reach Standards act as a reset button, reminding us that support should never be about control. It should always be

about freedom, dignity, and possibility. For Support Workers, Reach raises the bar. It challenges us to think beyond 'Is this care safe and efficient?' and ask 'Is this person truly in control of their life?' That's a much harder question and a much more meaningful one.

Examples of Reach in action

To really understand the power of the Reach Standards, it helps to look at what they look like in real life.

Take Imad, for example. Imad lived in a group home for years, but he wanted to move in with his best friend, Xavier. Using Reach, his support team focused on his right to choose where and who he lives with. They helped him understand his housing options, visit flats, and eventually, sign a tenancy with Xavier. For the first time, Imad had his own front door, his own bills, and his own say (with Xavier) in how things were done. That wasn't just a housing change, it was a life change.

Or consider Stan, who wanted to start cooking his own meals despite having a history of kitchen accidents. His Support Worker, rather than saying 'it's too risky', sat with him to look at safe recipes, cooked together, and installed some safety devices in the kitchen. Because of that, Stan learnt to cook but actually he didn't just learn to cook—he grew his confidence, he had more control in his life and his sense of pride in himself increased.

Then there's Mei, who felt lonely and isolated. She wanted friends, not just paid staff. Through the Reach Standards training, her support team started to understand the importance of Mei connecting and building her own relationships locally where she lived. They supported Mei to join a local dog-walking group (she's a huge animal lover). Over time and overcoming her shyness, Mei slowly and steadily became a regular volunteer, and then a known and valued member of her local community where she lives. She was a part of something bigger than herself.

These aren't just 'nice' stories. They are examples of how applying the Reach Standards can completely transform someone's life. And they all started with the same question: What does this person want, and how can we support them to get there?



From compliance to compassionate practice

One of the most powerful things about the Reach Standards is that they shift the focus from 'compliance' to compassionate practice. They remind Support Workers that ticking boxes is never enough. We need to listen, adapt, and walk alongside people on their own journeys.

That's not always easy. Supporting choice means accepting that people might make mistakes. It means embracing healthy risk. But it also means trusting that people with learning disabilities are the experts in their own lives.

That's a big cultural shift that requires courage. It means saying, 'Yes, you can' where others might say, 'No, it's too risky'. It means recognising that having control over your own life is more important than keeping everything perfectly safe. And it means being okay with the messiness of real, human life.

Tools for transformation

The Reach Standards aren't just about ideas. They come with tools and resources to help teams reflect and improve. They encourage Support Workers to have honest conversations with the people they support: What's working? What's not? What do you want to change?

For example, you might sit down with someone and ask, 'Who do you spend time with, and are those relationships your choice?' That one question could lead to a rethink of support hours, community access, or how staff interact during the day. These small changes, when grounded in the person's voice, can have a huge impact. Support Workers can also use the standards to challenge systems. If someone's living situation doesn't reflect their preferences, or if their support plan feels too restrictive, the Reach Standards give you the framework and the confidence to speak up.

As Michelle suggests,

> I think that The Reach Standards are very important for Support Workers to understand, on helping people they support to have good, ordinary lives.
> They could use them in groups, if they are supporting a few people. They could have a day altogether to bring Support Workers together with the people they support - make it a fun activity group, using The Reach Standards and asking them what they think and want from The Reach Standards.
> **Michelle McDermott**

A better life, a better future

The Reach Standards remind us that people with learning disabilities deserve lives that are rich, meaningful, and uniquely theirs. They shouldn't just be passengers in their stories. They should be the authors. **As Support Workers, we have the privilege of helping people write those stories.** With the Reach Standards as our guide, we move from helping people simply exist to helping them truly live. That's the kind of support that transforms lives and leaves a legacy.

So let's raise the bar. Let's listen deeply, support creatively, and never settle for 'good enough'. Because everyone deserves choice, connection, and control and we can help make that happen. **Empowerment is about empowering someone to become, not just survive.**

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. ARE THE DECISIONS BEING MADE TRULY LED BY THE PERSON I SUPPORT OR ARE THEY SHAPED BY THE SERVICE, POLICIES, OR MY OWN ASSUMPTIONS?
2. DO MY ACTIONS HELP THE PERSON BUILD REAL CONNECTIONS, MAKE CHOICES, AND LIVE WITH DIGNITY AND CONTROL?
3. HOW WOULD YOU WANT TO BE SUPPORTED IF YOU WERE IN THEIR POSITION? ARE YOU DELIVERING THE RIGHT LEVEL OF RESPECT, FREEDOM, AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** take time to understand the person's goals, preferences, and dreams - and let those guide your support.
2. **Do** support people to try new things, make choices, and even make mistakes. It's how confidence and independence grow.
3. **Do** use the Reach Standards to challenge systems, routines, or practices that limit people's rights, choices, or opportunities.

1. **Don't** reduce support to ticking boxes.
2. **Don't** make assumptions about what's 'best'. Ask and help someone explore.
3. **Don't** settle for 'good enough'. Always look for creative ways to help people lead richer, more connected lives beyond the basics of care.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/a-practical-guide-to-supported-decision-making/

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/A-Practical-Guide-to-The-Reach-Standards-2019-compressed-1-2.pdf

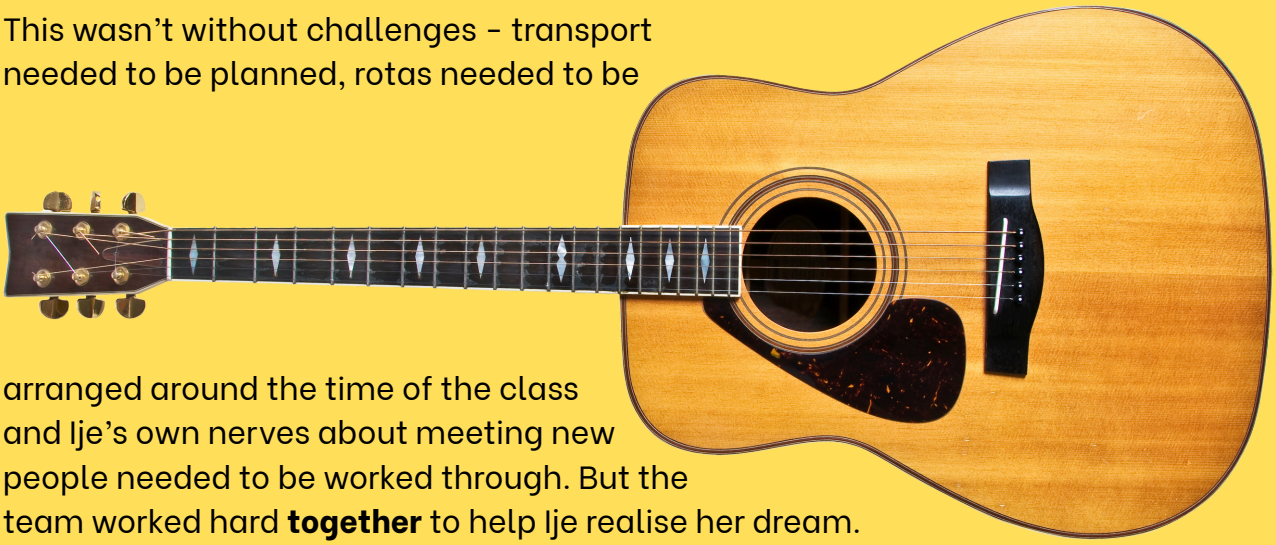
Case Study: Is Ije living a Gr8 life?

When Ije, a 28-year-old woman with learning disabilities, moved into a shared house, her days quickly fell into a familiar pattern. Staff managed her meals, appointments, and activities. Everything was ‘safe’ and ‘efficient’, but Ije often seemed withdrawn and disengaged.

During a team reflection using the Reach Standards, one Support Worker asked, ‘Are we helping Ije live, or just helping her get through the day?’ That question changed everything.

The team began talking to Ije about her hopes and interests. They knew she loved music but as they talked more, they discovered that she’d been keen for a long time to try learning the guitar. Instead of simply filling her schedule with ‘standard’ activities, they supported her to join a local beginner’s music group, after learning some basics on YouTube .

This wasn’t without challenges - transport needed to be planned, rotas needed to be arranged around the time of the class and Ije’s own nerves about meeting new people needed to be worked through. But the team worked hard **together** to help Ije realise her dream.



Over time, Ije’s anxiety lessened, though this took a lot of work from her team working together on this. Ije started practising at home with an online app. Then she went out for a cup of tea with a few people in the group after the class. She now meets one older person in the group regularly to go for a walk with their dog where they live. And the class have performed in a small community concert. Her weekly group became the highlight of her routine, not just because of music, but because Ije was making real choices and real connections.

By using the Reach Standards as a guide, the team shifted from simply a bland everyday that didn’t bring Ije much joy, to supporting Ije to build a week and life that started to reflect her wants more. In a way the guitar wasn’t the goal. It was a vehicle for Ije living her life, her way.

Chapter 3

Health and well-being

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Andrea Clark
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Ace Anglia

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People with a learning disability often face serious and unfair health inequalities. They are much more likely to die from preventable causes and at a younger age than others in the general population. The statistics are even more shocking for people with learning disabilities from black, Asian and minoritised ethnic backgrounds who can die, on average, nearly 30 years earlier than their white counterparts.

This isn't just about individual experiences. It's about how the combination of ethnicity and disability creates added layers of discrimination that people have to navigate every day. For instance, people from black, Asian and minoritised ethnic backgrounds may face language barriers and systemic bias in diagnosis and treatment. These communities are also underrepresented in national data and learning disability policy, making their needs easier to overlook.

Support Workers are in a powerful position to help change this.



One important way to do this is by supporting people to attend their Annual Health Check. These checks are designed to catch health problems early, help manage existing conditions, and connect people with the right care and support. Yet, over a quarter of people with learning disabilities who died in 2022 had not had one in the previous year.

That's why, between 2024 and 2025, the Race Equality Foundation worked with Learning Disability England and people with lived experience to explore what a good Annual Health Check looks like, especially for people from black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities.

Here's what we learned...

A good health check doesn't start in the doctor's office. It starts with preparation. People told us they want a simple questionnaire ahead of time so they can get ready, understand what will happen, and bring someone they trust if they need to.

A good check also gives people time especially those who may need more support to communicate how they're feeling. It includes important basics like weight checks, blood pressure, and a review of any medications. But it also ends with a clear plan that puts the person in control of their own health journey.

We heard how language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of trust in services often stop people from getting the support they need. That's why Annual Health Checks need to be accessible, culturally respectful, and community-led.

People told us it helps to:



- have interpreters available;
- receive information in different languages;
- talk to someone from a community they know and trust.

Peer education workshops can be a good way to prepare for health checks

'I would love to see people with learning disabilities and autism having the same equal opportunities to healthcare that everyone else has, ensuring everything is their choice and they know their rights, asking for reasonable adjustments which should be met.'
Daisy Driver, Health Project Lead at Ace Anglia

When people are well-informed, they are more able to advocate for their needs and participate actively in their communities. Good, engaging, accessible health information and education can make a big difference for people with learning disabilities, helping them get fairer access to the care and support they need. Ace Anglia run fun FREE Peer Educators Annual Health workshops that you can find out about here. People will learn all they need to know about:

- what happens at an annual health check.
- how to prepare for their appointment.
- The support (most likely from you that) they will need before and after (to start work on the Health Action Plan)

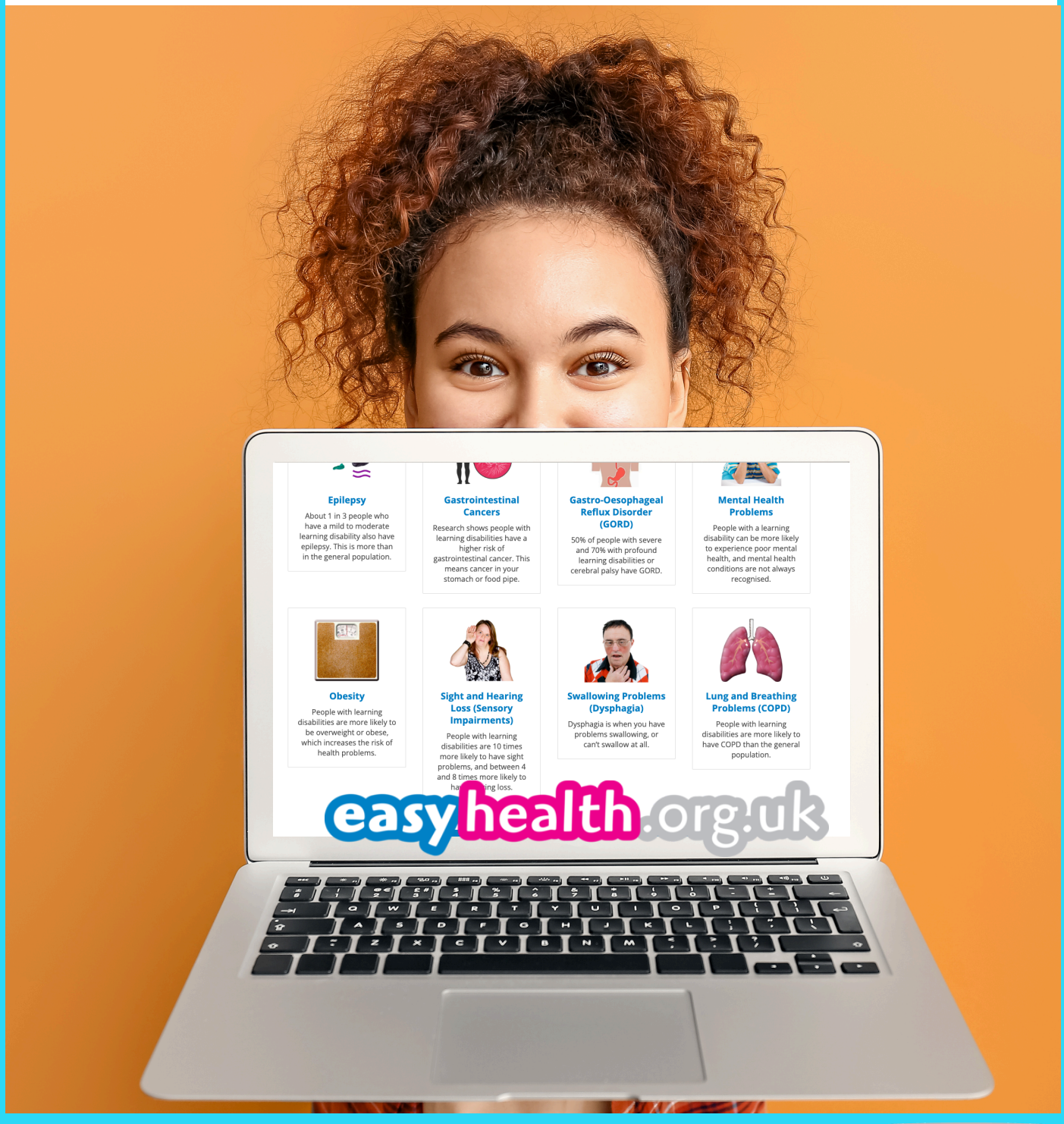
Why not encourage people you support to take part in these workshops?

Some people choose to attend with their Support Worker so that they can feel confident participating, but the peer educators also deliver bespoke sessions to Support Worker teams, so do contact Ace Anglia if this would be helpful to your team.

The right support at the right time can change everything. When Support Workers really listen and help people with learning disabilities understand and manage their health, they're not just supporting well-being—they're building confidence, independence, and a better quality of life.

You can find lots of resources to help you when support people with their health and wellbeing here on The Suffolk Learning Disability Partnership website. You can also find lots of Easy Read information on the Easyhealth website.

So go out there and do your brilliant work! Be the listener, the coach, the connector, the bridge-builder and the action-taker. Because every conversation, every bit of support you give, really can make a difference to someone's health and life.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WE ALWAYS LOOK AT THE RISK OF NOT DOING SOMETHING: HOW COULD YOU 'FLIP THE RISK?'

2. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FOR YOURSELF, FRIENDS, OR FAMILY WITH REGARDS TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

3. DO YOU HAVE THE SAME EXPECTATIONS FOR THOSE YOU SUPPORT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** ask open-ended questions and start conversations.
2. **Do** listen to people, look for the body language and reactions.
3. **Do** give people time.

1. **Don't** overcomplicate things.
2. **Don't** make assumptions.
3. **Don't** say 'no' (always look for different options).

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://suffolkordinarylives.co.uk/resources_category/health/

https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Part-A-RHO-LD-Policy-Data-Review-Report.pdf

Case Study: Support Worker at an Annual Health Check

A man with a learning disability was invited to attend his Annual Health Check at his GP surgery. To feel more confident and supported, he asked his Support Worker to attend the appointment with him.

The Support Worker had a good relationship with the man and took time before the appointment to ask:

'How would you like me to support you during your annual health check?'

The man shared that he wanted to feel like it was his appointment. He asked his Support Worker to sit at the back of the room, so he could lead the conversation, while still allowing his support to listen and take in the information. This helped the man feel respected and in control.

During the appointment, the doctor needed to take the man's blood pressure. The Support Worker noticed the man showing signs of distress. The Support Worker made a helpful suggestion:

'Shall we try it on me first, so you can see it's ok?'

The Support Worker had their blood pressure taken in front of the man. Seeing this helped reassure the man that it wouldn't hurt. He then felt calm and confident enough to have his blood pressure taken.

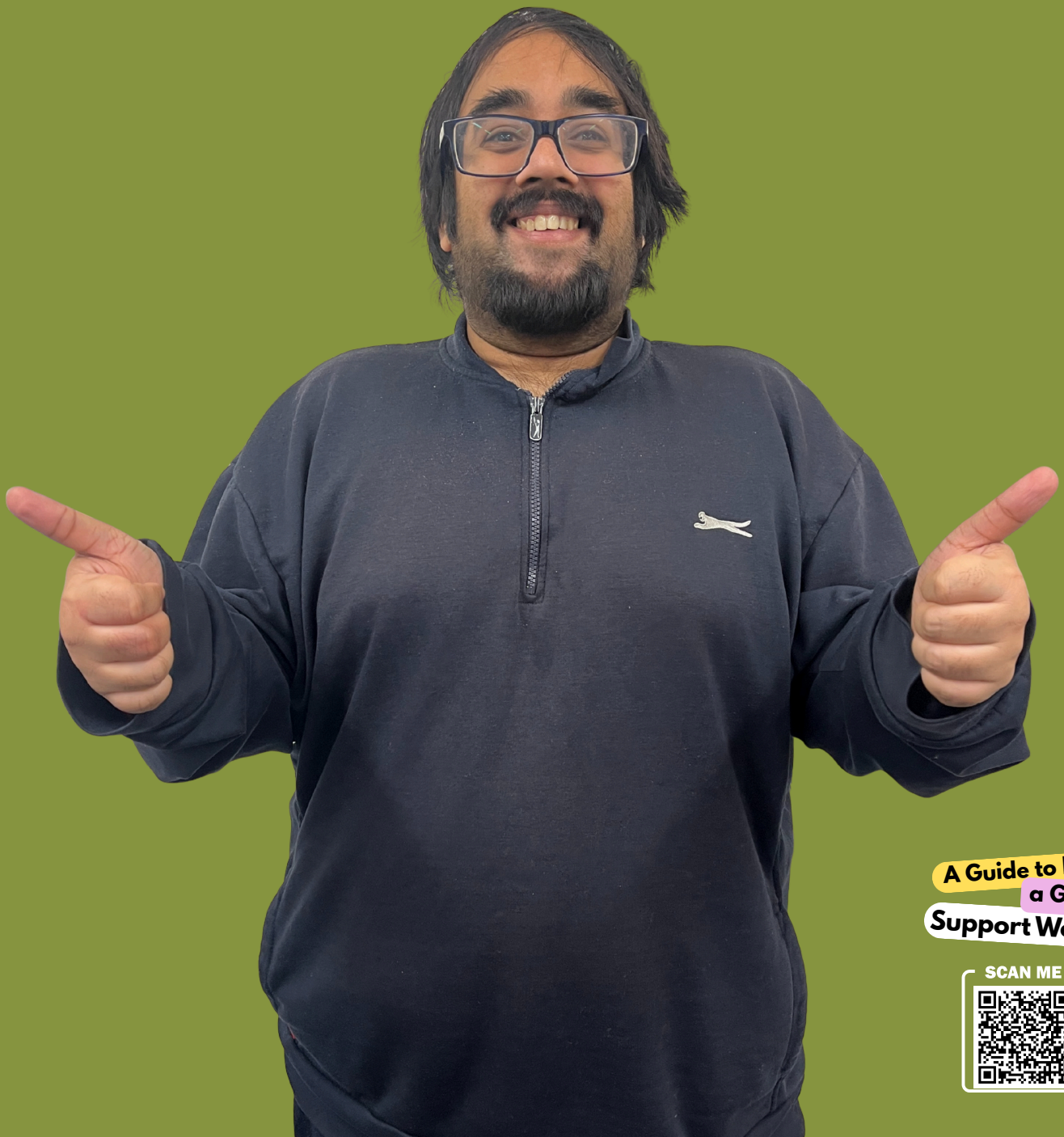


The Support Worker helped ensure that the created Health Action Plan was realistic and achievable, offering support for the next steps.

The use of reasonable adjustments with the blood pressure check, made this part possible.

This example shows good support, someone who asked, listened, adapted, and worked together with the person and the doctor.

Some people in my community don't want to talk about
people having a learning disability.
We can't switch our learning disability off.
It's there all the time.
I'm proud to be Punjabi and
proud to have a learning disability.
I work at a university AND I work for Oliver McGowan training.
I need help with some things but not all the time.
Sunny Sokhal, Research Assistant, Trainer and Self-Advocate



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 3

Volunteering and work

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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VIAS Scotland

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For most of us reading this, work is a crucial part of our lives. We need it to earn money so that we can pay for food, rent, bills, clothes and to go out with friends. We need to it to live life. It gives us more choice.

If we are honest, work gives us so much more than these things. It gives us a place of belonging; a place where we learn new skills, are challenged and grow; a place where we connect with people; and a place, hopefully, where we are proud of what we do. We also share our skills and knowledge at work, our character and personality, our insights, our learning, our mistakes.... the list goes on.

Keys to Citizenship helps us think about the components we all need to live life as equal, valued citizens. It highlights how we all, including people with learning disabilities, have unique abilities and interests to contribute to society. Work and volunteering is just one way of doing this. Our challenge is to find out how we can support someone in exploring this.

Citizenship means being part of everyday life – not being stuck in a box.
Wendy Perez Seven keys to a life well lived



Work isn't always a fun or easy place to be, but it gives us variety in life. It helps us avoid boredom, loneliness and overthinking. Some of us will have experienced unemployment. If you have, take a moment to remember how this felt. Work gives us a lot. It's society's heartbeat. Everyone gains.

But shockingly, work isn't seen to be the automatic route for people with learning disabilities. Too often, it's seen as an afterthought. Only 4-5% of adults with learning disabilities (known to Local Authorities) were in paid employment in 2021 (NHS Digital, 2021) when 75% of people (between 16 and 64) in the UK were in employment that same year (Office for National Statistics).

You, as a Support Worker, have the exciting opportunity to encourage people to explore the world of work and all its benefits.

If for any reason, someone is unable to get a job at the moment or there are no jobs available at this time, it is really important to consider volunteering. Actually, even if someone has a job, it might be worth a person exploring volunteering in their local community as a way of connecting with people outside of work - this could

be in their place of worship, a local charity shop or organisation. Volunteering means you don't get paid, but you still get to share your skills, to contribute, to connect with other people...to have a purpose in life – all the things listed above.

So, how do you find out what job or voluntary role someone would like to do? A good place to start is by gathering a person's thoughts in what their skills, interests, passions and goals are. You can also do this by:

- **talking to a wide range of people** that are important to the person.
- **observing a person's daily routine to understand** e.g. what do they love; are they better in the morning than the afternoon; do they have particular support needs?
- **trying something new together** to see how the person experiences it – do they enjoy it, what support do they need to cope in that new environment?
- **exploring what previous training and experience** they have had – this could be through looking at certificates from school or college.
- **learning about their skills in different settings** e.g. money skills from going shopping with a person.
- **trying short, supported work placements**.

Having gathered this information, think about what you have learnt together and help the person to list: What would their ideal job be? What work hours would work best for them, and where would the job be?

From here, it's about being realistic. How much can you do? It might be that you want to talk to your team leader to explore how this is taken forward. Is there someone else in the person's life who can help? Is there a local job centre you could liaise with? Is there a local employment project for people with learning disabilities who could help?

Underpinning all of this, is YOU, the Support Worker. You are discovering who someone is and what work or voluntary role they would like to do. You are also a connector, mediator and an advocate in building relationships with other people who may need to be involved – family, friends, employers, coworkers, job centre staff and other Support Workers. You'll need to be a team.

You may meet some resistance as you support the person to explore work or volunteering. For example, a job centre coach who does not think that people with such disabilities can work; A family member (naturally) terrified of the person losing their benefits and not being able to get back on again if the job doesn't work out; Employers who may not be open to employing people with learning disabilities or **making reasonable adjustments**.

Your job as a Gr8 Support Worker is to hold onto the belief in the person and their

ability to contribute to wider society and to their local community. Don't be afraid to reach out to people who can help a person secure a work or volunteering opportunity.

Let's get practical: How can Support Workers support people to get jobs?

Helping someone into work or volunteering isn't just about filling out job applications. It's about building real relationships, finding the right match, and being alongside someone every step of the way.

Start by tapping into your connections. Do you, the person, or someone you know already have links to local shops, cafés, or organisations? Use them. That friendly approach can open more doors than a generic job ad ever will. If the person has a CV, help them take it directly to places that interest them or, if needed, contact businesses on their behalf. But do your homework first: know the company, what they do, and how the person's strengths line up with their work. It shows respect and professionalism, and it helps the person feel more confident too.

> When businesses identify the strengths of employees with disabilities, then put them in jobs that match their skills, those employees turn out to be faithful, low turn-over, hard-working employees.
> **Project Search**

When you reach out, be direct: 'Do you have any roles available?' Even if the answer's no today, it could be yes tomorrow. Ask what they need and compare that honestly with what the person wants.



If a job trial or offer is on the table, ask to spend time on-site beforehand. Learn the routines, the rules, the little things that help someone settle in smoothly. Understand what support's already in place for new starters.

Then plan together: How will you and the employer support the person? You might only need to answer questions. Or, at first, you might need to coach side-by-side. It'll evolve, so stay flexible.

Consider using the **Training in Systematic Instruction** (TSI). It is a highly effective approach that helps people with learning disabilities learn new tasks in a structured,

respectful, and empowering way. By breaking jobs down into small, teachable steps and always focusing on what the person can do, TSI supports people to grow in confidence, master routines, and truly thrive in their new roles, at their own pace and in their own way.

I use systematic instruction to help people to learn to travel using public transport. It is a great pleasure as a trainer because I can get to see the difference it makes in people's confidence to travel on their own. When they learn these skills, they can experience different places, different routes, different ways to travel and transfer those skills into other aspects of life for example meeting up with friends and going to the cinema. With this it means people can make their own decisions and choices. This is a big thing for some people.

David Ross

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.
Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

Lao Tzu

Keep track of progress, strategies, and learning patterns. This isn't just helpful for the job - it builds confidence for whatever comes next!

When someone gets the chance to contribute through work or volunteering, they gain far more than a role. They gain visibility, connection, and purpose. What great things to help facilitate!



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF YOUR JOB, BEYOND MONEY EACH MONTH?
2. ARE THERE PEPOLE YOU SUPPORT WHO DON'T WORK OR DO VOLUNTARY WORK WHO COULD? IS IT TIME TO START A CONVERSATION ABOUT THIS?
3. WHEN CAN YOU FIND TIME TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** discover with a person what they are interested in and skilled at.
2. **Do** talk about things happening in a stepped way. Too much in one step can be very overwhelming.
3. **Do** look up and learn about the power of a systemtic instruction!

1. **Don't** forget to remind people who will be there to support them along the way. It can feel very scary starting a new job!
2. **Don't** forget to remind people of all the skills/qualities they have to offer. They may not see it in themselves,
3. **Don't** give up on the person. Keep seeing the possibilities ahead! If you need support too, ask for it.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.systematicinstruction.com/what-is-tsi

https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/

Case Study: Tom

Tom applied and successfully gained a place on the Project SEARCH Programme in April 2022. Project SEARCH is a business-led, school-to-work transition program for young adults with disabilities, primarily those with learning disabilities, autism, or both. It's an internship program, within a business setting, that provides a year-long experience combining classroom instruction, hands-on training, and real-world work placements to prepare participants for competitive employment.

Tom is an enthusiastic young person with learning disabilities, with a positive mindset, who is registered blind and has recovered from several strokes. This has resulted in memory loss and concentration issues. Tom had a strong aspiration to achieve paid employment and gain greater independence, with the long-term goal of living independently.

Lots of people, including Tom and his parents and many professionals, namely a Senior Social Worker, Occupational Therapist, Senior Rehabilitation Officer and Senior Job Coach, held a meeting to support Tom to make choices and identify appropriate support requirements throughout his Project SEARCH journey. At the same time, a proposal was put forward for a Direct Payment for Tom for support that he needs with learning household tasks, shopping and other things to help achieve his independence goal.

Tom was supported to strengthen his work ethic and develop his skill set through the participation of three internships namely, Administration Assistant, Project Assistant with the Research and Innovation Team and Portering.

Following Tom's graduation, he participated in weekly Job Club sessions, with a Job Coach. Tom was successful with invitations to interview and one with the Co-op led to Tom being offered a 16 hour per week employment contract.

This was on the understanding that his Job Coach would help him to apply for Access to Work funding so that they could provide job coaching to help him to learn the job. Access to Work is a UK Government grant to help pay for practical support needed at work. Access to Work funding was granted and Tom learned lots from his job coach. Tom and the Co-op, however, felt that ongoing support via a Support Worker was needed for Tom's safety whilst on the shop floor. They applied to Access to Work for funding for 16 hours per week to pay for the support worker and this was awarded.

Around this time, Tom was also awarded funding for 20 hours support per week as a Direct Payment to learn independence skills. This means that Tom had funding to employ his own staff.

Tom, his family and his job coach had a conversation about whether it should be the same person/ people who supported him at work and outside of work and it was agreed that this would be a good idea. From Tom's point of view, it means that he has regular members of staff that can help in with whatever he needs at any time of the day whether he is at home or at work.

Tom now employs 2 staff who support him at work and out of work. They each have an 18-hour contract. They enjoy helping him at work and take the teaching techniques that they have learned from his job coach into supporting Tom to learn skills and routines that build his independence at home.

Tom really enjoys the consistency of support he receives from his team.

Chapter 3

Balancing freedom and risk

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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PSS



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Charlotte Landry
Support Worker
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Ray Pealing
Parent
PSS

Risk is inherently woven into the fabric of life; it's impossible to experience life fully without encountering it. A life without risk is a life unlived, and the greatest risk is often doing nothing at all

Unknown






Every day of our lives are full of risk. From the moment we get up and boil a kettle, to crossing the road to catching a bus, or speaking to a stranger on the street, our lives are full of risks of different sizes. It's how we navigate them and consider their impact (both positive and negative) and the 'colour' they bring to our lives, that inform our way forward. Do we choose to take the risk or not? Why do we land on that choice? What do we learn from taking that risk?

For some people with learning disabilities, it may be hard to see when something is a risk. It may be hard to balance and think through the consequence and outcomes of taking a risk and it can be hard to make an informed decision without good support.

As a Gr8 Support Worker this is something you can do: help people to understand the pros and cons and possibilities of taking particular risks. Our role is not to keep people wrapped in cotton wool, stopping people from living life to the full. Our job is to support people to adventure and live good lives.

Take John for example, a young man with learning disabilities. He took the risk of going to the local café by himself for the first time. He worried about getting lost, ordering his drink, and handling money, but with support from his Support Worker who helped him practise what to say and stayed nearby in case he needed help. John managed the whole trip on his own. By taking this small risk, he gained confidence, independence, and the courage to try going out with a friend next time. If he hadn't taken the risk, he might have missed the chance to grow in confidence and enjoy new experiences and his friendships in a different way.

Supporting a person with learning disabilities to manage freedom and risk gives people more control over their lives and the direction they want to steer their lives in. Here's how:

Empowerment: It encourages people to make decisions about their lives, builds confidence and supports independence. This gives people a sense of control.

Personal Growth: People experience more freedom, space to explore their interests, develop skills and learn from challenges.

Equality: People with learning disabilities have the same rights as everyone else to take risks in life, and this includes making 'unwise decisions' (Mental Capacity Act

2005). But safety must be considered alongside freedom. We naturally need to explore risks with a person and work out whether they are worth taking so that people's independence is not removed but instead maximised. It's about creating an environment where they feel safe to explore and grow. It's about encouraging independence whilst being there for guidance when needed. It's about creating opportunities and not limiting experiences.

To do this you may need to work closely with a whole range of people e.g. parents, family members, other supporters of people and potentially local members of the community e.g. from a place of worship, local shop, allotment group. Here are some things to think about:

1. **Good Communication:** Open, brave and honest 2-way communication is vital. Talk about the person's strengths, preferences, and goals, as well as any concerns about safety or risks.

2. **Regular reflections:** As a Support Worker, you should continuously evaluate the balance between freedom and risk with the person you are supporting and where possible and, if appropriate, their parents and carers. As a person grows and develops, their needs and capabilities may change, meaning you may have to adjust the support you give them and their support plan. They may need less support but may need more support!

3. **Take a person-centred approach:** Focus on the person's rights, choices, and aspirations. What do they want from this? Empower them to make decisions about their own life while ensuring they understand potential risks. Remember that none of us go through life risk-free.

4. **Work out what the risks are and manage these:** Work out together with the person you support, parents and carers to identify potential risks and develop strategies to manage them. Be creative in how you do this whether it's a gradual exposure to new experiences or a subtle overseeing and support in a task or pursuit. Never allow risk to turn into fear!

Your organisation will have a risk policy. It should have a positive approach to risk, balancing potential benefits against harm (with the focus being on empowering people to make informed choices and engage in activities even if there is some level of risk). Have a look at your risk policy and have a discussion with your colleagues about how you use this in your role to ensure people live good lives.



You fail, and then what? Life goes on.
It's only when you risk failure that you discover things.
Lupita Nyong'o, Actress

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. DO YOU **REALLY LISTEN** TO THE PERSON YOU ARE SUPPORTING ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT TO ACHIEVE IN THEIR LIVES?
2. HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK IT IS FOR SOMEONE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES TO BE **ABLE TO TAKE RISKS LIKE YOU**?
3. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE **IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER** ARE WHEN YOU ARE SUPPORTING SOMEONE TO MANAGE FREEDOM & RISK?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** listen to the person you are supporting, allow them to have a voice.
2. **Do with** not for, where possible.
3. **Do** work with the person you are supporting If a risk is identified, so they can achieve their goals.

1. **Don't** assume, that a person with learning disabilities cannot make safe decisions.
2. **Don't** assume a person with learning disabilities doesn't want to have the same choices as you.
3. **Don't** let risk stop a person from living their lives to the full.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk

https://projectopendoors.org

Case Study: Joe's story

I supported an individual called Joe who had learning disabilities and was an employee for a local restaurant. As Joe's confidence grew, his need for more independence also grew. Joe was unhappy and frustrated by having to be escorted into work, he said I made him 'feel like a baby'.

I set up a meeting with Joe, myself, my team leader and Joe's house manager to see how we could support Joe with gaining more independence. We started off by discussing why Joe didn't want to be escorted to work anymore. Joe felt that he wasn't being given the option to try and be more independent and that he should be given the chance to walk to work on his own.

We then went on to talk with Joe about what some of our concerns were. These included.

- The possibility of Joe falling
- Joe becoming distracted & being late for work
- Joe not using proper crossings
- Joe having to navigate narrow pavements which could cause him to fall into the road
- Joe being approached by strangers.

After talking about our concerns, we started to look at putting a plan together to help manage any risks.

We devised a route alongside the main roads, consisting of wide pavements, well-lit streets, plenty of pedestrian crossings & CCTV. As this was a slightly different route to the one that Joe & me normally took, we decided that it was a good idea for me to support Joe for a few weeks to make sure he felt confident and happy with the new route.

After the first week of myself taking the lead and Joe's house support staff also using this route on their walks, we discussed how Joe would start to take more control.

1. Joe would take the lead, directing the way and navigating crossings.
2. Joe would walk independently to the top of their street.
3. Gradually the distance where I met Joe would increase and after a few weeks I would wait in the restaurant, and Joe would arrive independently.

The impact that this made to Joe's confidence and overall mental health and well-being was immeasurable.



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‘Andrew Garfield (the actor) beautifully said, ‘Grief, I’ve learned, is really just love. It’s all the love you want to give [the person], but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.’

We must remember that people with learning disabilities feel grief too- when their Support Worker leaves, when their parent dies. We need to support people in the messiness of grief - not ignore it or walk away.’

Jo Giles, Research Assistant



Chapter 3

Death and loss

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

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When someone dies, a little support can certainly ease the way. Most of us need some form of support and thoughtful kindness at a time like this. It might be a hug, someone to talk to us, to listen to us, someone to give us space and understand why we are quiet, or we might simply just need a shoulder to cry on.



Too often people with learning disabilities are not supported to talk about a death or the loss they feel at all. Too often they are not supported to process their feelings or to remember their loved ones. Too often they are excluded from funerals and too often people with learning disabilities are told to 'cheer up and not be sad'. This is not okay. (We'll touch on this 'cheering up' comment later grrrr!)

Noticing when a person is grieving and supporting them

We need to notice when a person is grieving and not 'walk away' or avoid talking about it. We need to intentionally create a space for the person to talk about it – a space where a person feels valued, not judged and not rushed. It's not really so hard to do. It could be over a cuppa, while you cook together, when you walk together or even when you travel on the bus somewhere together. Really, it's just whatever works best for the person. Sometimes, it's just down to refocusing our time or listening in a different way.

There may be times when a person is struggling, when they need a little extra investment of support or time from us, or maybe a grief counsellor. If this is the case, we should speak to our line-managers about this. What we mustn't do is ignore what is going on or think that someone else will deal with it because the risk is that this probably won't happen. But most of the time, if a person's community of people gather round them to support them through this hard time, this is plenty enough.

Lot's of us worry about 'putting our foot in it' and not saying the 'right' thing. We worry about adding to someone's distress. **Secret:** What most people need when someone they love or care about dies, is to simply feel really valued and listened to. Answers don't have to be perfect. Often you don't even need to say much but you do have to show with every fibre of your being that you are fully present and there with that person, listening to everything they are saying through their words and through their body language. People will feel our intention of wanting to understand and be there for them.

What happens if someone gets upset when we talk to them?

If a person cries, it's not us that is making them cry, it's the loss and grief a person is feeling being released and that is a healthy thing. You have simply created a safe, valuing space for them to process their feelings. What a gift to do that!

Grief can show in all sorts of ways. You can read about it here: 7 stages of grief, It can feel devastating, or make us feel alone and scared. Grief can hit at unexpected times, in unexpected ways. Many describe it as a wave (of grief) hitting you out of the blue, at unexpected times. You can feel the loss when a person dies straight away or for many years afterwards.

Often grief just feels messy, like this: 

Like when I'd been at college for 18 years and I was leaving, everyone was in tears because it was sad. Me and the teachers were in tears, we were. I'd been there a long time. You've built up a relationship and a nice bond.
Richard Keagan-Bull, Research Assistant, Self-Advocate

It's normal to feel sad and it's normal to feel anxious, so support us with this.
Sunny Sokhal, Research Assistant Self-Advocate



Let's NOT tell people to cheer up!

Many people with learning disabilities are told to 'cheer up' when they are upset. They are not given the space to move through and process their feelings. Let's think about this. When we tell people to cheer up or we distract people from being upset. What we are doing is stopping the natural process the person needs to go through, whether this is talking a lot about it, crying, being quiet, or feeling cross or devastated that a person has died.

Don't be afraid of upsetting the person.
Be there to listen to them and comfort them.
Let them show their emotions.
Sunny Sokhal, Research Assistant, Self-Advocate

As Sunny says, we need to be brave enough to be alongside the people we support when they are feeling such loss. We mustn't make it all about us and the deaths and losses we have also experienced, as this distracts from and minimises the other person's experience/feelings. We need to keep the focus on the person we are supporting, though there may be moments where controlled and thoughtful sharing may be helpful. (It's very nuanced.)

Many people walk away in these difficult moments. But as a Support Worker, we need to be the one who sticks by the person we are supporting- the person who is courageous in holding these conversations and helping the person remember and

talk about their loved one who has died. We can be the ones to support the person to go to a funeral and speak at the funeral if they want to. We can check in on how someone feels afterwards. We can talk in a way that is compassionate, empathetic and loving. It's a precious space that we should create.

You need to be compassionate! Say 'I'm sorry to hear this' but be really, really compassionate if it is a mum or a dad or someone close who has died.
Richard Keagan-Bull, Research Assistant, Self-Advocate

We can be sensitive to how hard it feels by saying things like,
'I'm sorry this is so hard.'
'I'm so sorry your mum died.'
'I'm here for you, if you want to talk.'
'How can I support you?'
'What do you need from me?'



You're not just going to get over the death of someone you love just like that. It's going to take a lot of time. Reassure the person that things will be okay. They might not ever get over it, but things will get easier in time.
Richard Keagan-Bull, Research Assistant, Self-Advocate

Use the words 'died' or 'death' more

At Kingston University London, we do a lot of work around death and dying, and what we have heard for years from many people with learning disabilities is that they want people to use the words 'death', 'died' and 'dead' more.

People are confused by phrases like:
'He's lost his brother'- *Where did he lose him. At IKEA?*
'He's passed'- What has he passed- his driving test?
'Gone to a better place' - *He's left the family to live with other people in a better place.*

It can be dangerously confusing for people. Use the word 'died' so that you normalise talking about what has happened. It says what's happened. As Sunny tells us,

Don't patronise people. Say that the person has died. Don't say, 'They've gone away to a better place'. Be honest with them. Always be honest.
Sunny Sokhal, Research Assistant, Self Advocate

One of the most helpful things you can do when supporting people in difficult times is to use open-ended questions like: **How are you feeling today? What would help you? How can you take care of yourself?** Open-ended questions allow a person space to explore and answer in a fuller way. They can also stop us assuming a person's reactions/wants/needs. It leaves it to the person to say how

they feel. They may be upset but also very worried about how they will do practical things that they've never done before on their own. If we don't ask, we won't know.

Of course, loss isn't just connected to death

People with learning disabilities, just like anyone else, experience loss in lots of ways: loss of a romantic relationship, loss of a job, having to move and losing what is familiar to them, loss of health, loss of friendships, loss of feeling safe, loss of financial security. It's quite a long list isn't it?

One big loss that people with learning disabilities commonly experience is the loss when a Support Worker leaves. Many have described this loss to being like a death. What makes us very cross is that too often people aren't told about their Support Worker leaving until the day before or the day of the Support Worker leaving. This is not okay. A relationship and trust has been built and in one swoop, lost.

If Support Workers are leaving, they should tell the person in advance. Don't go and not tell us. Some people with a learning disability can get anxious as they'll get a Support Worker who won't know them. You have to explain it all again. It can feel like you've been stabbed in the back.
Sunny Sokhal, Research Assistant, Self-Advocate

It's much better to give people notice. It is more respectful. It gives people a chance to say goodbye, to grieve and importantly to adapt.

A quick tip from Richard and Sunny:
'Go for a drink or a nice meal and celebrate your time together. Feel sad together if you need to. Think through how you can get ready for the new Support Worker. '



Make sure you understand us properly. What we need. What we don't need.
Sunny Sokhal , Research Assistant

Embrace these moments

Don't shy away from supporting people well in these life changing moments. You might need to be courageous to be there fully for someone. It might be new to you, but we can tell you that these moments are life-changing for the person you are supporting. **And these conversations are likely to touch you forever.**

So we finish this by encouraging you. Don't walk away. Be the Support Worker who sees and notices what is needed. Be the Support Worker who is bravely alongside the person in what they going through, talking about what is going on for the person. Your 'Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.' **Mother Teresa.**

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE THAT SUPPORT WORKERS IN YOUR ORGANISATION SUPPORT PEOPLE TO PREPARE FOR A SUPPORT WORKER LEAVING IN A COMPASSIONATE WAY?
2. IS THERE SOMETHING THAT WORRIES YOU ABOUT SUPPORTING SOMEONE IN THEIR GRIEF? WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN YOU EASE THE WAY FOR YOURSELF? TALK TO YOUR TEAM ABOUT THIS.
3. WHAT WILL YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME YOU SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** create a space where a person can cry or feel however they need to feel.
2. **Do** use open ended questions to find out more.
3. **Do** be genuinely curious and ready to support a person in the way they need it.

1. **Don't** walk away from supporting someone in their grief. They need you!
2. **Don't** assume how a person feels.
3. **Don't** forget you can have these conversations while you are cooking together, waiting for the bus etc. They don't have to be in isolation.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.victoriaandstuart.com/end-of-life-care-planning-toolkities-toolkit-top-tips.pdf

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Life-death-and-loss-cards-Final-1-compressed-copy.pdf

Case Study: Ola's grieving

Ola, a 42-year-old woman with learning disabilities, lived at home with her mum, who had always been her main source of support. When her mum died suddenly, Anna's world collapsed. She didn't fully understand what had happened at first because people around her used phrases like 'gone to a better place', which left her confused. She knew her mum wasn't there anymore, but no-one had clearly said she had died.

Ola became very quiet, stopped going to her craft group, and started withdrawing from doing things she usually enjoyed.



Fatima, a Support Worker, noticed this and wondered if Ola needed space to talk openly about what had happened. Creating space and time to do this, Fatima explained gently, using clear words: 'Ola, your mum has died. She died because her heart stopped working properly'. Fatima gave time to notice Ola's reaction.They talked together and Fatima asked Ola if she had any questions. She gave Ola space to be upset. Ola also said, 'It's okay to feel sad or angry. I'm here for you.'

Fatima supported Ola to go to the funeral, sitting beside her and lighting a candle together. They turned their weekly visit to their local cafe into a space when Ola could talk about her mum, share memories, or sometimes just sit quietly. Fatima also encouraged Ola to make a small memory box with photos, cards, and her mum's favourite perfume bottle.

Over time, Ola began to smile again when she spoke about her mum. She started going back to her craft group and even made a card for her mum on her birthday, which she said made her feel close to her.

Without this patient and compassionate support, Ola might have bottled up her feelings. Her behaviour may have become quite tricky. She could have shut down her grieving process. Instead, she was given space, kindness, and the chance to grieve which helped her slowly find a way forward.

‘I don’t like it when you feel like that you’re the ‘client’ and they are the Support Worker. It’s like you’re JUST someone they are paid to support. We’re both human beings .

We both need people to share our lives with each other otherwise you can be quite lonely and isolated after your Support Worker has gone. We both need people to talk to and share life with. Treat me as an equal. I just need a bit of help.’

Richard Keagan-Bull,
Self-Advoate, Author, Research Assistant



Chapter 4

Making people's rights a reality

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Chapter 4

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Chapter 4

Introduction

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



William Rae
Self-Advocate, Director
C-Change



Sam Smith
Chief Executive
C-Change

‘ .. recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.’

Written at the beginning of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Many people think that human rights are the business of lawyers and courts, but they are in fact, everyone’s business. **We all have the same human rights because we are born human.** This chapter aims to show how knowing and understanding human rights can improve your practice as a Support Worker and help improve the lives of the people you work with.

A bit of history

After the atrocities of the Second World War, leaders from across the world came together to find ways to prevent such tragedy recurring.

Out of this was born the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**. The UDHR sets out basic human rights as a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations. It has 30 Articles (legal sections).

4 of these Articles are highlighted here:

Article 1: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’ Click **here**.

Article 2: ‘People’s right not to be discriminated against based on ‘race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status’.

Article 3: ‘The right to life, liberty and security of person’.

Article 6: ‘The right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law’.



Human rights now

Since the creation of the UDHR, people across the world have worked to agree Human Rights conventions. A convention is an agreement that countries are invited to sign up to ('ratified') but is not legally binding.

Human Rights conventions recognise that some groups of people are more likely to be disadvantaged and should be protected. People can be at risk of being disadvantaged in more than one way e.g. a woman who is disabled. We need to be aware of this when supporting people. Here are a few examples of conventions:

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, women (UNCRC), Click **here**.
- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Click **here**.
- UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UNCRPD). Click **here**.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was co-produced with disabled people. It describes the basics needed for disabled people to live a good life. Article 19 outlines the concept of Independent Living. This can be used, like a north star, to guide your practice.

The good news is that these principles sometimes are further developed and enshrined in law. For example, The European Convention on Human Rights (**ECHR**), led to creation of 'The Human Rights Act' 19986 (**HRA**). This brings the rights outlined in the ECHR into UK law, setting out legally protected human rights in the UK, making them enforceable in UK courts.

Human Rights Defenders

In the same way as we all have human rights, we can all also be **Human Rights Defenders**. **The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders** was adopted in 1998 on the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It describes Human Rights Defenders as,

'Individuals or groups who act to promote, protect or strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means.'



This means that everyone can be a Human Rights Defender. We can all participate in, and contribute to, the global movement to make human rights a reality for all.

Being a Human Rights Defender



Recognising your role as a Human Rights Defender is particularly important for Support Workers who work alongside people whose rights are often not respected, protected or upheld. To be a G8 Support Worker and Human Rights Defender, it is important to know your own rights and the rights of the people you work alongside. There are some really good resources to help you know and understand human rights and how they apply to you and the people you work with. The British Institute for Human Rights (BIHR) has a great range of resources.

This chapter

This chapter will outline why it is important to know your own rights and the rights of the people you support. It will briefly outline the legislation that frames human rights, such as the Human Rights Act and the Care Act. It will help you understand how human rights inform how people access and use the money that is available to them for their social care support. It will also explore the idea of 'Supported Decision-Making' and how you can apply this to your practice. And importantly, what you can do and where you can go if you are concerned that someone's human rights are not being respected, protected or upheld. As we have said above, **use Article 19 as your compass in how you support people.**

Some of the fundamental elements of Article 19 states:



- people with disabilities have the opportunity **to choose where they live and with whom they live,** on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement.
- people with disabilities have **access to a range of home and other community support services including personal assistants necessary to support living and inclusion in the community** and to prevent isolation and segregation from the community.
- **Community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to people with disabilities** and are responsive to their need.

Here are a couple of examples of how understanding human rights can make a positive practical difference.

1

Example 1: Helping a supported person understand the money that funds their support is crucial. It enables people to make choices about how they use the money to live their good life:

William lived in his own flat in a block of flats where other people needed support. He had no information about the cost associated with his support. William and others in this arrangement were supported to understand the budget. William realised he was paying for a waking night support and a sleepover that he never used. William made other choices about how to use his budget. This led to greater control over more tailored support and ultimately a better quality of life.
William now helps others to understand how to gain control over their money and their support.

Question: What more could you do to ensure people have the information they need to have their rights respected, protected and upheld?

2

Example 2: Health and supported decision-making.

We all need help at different times in our lives and will seek support from others to help us make good decisions. Supported Decision-Making is based on the belief that we can all make decisions, if we have access to the right support from people who know and care about us and who take the time to make sure our will and preferences are heard. Supported Decision-Making aims to promote self-determination and independent living as detailed in UNCRPD Article 19. Your role as a Support Worker is to believe in the person and do all you can to help state their preferences and make a decision.

Alex does not use words to communicate. He has a great support team who know him well and what is important to him.

They noticed his sight was deteriorating and supported him to go to the GP. He was diagnosed with cataracts. The GP stated that he could not have the operation as he doubted Alex would cope with post operative rehabilitation. Alex's team and wider multi-disciplinary support team knew how important his sight was to him. They also knew he had a **right to health**.

They set out to prove that Alex would, with the right support, manage the rehabilitation. Using a human rights framing they were persuasive. Alex had the operation and thrived.10

Question: How can you be a more active human rights defender?

‘We are **all** **Human Rights Defenders**.
Dignity is at the heart of human rights
and in what we do,
in the most intimate moments of everyday life.’
C-Change supporting Good Lives



Chapter 4

Knowing people's rights

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



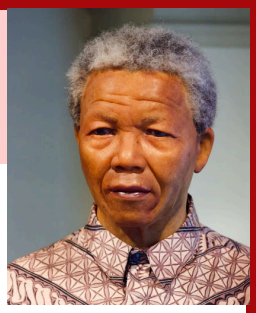
Yo Dunn
Consultant
Consult Yo Ltd



Joshua Hennessy
Support Worker

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‘To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.’
Nelson Mandela, Human rights activist **Amnesty International UK.**



Knowing people’s **rights** can really help you to stick up for them and that is an important part of your role as a Support Worker – to stand up for the rights of the people you support.

The Human Rights Act 1998 applies to all, including Councils, the NHS and Care providers whose clients are funded by councils and the NHS so they must pay attention and work by this.

The legal information in this section refers to England. People working in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland should refer to the relevant laws and guidance that apply in their nation.

The Care Act (2014) is the law that the council has to follow when they are deciding how much support an adult needs.

It is important for you to know about this so that if a person’s funding is being reduced, when you feel it shouldn’t be, then you have a basis on which to challenge this.

The Care Act states that the council should:

- **Listen to the adult who needs support** and people who know them well (this should include you!).

‘The process must be person-centred throughout, involving the person and supporting them to have choice and control.’
Care Act Guidance 6.1

- **Be appropriately trained** – this should include training in the person’s particular disability.

‘Local authorities must ensure that assessors … have the skills and knowledge … for example when assessing an individual who has autism [and/or] learning disabilities.’
Care Act Guidance 6.86

- **Assess all a person’s needs** – not just essentials like washing and eating, but also needs to get out, have friends and relationships and do meaningful activities. The council should think about all the needs someone has, even if an informal carer or support workers are meeting some of them. **Care Act Guidance 6.105 & 6.106**

- **Make decisions about how much support a person needs** based on what will meet their individual needs. They are only allowed to choose the cheapest option if that is actually available and suitable for the person.

> 'The local authority may reasonably consider how to balance [its own finances] with the duty to meet the eligible needs of an individual in determining how an individual's needs should be met (but not whether those needs are met).'
> Care Act Guidance 10.27

- **Support people to have their needs met** in whatever way works best for them.

> 'The person must be genuinely involved and influential throughout the planning process.'
> Care Act Guidance 10.2

Councils always have to 'find savings'. Budgets get cut. But that doesn't mean that it's ok or even lawful for the person you support to have their support cut without a good reason.

Councils are allowed to charge adults who need support for their social care under the Care Act. But they should reduce their charges to take account of any Disability-Related Expenses (DREs) that they already have. These can be any extra costs they have because of their disability.

So, you can do a lot to help the person you support keep more of their money if you can help them show the council how much money they spend on these costs. Inclusion London have a chatbot which can help you understand the rules around DREs - www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/chat-bot/

The law highlights that adult citizens have the right to make decisions for themselves e.g. where to live, what to buy with their money, who to be friends with. Sometimes, because of a person's disabilities, they might struggle with decision making and need extra help. Sometimes, because of a person's disability, they might not be able to make their own decisions.



The Mental Capacity Act (MCA) (2005) is a law which says that adults have the right to make their own decisions whenever possible. That means adults with learning disabilities too!

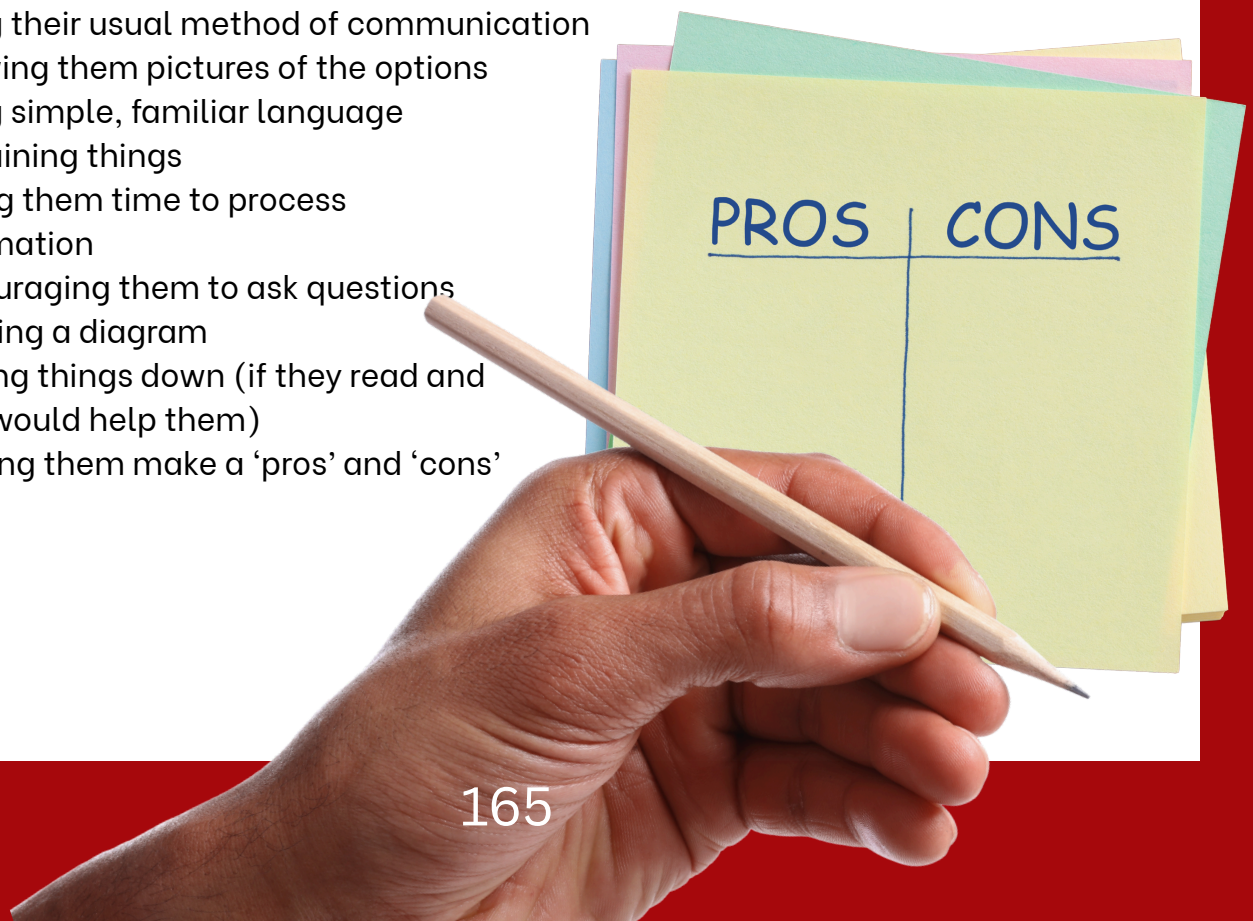
The MCA says that people are not allowed to just assume that an adult is not able to make their own decisions because of their disability (even if it seems obvious). This rule is meant to avoid discrimination.

The MCA also says that people must make reasonable adjustments and provide support to give the person the best possible chance to understand and weigh up the pros and cons of the decision. In fact, people are only allowed to decide that an adult isn't able to take a decision because of their disability (which is called 'lacking capacity' to take the decision), if they have done an assessment and can provide evidence that that is true. So a Mental Capacity Assessment is when someone assesses, according to the rules in the law, whether a person just needs extra help or whether someone else has to take the decision for them.

But a Mental Capacity Assessment only applies to **that** decision, not every decision.

YOU can make a big difference here. You can help the person you support to understand more about the decisions in their life, support them to take more decisions for themselves and help them gain experience at decision making. You can start with smaller decisions, like what to eat for lunch. But over time, you can support the person to take bigger decisions, like what to buy in the supermarket. You can use support strategies like:

- Using their usual method of communication
- Showing them pictures of the options
- Using simple, familiar language
- Explaining things
- Giving them time to process information
- Encouraging them to ask questions
- Drawing a diagram
- Writing things down (if they read and that would help them)
- Helping them make a 'pros' and 'cons' table



An adult who has 'substantial difficulty' being involved in their assessment, care planning and other big decisions, should have an advocate (s.67 Care Act, s. 35 MCA) unless they have a suitable friend or family member who is able to speak up for them in the process.

Giving good support with decision making can help to ensure that the person you support has as big a say in their own life as they possibly can. So, if you can learn a bit about the rights of the person you support (reading this chapter is a good start!), you can notice if people like social workers, doctors or others are not upholding people's rights. Sometimes, one of the best things a support worker can do, is be a bit pushy to stick up for the rights of the person they support!

'Professional challenge' may be an appropriate thing to do. That is when you encourage another professional to reflect on whether they are respecting someone's rights and following the law. This takes courage and you should make you are supported when you do this.

So, it's clear, there are many ways in which you can support and lift a person's voice when you are a Support Worker. You just need to make sure that you know about people's rights so that you can uphold them and not allow them to be eroded away.

'Get up, stand up, Stand up for your rights. Get up, stand up, Don't give up the fight.'
Bob Marley, Jamaican singer



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. DOES THE PERSON YOU SUPPORT UNDERSTAND THAT THEY HAVE RIGHTS THAT THEY CAN ENFORCE? HOW COULD YOU SUPPORT THEM TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS?
2. THE PERSON YOU SUPPORT IS ANGRY WITH THEIR STAFF. HOW MIGHT YOU SUPPORT THEM TO MAKE A COMPLAINT?
3. YOU ARE SUPPORTING AN ADULT TO CHALLENGE A REDUCTION IN THEIR CARE PACKAGE. THE COUNCIL DID NOT DISCUSS THE REDUCTION WITH THE ADULT BEFORE DECIDING TO REDUCE IT. IS THAT LEGALLY WRONG? IF SO, CAN YOU SAY WHY?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** consider risks to people's rights and happiness throughout their lives, not just short term physical risks.
2. **Do** use law and guidance to stick up for the person you support and help them live the life they want to live.
3. **Do** take time to imagine what it feels like to depend on support, and how you would want your Support Worker to treat you.

1. **Don't** rely just on training. Research human rights, the Care Act and the MCA yourself and think about how they apply in your work.
2. **Don't** hide the support plan from the person you support. It's a blueprint for their life and they need to be in control of what it says.
3. **Don't** cut the person you support out of the loop by only seeking advice from managers, professionals and peers. The person you support needs to be able to guide you.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.accessava.org.uk/

https://cascaidr.org.uk/

Case Studies:
Greg and his communication

Greg is autistic, does not speak, and has learning disabilities. Greg depends on his Support Workers to guess and work out what he might want and show him a list of options so that he can point to the one he wants to do.

Asil, one of his Support Workers, thinks it may be worth trying to teach Greg some Makaton so he doesn't have to wait for his Support Workers to try to guess what he wants. However the council refuses to allow any of Greg's Direct Payment to be spent on Makaton training. Asil looks up the law and argues that mental capacity law says that Greg has to be supported to communicate his decisions in whatever way works for him. Asil also finds some statutory guidance which says that money for Greg's support can be used flexibly to meet his needs.

Asil sends an email to the council quoting the law. The council changes its mind and agrees that some of Greg's support funding can be spent on Makaton training. Now Greg can tell his Support Workers what he wants by signing. He doesn't have to just wait for them to guess any more.

Tosin's awareness of danger

Tosin is a young woman with learning disabilities and her Support Plan says she 'has no awareness of danger'. Whenever Tosin is out of the house her Support Worker links arms with her to prevent her from walking into the road or hurting herself.

Kevin is a new Support Worker, and to begin with he does the same. However he wonders if it is really necessary to restrict her freedom like this. Kevin knows a little bit about rights and thinks it may be more restrictive than is really necessary to keep Tosin safe. He also reflects that she might not like it. If he was in her position he would hate being restrained like that, no matter how gently. Kevin asks about what evidence there is that Tosin would be at risk if she wasn't linking arms with someone. Kevin is told that sometimes Tosin gets angry, bites her Support Workers' arm and runs away from her Support Workers. Once she ran across a road.

Kevin takes Tosin to the beach with no roads nearby and lets her go. Tosin seems pleased and walks around safely. Kevin tries more experiments in low-speed traffic environments like car parks. Tosin is always calm, and he notices she flicks her eyes at the cars and waits for them to pass before moving. After a while Kevin stops linking arms with her altogether, although his manager is uneasy. But eventually Kevin's approach becomes the new normal, and the whole team take a more relaxed approach, abandoning restraint altogether. There have been no further incidents of arm biting or running into roads. Once, when a stranger approached Tosin, she took Kevin's arm herself.

Why is it still so hard for people with learning disabilities who just want to do ordinary things for themselves?

Wendy Perez, Disability Rights Activist



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 4

Using the law to get the right support

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

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Access Social Care



Jacqui Darlington
Family Carer

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Across the UK, adults with learning disabilities (who are assessed as eligible) have the right to care and support that promotes their wellbeing, independence, and choice. As a Support Worker it is important you understand the relevant laws to make sure you can uphold the rights of those you support and help people get the support they need.



While there is no single UK-wide Social Care Act, each nation has its own law designed to protect people's rights to care, support and independence. These laws, listed towards the end of this piece, set out how it should happen. Although they share the same values about person-centred support, dignity, and inclusion, they are written and applied slightly differently.

Why these laws matter

All four nations in the UK have laws that:

- Give adults the right to be assessed for care and support.
- Require authorities to promote wellbeing, not just safety or basic care.
- Emphasise choice, control, and involvement in decisions.
- Encourage prevention and independence – supporting people to live the lives they choose.

These laws mean that keeping clean and safe is not enough. Local authorities must also consider things like relationships, work, volunteering, learning, and community life. All the laws (listed towards the end of this section) are underpinned by the principles of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which protect people's rights to dignity, autonomy, and inclusion in everyday life.

Understanding and using the law

Being a Gr8 Support Worker means knowing people's rights and upholding people's rights as well as helping people to use their voice. If you notice that a person's rights under their nation's law aren't being respected, protected and upheld, you can help them challenge it, with their consent and involvement, and the support of your manager, if you have one. For example:

- If a person isn't offered an advocate when needed.
- If their support is reduced but their needs haven't changed.
- If someone isn't getting enough support to live their life in a way that considers well-being, choice, control and independence as the laws set out.

- If they're told they can't use Direct Payments flexibly to live their life in a way that achieves the agreed outcomes.
- If care charges leave them unable to afford essentials.

The shared principles across all UK laws



These important principles are:

- **Wellbeing:** focusing on what matters to the person.
- **Choice and control:** enabling people to make decisions about their lives.
- **Involvement:** making sure people are fully included in planning and decisions.

Empowering people to have choice, voice, and control over their lives is a value that crosses borders.

The law you should know about in Scotland

The Self-Directed Support (Scotland) Act 2013

In Scotland, the Self-Directed Support Act (SDS) gives people choice and control over how their care and support are arranged.

Local authorities must offer four options for how support is delivered:

Option 1: Direct Payment
The person receives money directly and arranges their own support (for example, employing a Personal Assistant or choosing their own provider).

Option 2: Individual Service Fund (ISF)
The person chooses the care provider, but the local authority pays the provider directly. The person still decides how the money is spent.

Option 3: Arranged Services
The local authority arranges all the care and support on the person's behalf.

Option 4: A Mix of Options

The person can combine any of the above, for example, managing some support themselves while the local authority organises the rest. The Act is all about independence, dignity, and partnership working. Learn more by looking at: www.careinfoscotland.scot

The law you should know about in England

The Care Act 2014

The Care Act 2014 sets out what care and support adults should receive, and what local authorities (city, borough, or county councils) must do. It explains how local authorities should assess a person's needs, decide who is eligible for support, and plan care in a way that promotes independence and wellbeing.

The Care Act covers:

- How local authorities assess care and support needs (needs assessment).
- How they decide who qualifies for funded support (eligibility criteria).
- How much a person contributes towards their care (financial assessment).
- How to plan and review care and support (care planning).

The law you should know about in Wales

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

This Welsh Act brings together laws for adults, children, and carers.

It focuses on choice and control, prevention, and wellbeing. Local authorities must help people understand their choices, assess needs, and offer Direct Payments to increase independence.

The law you should know about in Northern Ireland

Health and Social Care (HSC) Framework

In Northern Ireland, health and social care are integrated under the Health and Social Care (HSC) system.

Support is arranged through regional HSC Trusts, under laws such as the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 and the Carers and Direct Payments Act (NI) 2002.

The focus, like the rest of the UK, is on choice, inclusion, and wellbeing.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE LEGAL RIGHTS? WHAT LEGAL RIGHTS DO WE ALL HAVE? WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?
2. WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF THE PERSON YOU SUPPORT IS NOT GETTING THE CARE THEY ARE ENTITLED TO?
3. HOW CAN YOU SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT WHAT THE LAW SAYS ABOUT SOCIAL CARE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES AND THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do,** before a person has a care planning mtg, a needs assessment or a review, ask the Local Authority for info on what will be discussed in a way the person will understand.
2. **Do** help the person you support find legal advice, If the problem is very complicated,. Search the Law Society website for legal advice in your area.
3. **Do** think of different ways the person might communicate the things that are important to them. This might be observing them, using pictures etc. The person you support must be at the centre of their assessment/ review meetings. But a formal meeting where questions are fired at them may not be the best way of getting their input.

1. **Don't** assume anything – do not assume that the person understands what is happening – but definitely do not assume that they do not!
2. **Don't** accept it when a Social Worker says 'we don't do that' or 'we don't have the money for that'. Remember that the person you support has rights. Although money is tight, the Local Authority must follow what the law says.
3. **Don't** go off and write to the Local Authority without the person you support's consent. If a family member is involved, consult with them too.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

www.accessava.org.uk

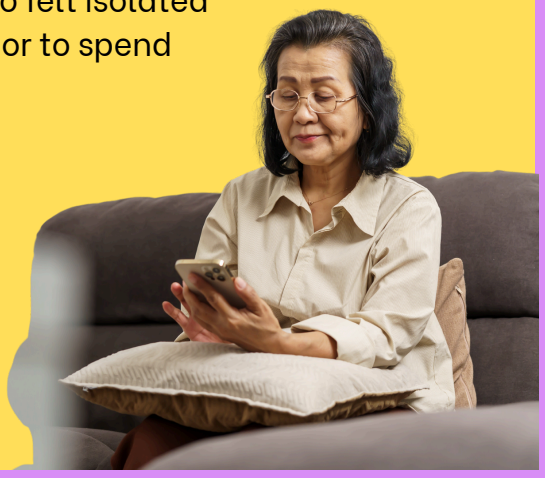
https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/guides-and-tools/looking-after-someone-guide/

Case Study:
3 different people's stories

Ian is a gentleman in his 50s. He has COPD and a back problem and needs help with getting up, showered, and dressed in the morning, and because he is not able to travel independently, he has become very isolated and depressed. He needs support to get out and meet people. He had an assessment several months ago and the Local Authority decided that he was eligible for care and support. The next step was to arrange for a Social Worker to meet with him to plan the best way of meeting his needs. However, he was told he would have to wait for this because there was a backlog and there was no Social Worker available to see him. As he waited, his health started to deteriorate, and a concerned neighbour offered to help write to the council about his situation. She looked up what the law said about delays and helped him write a letter quoting this. Shortly after this, Ian was contacted by Social Services who were able to quickly put the care package in place, making sure that his health did not deteriorate further.

Saradha is a young woman in her twenties who has learning disabilities and needs support with preparing meals and with managing her budget. She has a good social life and seeing her friends at her drama society is really important to her. Saradha has stopped going along to her club for a couple of weeks because her Social Care charges have gone up. She has not been able to afford the taxi there. Saradha's Support Worker watches a video about what the law says about care charges and knows that Saradha has lots of extra expenses because of her disability that should be accounted for when the council calculates what they will charge her. She makes a list with Saradha and they submit this to the council who agree to reduce the amount she has to pay. Saradha enjoys going back to her drama club.

Terence is a 35-year-old man who is autistic and has learning disabilities. His mother, Lara, is his carer and has health problems herself. After Covid, she wanted to go back to work but the Local Authority had not reinstated any of Terence's care package which stopped during the pandemic. Lara was exhausted from spending all her time supporting Terence without a break. She also felt isolated because she was not able to leave him to go to work or to spend some time with her friends or doing things that were important to her. She learned about carers' rights from other carers on a forum and wrote to the Local Authority explaining her situation. After working very hard to remind the Local Authority about Terence's rights, and her rights as a carer, the Local Authority provided support for Terence that allowed Lara to go back to work part-time.



‘I have learned a lot from Personal Assistants who are really clued up.

A Personal Assistant said [to me], ‘Why has Joshua not got a communication aid?’ and I said, ‘Well, he signs.’

He said, **‘Yeah, but not everybody can understand signs. Why has he not got a communication aid?’**

You know, I never even thought of that… This was a U-turn for me as a family carer. If he can have these things, what else is he missing out on?’

Parent



Chapter 4

Understanding how the money works to support a good life

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Nikki Henderson
Director of Elemental Health and Care



Clare Atkinson
Individual Service Fund and Training Facilitator

Alex Boys
Self-Advocate
Newkey

This section on money is different to other sections...

This is because we are asking you to **click on the green button** to read the full section as it's quite long. There is simply a lot to know.



Money, funding, benefits, and personal budgets can be complex, and the rules can change. No Support Worker is expected to understand everything. You are not a money expert. But this section will give you an understanding of the basics. You will feel more confident asking questions, noticing when something doesn't seem right, and knowing where to get advice or support on money.

Taking time with this section will make a real difference to people's independence, choices, and sense of control in everyday life.

Here's a few headlines to encourage you to learn more:

Money can change what everyday life looks like

The way you support someone with money can increase their freedom... or quietly limit their life.

Personal budgets aren't just numbers – they're someone's daily life.

Understanding how funding works helps people choose how they live, not just what service they get.

You don't need to know everything – but you do need to know when to ask.

A great support worker knows when to seek advice, advocacy, or challenge decisions alongside the person.

The system still focuses on what people can't do – your role is to keep sight of what matters.

Strengths, wellbeing, relationships, and ordinary life often get lost unless someone speaks up.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A GR8 SUPPORT WORKER WHEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH THEIR MONEY AND RIGHTS?

2. WHEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH THEIR MONEY AND RIGHTS, WHAT ARE MY MANAGER'S RESPONSIBILITIES TO ME AND THE PERSON.

3. WHAT TOOLS, SKILLS AND RESOURCES DO YOU NEED? TALK ABOUT THIS WITH YOUR MANAGER.

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** understand the person's situation. Ask questions and seek support if needed.
2. **Do** check and record everything clearly with the person or with a colleague.
3. **Do** have difficult conversations in ways that work for the person, including explaining consequences.

1. **Don't** think one size fits all. Every person will be different in how they want you to support them with their money and rights.
2. **Don't** be inconsistent. Work as a team around each person and support in agreed ways.
3. **Don't** cross professional boundaries or give advice beyond your role. Seek advice.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/?srsltid=AfmBOoo8NIpdi0Y7iEptJe0K7ewgT5h8N5D_NDa5zv75YnY6vohBW8g7

https://www.turn2us.org.uk/

Chapter 4

Helping people make decisions

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Liz
Trainer and mother



Mary Ellen
Personal Assistant



Elsa
Self-Advocate and Volunteer Steward, Shibden Hall

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One of the most powerful ways in which you can support people with learning disabilities is through supporting them to make decisions - their decisions. Whether someone has a mild learning disability or a profound one, every person has the right to be involved in decisions about their life. And supporting them to do that? That's real empowerment.

Why decisions matter

Think about your own life. How many decisions do you make each day without even thinking? What to eat, what to wear, how to get somewhere, what to say or how to say it?

Now imagine if those simple choices weren't always yours to make. How disempowering would that be? And imagine if other people kept making decisions for you. You'd start to feel powerless, frustrated, and invisible. Your life would become limited by others' assumptions and rules, and your life would become smaller and inward looking. Gradually you might give up the driving seat of your own life and just let others take control.

Can you guess what we are alluding to? Yep, this happens to many people with a learning disability. Seriously, who's going to speak up about making a big change in life, if they don't get to decide what goes in their packed lunch?

Well, it doesn't have to be like this. You can change things by the way you support people to make decisions because when people start to make their own decisions, they exercise their decision-making muscle and they start to grow confidence in themselves. They start to 'feel' and embody their right to decide on the things that matter to them.

Sometimes decisions don't come out all at once. They start with an idea that slips out quietly. But if that idea isn't heard, supported and acted on, then it might creep back inside and get buried deep in a big pile of broken hopes and dreams. As Support Workers, you need to notice these moments and do something about them!

For many people with learning disabilities, the world tries to make decisions for them, sometimes 'to keep them safe' or 'to make life easier'.

By proactively supporting someone to make their decisions, you're opening doors. You're helping someone step into their own story, rather than being stuck as a bystander.



So you can see how supported decision-making is deeply rooted in respect. It says: 'You are an expert in your own life. You are trusted to make choices even if those choices are different from what I might make. And I am here for you if it doesn't go quite as planned.'

This respect builds trust. When people trust you, they are more likely to share their true feelings and wishes. They will feel safer trying things out, knowing they won't be judged or punished for a mistake.

What does supported decision-making look like?

Supported decision-making means more than ticking a box or asking yes/no questions. It's about respecting that person's right to be involved, their preferences, and their pace. It's about listening, explaining, exploring options, and sometimes stepping back to let people try things out- even if they might make a mistake.

Supporting decisions is about being a guide, a helper, a cheerleader, and sometimes a translator between the person's wishes and the wider world. It might look like:

- **Asking what a person** thinks so that you aren't making any assumptions.
- **Breaking down complex information** into easy-to-understand bits, using pictures, objects, or simple language.
- **Giving someone time** - because rushing decisions can make people freeze or say what they think others want.
- **Checking in regularly**: 'Is this still what you want?' or 'Would you like to think about this a bit more?' (And coming back to this another time.)
- **Helping someone weigh up the pros and cons** without taking over.
- **Finding ways to communicate beyond words** - through gestures, pictures, or technology.
- **Respecting the decision** sometimes might be 'I don't know yet or 'I want to wait.'

Every one of these steps is an act of respect and belief in someone's right to live their own life. They say, 'You matter. Your choice matters.'



Even when someone is assessed as lacking capacity for a specific decision (according to your national legislation on p183), Supported Decision-Making doesn't stop, it shifts. We still look for a person's preferences, feelings, routines, and what matters to them. We still include them in discussions, adapt communication, and ensure the decision made on their behalf reflects their life, identity, and values as closely as possible.

Everyone can make decisions, in their own way

Some people might need lots of help to make decisions, and some people might only need a little nudge. People communicate and process things in different ways and at different speeds. The right support might be a quick chat or a long, gentle conversation over days, weeks or months. It's important to remember that many people with a learning disability are, too often, not used to being given the opportunity to explore and make their own decisions.

Dr Jo Watson, an Australian expert in supported decision-making, reminds us that everyone communicates, just not always with words. She talks about the importance of 'building on people's preferences', especially when supporting someone with profound and multiple learning disabilities. That might mean noticing the joy someone shows when listening to a certain song, or the calm they feel around a particular person. These are decisions too.

Jo Watson shares the story of a woman who was non-verbal and didn't use conventional communication, but who clearly responded with delight whenever she was taken outside into the garden. Over time, the woman's support team started to see this consistent reaction as a preference - and therefore, a decision. They proactively planned her day around regular outdoor time. That one recognition, as a preference, sparked a ripple effect.

As a Support Worker, you need to interpret these subtle expressions as meaningful choices, and honour them because decision-making doesn't start with words, it starts with connection, noticing and deep respect.

Supporting decisions means being patient, creative and curious, always trying to understand the person's unique way of expressing themselves.

Supported decision-making across the UK

Across the UK, there are different laws and policies that guide how we support people to make decisions, but they all share the same foundation: the right to make your own choices, with the support you need. These values aren't just good practice; they are also protected by law in every nation of the UK.

England and Wales: The Mental Capacity Act 2005 says every adult has the right to make their own decisions unless it's proven they can't – and even then, any decision made for them must be in their best interests and involve them as much as possible. Scotland: The Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 focuses on principles of benefit, least restriction, and taking account of a person's past and present wishes. Northern Ireland: The Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 combines mental health and capacity law, emphasising the same rights to make decisions and receive appropriate support.

In all four nations, the message is clear:

- capacity is decision-specific
- support must be offered
- everyone has the right to participate in decisions about their own life

So how can Support Workers step into this role?

Here are some simple but powerful ways Support Workers can bring supported decision-making into their daily practice:

- **Slow down**. Give people time and space. Don't rush decisions.
- **Use visuals and tools**. Pictures, objects, apps, or symbols can make information clearer.
- **Ask open questions**. Instead of 'Do you want this?', try 'What do you think about this?"
- **Be a good listener**. Notice body language, expressions, and subtle cues.
- **Build routines that include choice**. Even small choices can be a daily habit.
- **Learn about the person's history and preferences**. The more you know, the better you can support.
- **Celebrate decisions made**, big or small. Every choice is a win.
- **Be okay with mistakes**. They are part of learning, not failure.
- **Involve family and friends**, where appropriate. Their insight can help—but the person should always have the final say.
- **Keep reflecting and learning**. Supporting decision-making is a skill that grows with practice.

You are more powerful than you think

Your job is not easy. It takes a huge range of skills to do what you do. It takes patience, lots of juggling, creativity, and heart. If it ever feels like the world doesn't see or value the amazing work you do, remember this: **You hold the keys to someone's dignity and independence. So be the person who gives the keys to the person you support. Don't hold onto them. Help the person know how to use them so they can open their own front door.** Every time you support a person to make a decision, you're shifting power in their direction. You're telling them, **'You are capable. Your life is yours.'** And that is revolutionary. (Sadly.)

The work you do, supporting people to live lives they choose, in ways they decide, is one of the most meaningful things you can do for someone. It may seem small, but it's huge. It's the difference between living and just existing.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO DIFFERENTLY TO MAKE SURE THAT PEOPLE WE SUPPORT ARE MAKING THEIR OWN DECISIONS?
2. WHAT ARE WE DOING AUTOMATICALLY 'FOR' INSTEAD OF WITH PEOPLE AND WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE FOR US TO STOP DOING THESE THINGS?
3. WHAT CUES ARE WE MISSING ABOUT DECISIONS OR CHANGES THAT PEOPLE WE SUPPORT WOUD LIKE TO MAKE AND HOW CAN WE MAKE THE SPACE TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO THESE THINGS?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** leave time and space for agenda free conversations with people.
2. **Do**, when you know something needs to happen but can't make it happen by yourself, be persistent in making sure someone else does the thing
3. **Do** build a strong relationship with the person and their family. Decision making is hard, trust is vital.

1. **Don't** say, 'It's not possible'.
2. **Don't** make a decision with someone in a rush. Give the process the time it needs, whether that's months or even years.
3. **Don't** work towards a decision when anyone involved is stressed or has their mind elsewhere.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/a-practical-guide-to-supported-decision-making/

https://www.mwcscot.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Supported%20Decision%20Making%202024.pdf

Case Study:

This is a story of a time when an idea from someone was stuck, nurtured and turned into something marvellous:

Elsa had been living in her own supported flat for about nine months when she sat down for a cuppa with her Key Worker, Shelly. It wasn't a meeting or review, just ½ hour to chat. Over tea, Elsa mentioned she'd like to do some volunteering or work.

Shelly didn't yet realise what a big step this was. Elsa had been let down in several supported employment and voluntary roles, losing confidence in her ability to make a contribution. Knowing she didn't have the time to take it forward alone, Shelly arranged a chat with me, Elsa's mum, so we could plan together.

We met Pam, a Volunteer Coordinator, who asked thoughtful questions about Elsa's interests, skills and qualities before suggesting a few opportunities. Elsa quickly discounted 2 of the jobs (one I secretly thought was perfect) and we arranged interviews for the other 2 jobs.

Reliable support was key. The provider couldn't guarantee consistency, so we asked one of Elsa's Personal Assistants, Mary, if she'd help. Mary was a great match. She was supportive, steady and, as it turned out, passionate about history!

The first placement, at a community theatre, was tempting but involved evenings and weekends, which Elsa wasn't willing to give up. The second, at Shibden Hall Museum, felt right immediately. Elsa already loved the place, and Mary's enthusiasm sealed the deal.

There were still plenty of decisions to make about hours, travel, lunch and these changed with the seasons. But a year on, Elsa now volunteers every Friday. She travels by taxi instead of relying on Mary, and proudly works as a steward in the kitchen, sharing her knowledge of the old equipment with visitors.



Her confidence has grown beyond the museum too. She's more assertive, clearer about her hopes, and recently planned a holiday with a friend (on her own terms). What began as a passing comment over a cuppa has blossomed into a purposeful, confidence-building role with ripples that keep spreading. Thanks to Mary, Shelly, and the wonderful team at Shibden Hall. If you get the chance, do go and visit Shibden Hall!

Chapter 4

Challenging practice that isn't good enough

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Fiona Ritchie
Independent Consultant



Sal Lapsley
Self-Advocate



Christine Davis
Family carer /Advocate

By now, we hope you will realise what an important job being a Support Worker is. Your role is to stand alongside people you support, to encourage, to hold people's ambition until they can hold it themselves and for you to step back watching them blossom and take control of their own lives - **that's a being Gr8 Support Worker**. However, things don't always go to plan, and you will see practice in your career that makes you think, 'Mmmh ... not sure about that! ' Or 'Blimey, I wouldn't do that!'

What might that behaviour look like? How do you know when things need to change? Well, we think it's easy. Everybody should be treated as we would all want to be treated - with kindness and respect. Don't compromise.If you compromise once you will keep doing it, until you find yourself doing things you would not have dreamt off at the beginning of your career! **Instead stand up for the rights of others.**

Have you ever been ignored, not listened too or humiliated? Think about how that felt. People with lived experience tell us they feel this all the time. So, lets delve a bit deeper...

Someone once said that if you want to understand an organisation's culture, ask a new employee what they think after their first week on the job. They are often more likely to provide an honest and accurate perspective because they have not yet become immersed in the team's ways of working. As a result, they can notice behaviours, practices, and attitudes that longer-serving staff may simply regard as the way things are done'.

Some things to discuss with your team:

Example 1: You are a new Support Worker; you are shadowing Susan, another Support Worker, as part of your induction. There are 3 people that live together in their own home, and you have been employed to support them. During your shadowing, you notice Julie sitting on her own with no one talking to her. She has sat in the same spot all morning. She is starting to bite her fingers and making vocal sounds that you don't think sound good. You talk to Susan and ask about Julie. Susan states, 'Oh that's just her. We leave her be as she is nice and quiet and it's easier that way'.



- What do you think about that?
- Do you feel staff are supporting Julie to be the best she can?
- What could be done differently?
- How would you go about tackling this?

People may all have different initial reactions to this scenario, and it's helpful to explore why. Some may think this is okay behaviour as it has always been that way; and why wouldn't you want to keep Julie quiet, as when she gets upset, she upsets the other two people living there.

But that's not what we think. We think Julie is being emotionally neglected. She is being ignored because she is quiet. No-one is engaging her or encouraging her to experience different things. Her quality of life must be very poor, boring, dull and small, in terms of her friends, relationships and living her life. It may be that she does not like living with her peers or staff or the home. Why would you 'keep' someone in that situation?

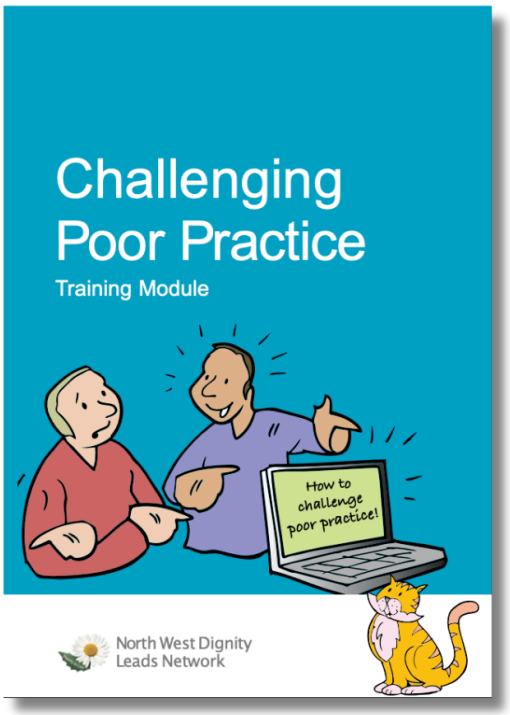
So how could we tackle this? Here are some of our ideas:

Make sure you have Julie's Support Plan and Communication Plan so you can understand Julie more. If appropriate, ask Julie if you can sit with her. Take your lead from her. You might not sit too close until you feel she is happy with you being there, but her Communication Plan will tell you this as well as your observations. Get to know Julie and initiate things that you can both do together. Model the practice you would like to see. You could also:

- Read some of the day notes to see if this is custom and practice, i.e. she is always on her own and doesn't get out much.
- Talk to your Line Manager. Talk through your observations and why it makes you feel uncomfortable. You might want to discuss it at your team meeting. There might be others who feel the same way as you do.
- If Julie has family, talk to them and get a feel about Julie and what she likes to do and then volunteer to support her to do those things. Family involvement could be critical.

It's easy to do nothing and to copy bad practice, especially if Support Workers have been doing it a lot longer than you. Avoid looking down or away. Look up and see and feel the possibilities!

You may want to read **this** resource which is helpful to get you thinking. There is a lot around safeguarding in this....so might be useful for that too)



2

Example 2: You're out walking about town, and you notice 3 people at a bus stop. 2 of the individuals are looking at their phones and seem engrossed in them, nothing new there, but you also see the third individual is looking distressed. You look further and 1 of the people has a lanyard on them showing what care company they work for. What are you thinking and what would you do?

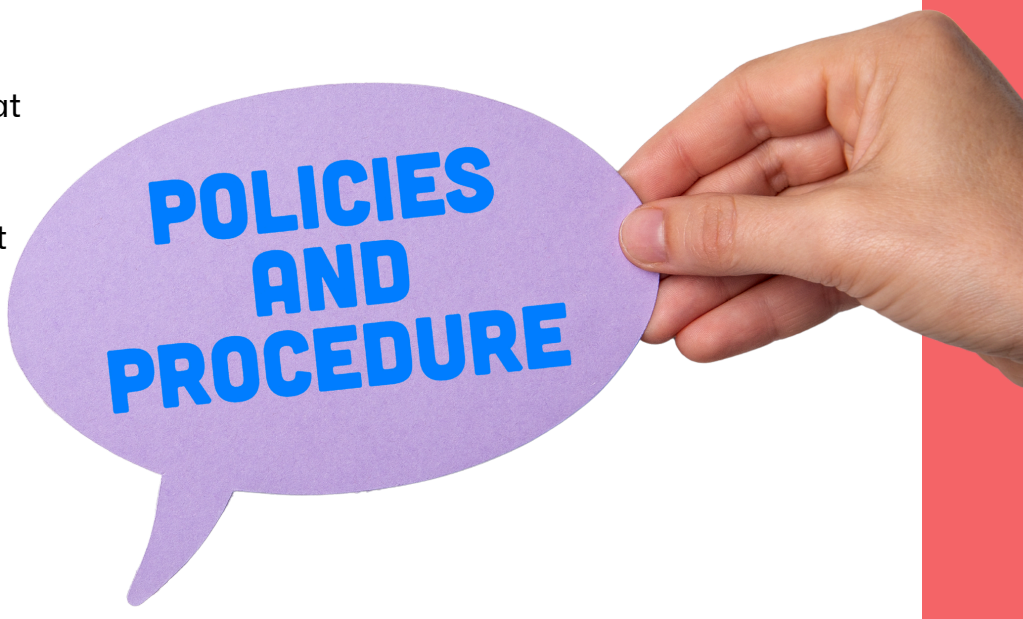
We think most people in this position would look down and walk on. Is that you? If you were the third person, how do you think this would make you feel? You don't know all the circumstances, but we can guess that at least 1 person out of the 3 you saw works for a care company. So they are probably being paid to support the individual to go about their daily business. They are not paid to look at their mobiles when someone was in obvious distress. We all have a duty of care and it's just plain decency to communicate and support people when they are anxious or worried not to ignore and blank off. If the people on the phones were hitting the third person, would you intervene?

Take some time to think about this, think about other things you have seen in your life and review what could have been done. Be Brave. Don't walk on.

So how could we tackle this? Here are some of our ideas:

- Do you feel comfortable going up to them? Maybe you could ask the third person who is distressed if they are okay? This might stop the other 2 looking at their phones and concentrate on the third person. This might be all you have to do... re: direct them.
- Did you get a look at the lanyard for the care company? If so, call them and explain what you saw, and your concerns. Ask that someone investigate this
- Ensure that YOUR team doesn't do this. Talk about it in team meetings. **Open Future Learning** has some thought-provoking videos which will make you reflect on you and your teams behaviours-have a delve in!

Your organisation will have policies and procedures that support you to think about what actions you need to take. Please make sure that you read these and talk about them in your team meetings so you all can learn from each other.



Challenging practice in health care

We know people with learning disabilities and autistic people live much shorter lives than the general public. That is why health care is so important to get right.

As Support Workers, your role in this aspect is both massive and difficult. Speaking up for individuals when they need this in primary and secondary health care is vital.

Ambition is not just for things people want to do but we must all have ambition for people's health and wellbeing.

Doctors might not always think that Support Workers know much. We know that the public don't always understand Social Care like they do health care, but that's why we must be Ambassadors and question when we don't understand.

So how could we tackle this? Here are some of our ideas:

- Ask health professionals to speak to the individual, not you. Then you can concentrate on ensuring you understand what is being said.
- Make sure when you go to an appointment with the person that you know them well and you have agreed a list of things you both want answered.
- Never be afraid to question anyone. You might find this one of the most difficult discussions to have. Hold strong, be brave, head up and stay firm. You've got this!

The World Health Organisation have some interesting articles on the right to health that you may find useful: **Standing up for the right to health**.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. THINK ABOUT ALL THE SUPPORT YOU HAVE GIVEN. ARE THERE MOMENTS YOU WOULD CHANGE IF THEY CAME UP AGAIN?
2. HOW WOULD YOU DEAL WITH THEM DIFFERENTLY? AND WHO WOULD YOU GO TO FOR SUPPORT IN THIS?
3. TALK TO YOUR MANAGER ABOUT PRESENTING 3 SCENARIOS TO YOUR TEAM MEETING, ASKING HOW PEOPLE THEY WOULD/ WOULDN'T DEAL WITH THEM? (CREATE A SAFE/NOT SHAMING SPACE TO DO THIS.)

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** model the practice you expect to see and reflect this in your practice.
2. **Do** understand your rights so you can benefit others.
3. **Do** speak up when things don't look or feel right. You'd want some-one to do this for you, wouldn't you?

1. **Don't** look down and walk on.
2. **Don't** compromise on things that shouldn't be compromised- it's a slippery slope!
3. **Don't** copy practice that you have seen others do that make you feel uncomfortable.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.openfuturelearning.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=login.Contributors

https://www.dignityincare.org.uk/_assets/Challenging_Booklet_low_res.pdf

Case Study (Building on the story from p188)
Choosing kindness by speaking up

Amie was a new Support Worker on her first week in a shared house. 3 people lived there, including Julie, who spent the morning in the same chair, silent, biting her fingers. When Amie asked her colleague, Susan, about this, she was told, 'Oh that's just Julie. We leave her be. We don't want to unsettle her.'

Amie felt uneasy. She remembered that her induction had explored how Support Worker's roles can unlock or keep locked people's lives. She worried that if she let Julie just sit there, she was colluding with Julie's world being quite small and closed. She didn't know if anyone had tried to explore Julie's life to open it up more. Amie read Julie's Support Plan and Communication Plan and checked the daily notes. Amie thought that she just needed to be brave and try a few things. First she sat near to Julie at first, smiling, and copying some of rythms Julie was making with her tapping hand. Gently and over time Amie offered Julie easy choices, using Julie's preferred objects of reference (physical items that have a special meaning assigned to Julie, representing an activity, person, place, or event). Amie invited Julie to water plants together. Julie's humming eased; and one time when asked, she reached for the watering can.

Amie brought her observations to supervision, asserting gently that she was worried that Julie could do more and was being overlooked. The manager suggested that the team create a plan to increase connection where they try different, short things to do, recording what works. Amie phoned Julie's sister, who had shared ideas on what Julie enjoyed years ago - baking and listening to soul music. Within weeks, staff were seeing a shift in Julie. It was like she was literally opening up as a person! In the year to come, Julie was almost unrecognisable to the old Julie. It gave Amie a confidence boost and she was really pleased that she had been part of doing this for Julie.



Reflective thoughts:
Who would you speak to if you feel uncomfortable about what you have seen? It should be someone you trust and who can help you think through a way forward.

‘Whenever one person stands up and says, ‘Wait a minute, this is wrong’, it helps other people to do the same’

Gloria Steinem, feminist, journalist, and activist



Chapter 4

When advocacy should be used

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Kate Mercer
Black Belt Advocacy



Joshua Hepple
Equality Trainer and Consultant

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As a Support Worker, or Personal Assistant, you have probably already developed your advocacy skills and hopefully use these every day in your relationships. In this section you will learn about the key elements of using advocacy as well as when to refer to an independent advocate.

1. What is advocacy?



Advocacy is always about making sure the person's 'voice' is heard and that their views are taken seriously. It is such an important activity because when people draw on Health or Social Care, the services they use can take over and start to dictate what should happen in a person's life, when and by whom. Advocacy exists to make sure that the person, their views, their goals and their version of what is best for them, is always heard and promoted.

Here are 3 essential elements of being an advocate:

PROMOTING SELF ADVOCACY

> Advocacy is not about speaking for others;
> it's about empowering them to speak for themselves.
> **Malala Yousafzai, education activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner at 17 years old**

Advocacy can be about speaking up for another person but you should only ever do this if the person asks you to speak up on their behalf or in circumstances where the person can't because they lack the capacity to make certain decisions. It is always better to ask 'How can I support you to self advocate?'. This starts with listening to the person, appreciating what matters to them and then supporting the person to say this.

For more information about the importance of self advocacy watch these videos:
The Power of Self Advocacy film **here**.
Impact of Advocacy from Learning Disability England film **here**.

PROTECTING RIGHTS

> Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home.
> **Eleanor Roosevelt, American political figure, diplomat, and activist**

In the UK, there are numerous legal frameworks that enshrine rights. From the right to be heard, to the right to complain, advocates are there to make sure that people enjoy all their human rights. As a Support Worker, you are not expected to be a legal expert, but you should be confident in asking questions and raising concerns where

you are worried if a decision might infringe upon a person's rights. This includes making sure that people are heard, are taken seriously and only have restrictions on who they can see, where they can go and what they can do where this is agreed through Care Plans or legal frameworks.

Story: Franny is 28 and loves anything to do with football. He worships West Ham Utd and loves to go to the football whenever he can. Recently staff have introduced restrictions meaning he can't leave his house without staff support. Tina, is Franny's Support Worker and is concerned that these have been implemented without any formal decision making and that Franny might lack the capacity to agree to these restrictions. She suggests that there needs to be a review of the care plan as this might be a Deprivation of Liberty.

SUPPORTING DECISION-MAKING

People often need friends, family and/or advocates to help them to make decisions. Support can take different forms but usually means someone helping with information (in preferred formats), protecting the time it takes to go through the information, space to work out how the person feels about different options, respect and appreciation for their feelings and also making sure the person has experience of the options (for example if there is a decision about where you live, you need to visit the new home not just pictures of it). For further information and guidance – see the this **Supported Decision Making kit**.

2. Is advocacy part of a Support Worker's role?

Support workers should always notice and pick up on moments when a person's rights might be being ignored or worn away or when a person would benefit from advocacy.

Support Workers often make the best advocates because they know the person well and understand what is important to them. They know when the person is quiet because they are tired and had a late night the previous night or if they are quiet because they are worried about an appointment coming up next week. Support Workers who 'get this' are well placed to then help the person to speak up – or speak up on their behalf. This is really important when the person is worried or doesn't feel able to do this.



Story: Corey's Support Worker is Raheena. They have known one another for over 2 years. Raheena first came into Corey's life when he was 18 and moving out of the family home into his own place. Corey loves his family but felt they were over-protective and didn't want him going out on his own. He wanted to go out to gigs and nightclubs, but his parents had always said no. He told Raheena that he didn't want his parents to worry but he didn't want to have an argument with them, so asked Raheena to let his parents know that he would be going to gigs from now on. Raheena was able to put forward his views and goals on his behalf, working with them to put safety measures in place (which gave the parents more confidence.)

However, there are times when a person may not want their Support Workers to advocate for them. They may be very clear that they have employed assistants or Support Workers for a particular set of skills and that they are able to speak up for themselves, so there are times when a Support Worker jumping in to advocate when it is not needed or wanted can actually disempower and overstep their role.

Josh Hepple is an Equality Trainer and Consultant who has severe cerebral palsy. His impairment affects his speech and mobility and he relies on Personal Assistants.
'I was asked to think about how my assistants help to advocate for me. In a very simple response, I said 'they don't'. This is a very intentional decision. I generally employ fantastic actors and master's students. When I was at uni 15 years ago I had the rugby team and we had many trips to America and we did lots of fantastic interrail trips each summer. I have more than enough capacity to understand what I do and don't need and I have taught the Care Act for many years. I need this money to drink and do the toilet but it is not the role of my assistants to talk to anyone in my local authority, not only would it be disempowering for me, lots of my other assistants are completely unaware how they're paid but this would be the same for any student job. They do not need to know the details and I need to appear as though I am a calm and steady employer. For example, a junior waiter would focus on serving rather than attending management meetings on how many waiters might be needed for a shift. I appreciate that many people with care needs do not have capacity and asking those who help that person about their life could be helpful.' To learn more about Josh and his work, please see his website www.joshhepple.com.

It's important to note that many people with learning disabilities may choose to advocate for themselves. But other people will prefer (or even rely on you) to advocate for them. The important thing is not to assume anything. Check with the person.

3. When is an official Independent Advocate needed?

An Independent Advocate can be helpful in a variety/ range of situations. When a person wants something that is risky or 'unwise', Support Workers (and other health and care professionals) need to make sure they are working in the 'best interests' of the person. This means that if a person wants to do something that might be risky (say stopping medication) the Support Worker might not be able to help with this. This is

where an Independent Advocate can come in. The Advocate is not there to make decisions, so is free to promote whatever the person is saying. If a person wants to go out and get drunk, an Advocate would simply help that person to say this!

Lots of people using Health and Social Care will also be entitled to a Statutory Advocate. All this means is that the Local Authority must pay for an Independent Advocate in the following instances:

- **When a person lacks capacity to make certain decisions** (such as a decision about serious medical treatment or where to live), the law requires the person to have someone available. This must be someone who isn't paid to deliver care who can help or represent them through the process. Where the person doesn't have any friends or family, they will be given an Independent Mental Capacity Advocate (IMCA). An IMCA will ensure a person's views are heard as decisions are made.
- **When a person is detained in a mental health hospital**, they are entitled to have an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA). This advocate will be there to make sure the person understands what is happening, why they are in hospital and help them to challenge or appeal their section.
- **When a person is drawing on Adult Social Care and going through Social Care assessments, care planning or review and safeguarding processes,** they may be entitled to an advocate, under The Care Act in England, Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 (Wales), Mental Capacity Act 2016 (Northern Ireland) and Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act 2003 (Scotland). This advocate will make sure the person is involved in these processes and that their voice and goals influence what happens. For more information about statutory advocacy please read here: www.blackbeltadvocacy.com/statutory-advocacy

4. Final thoughts

Advocacy is about ensuring that people are at the centre of decisions that affect their lives. In practice, this means:

- **Building trust and relationships:** Effective advocacy relies on strong, trusting relationships between the Support Worker and the individual. This allows the Support Worker to understand the individual's needs, preferences, and concerns, and to represent these accurately.
- **Ensuring privacy:** Support Workers should ensure that individuals have the opportunity to speak privately about their views and concerns.
- **Promoting independence and empowerment:** The ultimate goal of advocacy is to empower individuals to take control of their lives. Support Workers should build an individual's confidence and independence, rather than create dependency.
- **Listening:** Advocates need to be able to listen without judging what the person is saying. They must respect what it is that is important to that person.
- **Addressing power imbalances:** People may feel intimidated by professionals or systems, making it difficult for them to speak up or challenge decisions. Support Workers can be there to 'have the person's back' and help to raise issues and concerns, especially when there is unfairness and injustice.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. THINK OF A TIME IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU WOULD HAVE LIKED SOMEONE TO HAVE BEEN YOUR ADVOCATE. WHY DO YOU THINK AN ADVOCATE WOULD HAVE HELPED? WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE WANTED YOUR ADVOCATE TO DO?
2. THINK OF THE PERSON YOU SUPPORT. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO THEM RIGHT NOW? IF THEY COULD ASK FOR SOMETHING TO MAKE LIFE BETTER WHAT WOULD IT BE? CAN YOU HELP WITH THIS?
3. IMAGINE YOU ARE ADVOCATING FOR SOMEONE. WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES OF YOU REPRESENTING THEM? WHEN WOULD IT BE BETTER IF YOU HELPED THEM TO SELF ADVOCATE?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** listen to the person you are supporting. Find out what matters most to them and be on their side.
2. **Do** help the person to self advocate wherever they can.
3. **Do** challenge practices and systems that fail to listen and respect the person you are supporting.

1. **Don't** rush in to represent the person. Step back. Are you taking away their voice. Should you support them to speak up?
2. **Don't** be afraid to ask questions and challenge authority.
3. **Don't** give advice or persuade the person to do something without really appreciating their viewpoint.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.blackbeltadvocacy.com/

https://www.joshhepple.com/

Case Study: Matchday matters

Luca was 28 and absolutely loved football especially his local club. Most weekends he went to the club with his brother, Fred, or a few football mates to watch the game. They would have a laugh, and share the ups and downs of every match. It's what kept Luca connected and it's something Luca really loved.

Luca's brother then moved away and was no longer able to attend football matches with Luca. Fred explained this to the organisation supporting Luca and he suggested that Luca could go with Fred's and Luca's friends (also football supporters). The support organisation said they would look into this but they'd need to do a risk assessment and DBS checks. They said that in the short term they would arrange for a Support Worker to go when possible.

In the following 6 months Luca only went to one match (with a Support Worker who didn't like football) and when Fred questioned this, the organisation said they didn't have the staff to go with Luca and the risk assessment hadn't been competed yet.

A Support Worker who had known Luca for a long time could see how upset he was about missing football. In regular catch ups with Fred, the Support Worker could hear how concerned and frustrated he was at something so special being removed from Luca's life. The Support Worker suggested that Fred could ask a local advocacy organisation for their advice about Luca going to football with Fred's friends ... who had also been Luca's friends for the last four years of regular football watching!

Within six months, Luca was happily going to all the home games and some away games with his football mates - still too long to have waited but at least Luca was back at the matches!

Reflective Questions:

- When someone's routine or passion changes because of staff or system decisions, how can you make sure their voice is still heard and acted on?
- What steps can you take when you see that a person's rights, friendships, or community connections are being limited, even when its unintentional? (Would you raise this with your manager, or look for advocacy support like in Luca's story?)



Chapter 5

Nurturing Support Workers

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Chapter 5

Introduction

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Support Worker
PSS



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Director
PSS

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Hello, we are Jesse Onokpasa and Harriet Michael-Phillips, and we're delighted to be introducing this chapter about the support you get to do your role.

Jesse has worked as a Support Worker in several organisations, both as an agency worker and as a permanent team member, so he has lots of wisdom to share when it comes to what good and bad support looks and feels like. Harriet is a Director now, but she started out nearly 30 years ago as a Support Worker for the most amazing group of people and she has never forgotten the joy she got from that role, the people she worked with and the brilliant colleagues and managers. When we get it right, it really can be the best job in the world!

Jesse and Harriet both like to chat and when we met to work on this, we couldn't stop nattering and smiling about what we love about our work.

So why is good support important? We know that being a Support Worker can be incredibly rewarding and that many of us have a desire to give and to share. That is what brings us to the job. But it is also not easy and takes a lot of skills to do it well. If you have good support and are challenged to develop and to learn and you are able to receive feedback (both positive and constructive), then you will be able to thrive at work and the people you support will be getting your best.

We all need good support, but what that looks like for you probably won't be exactly the same as what your colleagues need. Just as we work with the people we support to make sure we do things in the way they want and need, we should be able to ask for support from our manager and our colleagues that works just right for us. That means that it's important for you to have a good think about what you do need, whether that's about how often you have supervision, if you have a health need, or about your preferred ways of communicating with your colleagues.

Before you even start work as a Support Worker, or if you're looking for a new job, we would recommend trying to choose an employer that will be a good match for you. Our background and the way we were raised forms our values, what is important to us and influences how we behave and interact with other people, so it's a good idea to try and get a feel for an organisation's culture. Do they make you feel welcome and as if you belong right from your first experience of them, or is it an anonymous process? Jesse knew he wanted his current role because he was made to feel like part of a family when he started work as an agency worker. His colleagues were so friendly and welcoming and he wanted to be part of that!



Right from the moment you start your Support Worker role, you can expect to get lots of help and training through your induction. You will be told what this involves, but be sure to ask your manager if you aren't sure. It will look a bit different in each workplace, so it's a good idea to look through all the information you are given, whether that is in booklets or online and work out what is on offer. You can look for things like how often your supervision sessions with your line manager will be, when your team meetings will be, or whether there are any network groups for you to join.

We all have different confidence levels and you may be nervous to start off with, but it's important to ask lots of questions and learn from everyone around you. This is harder if you lone work, or if you don't see your team mates very often, so you might need to look for opportunities to connect with others.

When we talked about what makes us feel well supported, we agreed that collaborating with others is what works best for us. Jesse strongly believes that this works across roles within an organisation and that creating a sense of togetherness makes it easier to achieve our goals. We talked about how good it makes us feel if we are noticed and appreciated by a colleague, so we should be thinking about how we care for our team members, share our ideas and share those positive feelings. Harriet recommends really getting to know your colleagues and what makes them tick. What's important to them and what do they find stressful or difficult? That way, you can pay attention to their needs and be flexible in the way you work together.

In this chapter, you will learn about where you can get good support and we hope that will be offered freely to you, but just in case it isn't, you also need to know what to do if it isn't working for you. First of all, it is best to have a chat with your manager and let them know how you are feeling. Hopefully they will work through this with you and make some changes or think of new things you can try together. If this doesn't work, it's probably best to have a look at your organisation's policies and find out who to talk to if you are struggling. It may be someone from the human resources department, or another manager. It can feel worrying to tell people when things aren't working, but it's really important both for you and the organisation to get things sorted out, so don't just hope it will go away, talk to someone.



We both wish you all the success and joy in your role as a Support Worker – you are going to change lives for the better (including yours!) and there's nothing better than that.

Chapter 5

Ways to nurture Support Workers

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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The Aldingbourne Trust



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To us 'nurturing' means to support and encourage someone so that they can grow, develop and thrive.

This got us thinking about how do you nurture Support Workers, so we asked Chat GPT! According to 'Chat GPT', the best way to nurture a Support Worker is to create an environment where they feel valued, respected and equipped to provide high quality care and support. Which sounds so easy! But the reality can be a little complex. BUT these are good headings to start understanding how to nurture you and all Gr8 Support Workers.

Feeling valued

Feeling valued is one of our most core needs, and as we will be at work for so much of our life, getting this right can make a big difference to both yourself and your employer.

Have you ever walked into a place and felt uncomfortable or not welcome? What was it that gave you that feeling? Was it how people said hello to you? The way they spoke to you? Their body language? The way the building looked? We can show each other, in so many ways, and often in small but powerful ways, how we value each other and nurture each other.

We can be curious and ask thoughtful questions. We can explore new ideas together. We can agree new ways of improving the support we offer. And we can show appreciation of each other. Relationships matter. Nurturing communication is powerful, whether in a passing, informal conversation, within supervision, or within team meetings.

One thing we tried during covid, was to create '**Thank you Thursdays**'. Inspired by the Laloux book about self-organising teams (Reinventing Organisations, Laloux F, 2014). 'Thank you Thursday' was an appreciation of a colleague, shared through a Teams channel. Each week people from across the Trust were invited to share a short message of thanks. The effect was powerful, connecting and needed!



Suggestion:

Why not try something similar in your team, either by way of an appreciation round at the beginning of your team meeting, sending a **'You're AMAZING'** note, a notice board with free sticky notes to pop a 'thanks' on or just take the time to acknowledge something a colleague has done in the team communication book.

If your employer thinks the best way to value you is just focus on pay, then they are missing out on so much more! Yes, we all want to be paid what we think we are worth. However, research in the UK has found that 50 % of employees, would rather work somewhere friendly with good working relationships. (People Management, March 2023).

Jazz's thoughts on this: 'Being managed in a way where I feel valued has helped me grow in confidence. I've been encouraged to take ownership of projects and to try new things which has made a huge difference in how I view myself personally and within my role.' **Simply put, we don't just feel valued by how much we are paid.**

What are some other ways that your organisation shows it values you?

Look at what benefits your organisation offers and how they support you. Across the UK, organisations show their appreciation of staff through a range of different benefits such as flexible working, TOIL policy and things like gym membership discounts.

If you feel that things need to shift a little in how people are nurtured and change for the better, find little ways to make this happen. Talk to your Line Manager. Could you bring this to your team meeting? Think through your idea beforehand:

- What's your idea?
- What is it trying to improve?
- How can you and other Support Workers help with this process?
- What's needed to make it happen well?
- What would success look like?
- How would this make things better for Support Workers.



At our organisation, The Aldingbourne Trust, we find ways to ask people to share their ideas and often set up 'Task and finish' groups (which include Support Workers) to help us develop policy and practice. The voice of Support Workers matter to us.

Example: We used a 'Task and finish group' to re-write our staff recruitment process. The group, made up of Support Workers, from across the organisation, were asked to develop a set of principles for a recruitment process for all teams to follow.

The teams were then asked to create their own recruitment process that met the principles but reflected the team (e.g. size location, purpose). Support Workers felt their voices were heard and the people supported were able to engage in a way that was right for them.

Being respected

Feeling respected often also means feeling heard. Dynamics in teams can be hard to navigate, and we can often choose not to speak up because we don't want to rock the boat, or cause offence. But internalising how we feel influences how we then go on to interact with colleagues.

Jazz said feeling respected means '*it is easy to share ideas or raise any concerns. I feel like my strengths are recognised and built upon, rather than being overlooked.*'

One way for a team to take control of safely speaking up is to develop a *team agreement*.

Team agreements are a co-created list of statements that describe the behaviours that the team commits to in their work together.
They need to be lived to make a difference.
Helen Sanderson, Founder of Helen Sanderson Associates

Team agreements can be a powerful tool in developing psychological safety, which in turn supports teams to have the conversations that matter, in a way that is respectful and focussed on the shared goals of the team. For information on how to develop a team agreement, please see **here**.

Jazz's thoughts on team agreements: '*Developing our team agreement helped us develop how we collaborate and support one another by focussing on what behaviours helped us work together and what did not*'.

Give it a try! Even if you are not ready to work through a team agreement, why not agree as a team some basic rules of meetings such as:

- Create a space where you can all be brave enough to be honest.
- There is no such thing as a stupid question.
- Value each other for the experience, insight, skills and the different ideas you bring.
- Be kind.
- Listen to understand, not respond.
- Ask a clarifying question such as, 'It sounds like you are saying…'

Add you own to this list and see what happens. We hope you are inspired by what we have shared!

Being equipped

What do you need to do to feel equipped? This will vary for each of us. You might need someone to support you and give you a bit of a confidence boost. You might

need someone to walk you through a process, checking in with you. Or you might need to do a little research into how your organisation systems work. You may need training in a particular area. You might need to find inspiration from other Support Workers or organisations that have great ideas that you could all learn from.
If you are lucky, you may have a Line Manager who is very good at spotting what you need and talking this through with you.

Most of us, need to equip ourselves and ask for what we need. We may not know the full conversation that needs to happen or our full needs right from the beginning, but the most important thing is kick-starting the conversation, so that things can emerge and you can find your way forward, involving the right people, in the right way.

You matter. Don't be afraid to ask for what works for you and what you need.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. THINK ABOUT THE THINGS YOU DO TO LOOK AFTER AND CARE FOR YOURSELF. DO YOU NEED TO DO ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY?
2. HOW DO YOU SUPPORT AND NURTURE YOUR SUPPORT WORKER COLLEAGUES?
3. IF YOU THINK A WAY OF WORKING CAN BE IMPROVED, WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT? WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO GO ABOUT IT?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** make sure you share your ideas and collaborate with your colleagues. Your ideas are so important,
2. **Do** put your heart into what you do and give your all. You will gain a huge sense of achievement and you will receive so much back.
3. **Do** get to know the policies and ways of working – they are there to support and guide you.

1. **Don't** bury your ideas or things you are struggling with. Speak to your manager or colleagues. Ask for support.
2. **Don't** just talk about what's wrong. Do something about it. Focus on solutions, and improvements.
3. **Don't** forget to see all the things you are good at! YOU are so important!

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

Liggy Webb – Award-winning presenter and author

https://www.tiktok.com/@open_future_learning

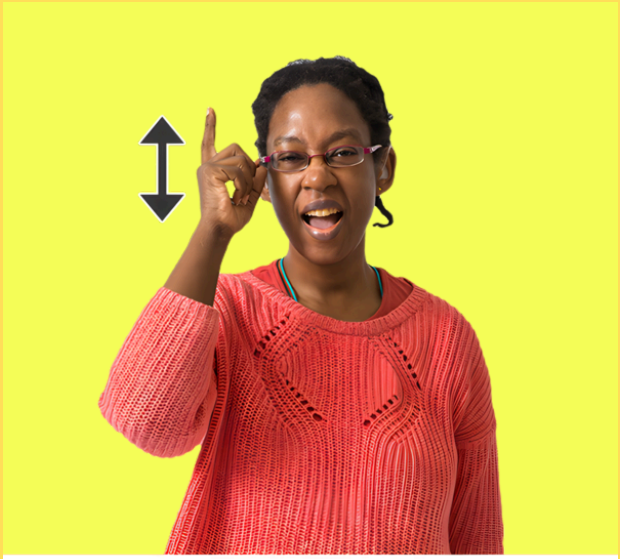
Case Study: Feeling listened to

'In my role supporting adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, I have learned that the quality of care and support we give, is directly linked to how supported we feel ourselves. The support I deliver focuses on community engagement and taking a collaborative approach to ensure the people we support are actively participating in their lives. Here's my story:

We had noticed that some people were trying to use signs to express themselves. We discovered that they had used Makaton in the past, but over time had lost their skills as they weren't consistently using it.

We were also curious if other people, including those with hearing loss, limited mobility and speech would also benefit from an accessible and expressive way to communicate.

We felt bringing Makaton into our work could make a real difference. We shared our idea with the organisation, who supported us from the very start. They saw the value in what we were trying to do, in creating a more inclusive environment, and improving the quality of communication across the service. We were actively supported and encouraged, and with their help we were able to complete our Level 1 and 2 Makaton qualifications and are now progressing on to level 3. It has become a passion, and something we are proud to bring into our work each day.



We have begun to incorporate signing into our day-to-day support. Some of the people we support immediately recognised some of the signs and were excited to use them. Whereas others have started picking up new signs and using them to express themselves more clearly. We have now set up informal sharing sessions, open to everyone. These relaxed sessions have become a collaborative space, where people of all abilities feel safe to contribute, ask questions, and practice signing without pressure.

When Support Workers are nurtured, and given the opportunity to grow, when we are respected, trusted to innovate, share ideas, and supported to learn, the results are powerful. We feel connected, more confident and equipped to use our ideas to make a difference. ' **Jazz Behan, Support Worker**

‘People will forget what you said, they'll forget what you did, but they'll never forget how you made them feel.’

Maya Angelou, memoirist, poet, and civil rights activist



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 5

The power of supervision

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Jane Nganga
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Gettalife

Fred Ngamiye
Support Worker
Gettalife

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Support work is a rewarding and challenging job. To do it well, Support Workers need and deserve Gr8 supervision.

Supervision can be really powerful. It can unlock your potential by giving you time to:

- reflect, debate and develop as a Support Worker.
- contribute your ideas in response to the wishes and needs of the people you support.
- explore your passion and skills and how they can be valued, used, and developed.
- improve the culture and practice of the organisation.
- receive the support and kindness that you need in that moment.
- have any concerns addressed.

Used well, supervision leads to your own personal growth, and good lives for those being supported.

So what makes supervision work?

Well firstly YOU, it's your supervision after all! As a Support Worker, take supervision seriously.

Think about how you want it to go, what you'd like to say, what questions you have, and use it as a space to reflect. Give yourself time to get to know your Line Manager (supervisor) and them to know you. Be true to yourself.

To begin with, I felt I did it because it was mandatory. Once I got to know the manager, I found it interesting, I then found it encouraging and wanted to do more, it became a personal support, like you have another friend.

Jane Nganga, Team Leader

You and your fellow Support Workers/PA's are the people who spend the most time with the person you support. Supervision can be an empowering place that frees you to work creatively in response to the wishes and needs you have identified of the person you support. If you can see your ideas put into practice, your confidence will grow and the life of the person you support will improve.

The other key element to G8 supervision is the Line Manager (supervisor) - after all, they are the other half of the process! In reality, you will only have so much control over your Line Manager and their supervision style. But there are things you will be able to influence or nudge to work in a way so that supervision is more helpful to you. Make sure you say what you need and what you need more of or to be different.

Reflective question: What would you like to change in your supervision to make it more helpful to you? Why not have a conversation with your line-manager? It may be that in the near future, you are asked to become a Team Leader (offering

supervision) alongside giving direct support. If you know what good supervision CAN look and feel like, you can start to bring this into your practice/supervision style. It may also think about what you need here and now from your supervision!

Her are some top tips for facilitating Gr8 supervision:

1. **Take time to get to know each other** and for a mutual relationship to form.
2. **Show that you are genuinely interested in them**: who they are, their passions, their lifestyle and experiences and equally be open about who you are.
3. **Bring 'you' to your supervision** – your authenticity and individuality.
4. **Keep your language down to earth and friendly**, not cold and professional.
5. **Use questions that help you both explore your thinking:** 'What holds you back?', 'What could help you step forward more boldly?', 'What can we do to best support you in this?', 'What do we need to pay more attention to in the future?', 'How can we...?' - to encourage creativity. You'll notice that these questions don't give yes or no answers. They ask for more full/whole answers.
6. **Demystify management and humanise the hierarchy**, in plain language be yourself and show you care.
7. **Listen more than you speak**. Listen to understand.
8. **Think about whether the supervision space can be away from formal work settings:** A nice café, a walk and talk supervision.
9. **Offer feedback and ideas in a compassionate way** to maximise the possibility of them being received and acted upon.
10. **Don't be afraid to constructively challenge** in a kind way.
11. **Always be appreciative.**

So much of our work is acknowledging that all behaviour is communication and we invest in understanding what is being communicated. We often think about this in relation to those we support, but it's just as important when thinking about with those we are in supervision with.



As you continue your journey in support work, trust that you are worth investing in. Your understanding of yourself unlocks the door to your own development and your self-esteem is paramount to how you work. No service is any better than its direct support staff so the importance of supervision must never be underestimated.

What can you do to ensure that you leave a supervision saying, 'I always feel better after supervision'?

Thoughts on supervision from a Support Worker



'Supervision has helped me to grow and develop, both as a person and as a Team Leader.

In 2016, I was offered the opportunity to support a young woman to move from a hospital setting into her own home. This was the start a new life for her with her own support. Her team consisted of 6 supporters including myself. My Line Manager worked alongside us during the transition, helping us get to know her and establish the best possible support from the very beginning.

I came to understand the importance of supervision when working with people, I was able to learn through open questions from my supervisor. I was challenged to reflect deeply on my practice. It helped me to listen attentively. I have learnt how to solve problems without relying on my manager. Supervision has built my confidence, especially when dealing with health care professionals. I have learnt to advocate, ensuring the woman we supported received the services and equipment she needed.

Through supervisions I have learnt the importance of sharing with my team to build their confidence and trust. My supervision has contributed to me developing strong team members, they are accountable, value their work, and work well together. This has benefited the woman we support. She is settled and happy as a result, trusting that her supporters will keep her safe.

There are times I have felt vulnerable during supervision. When I reflect on those sessions where I did not mask my vulnerability, I am proud to share that these sessions brought out the best in me. I developed my managing skills through learning from my Line Manager who was my supervisor. One of the Top Tips was, 'The most difficult part of being a Team Manager is to manage people.' This was true for me. It was the wisdom and knowledge that was shared during supervision that helped me to be more assertive in my role.

Finally, I found supervision promoted communication and even writing skills within teams. There is shared learning for both the supervisor and supervisee. You become a better thinker as well. The best outcome being the benefit to the young woman, as unhelpful issues and tricky times are dealt with early and positively, continuing the team's journey forward rather than creating stress and negativity.

My conclusion is that good supervision is crucial for everyone involved.'
Fred Ngamiye, Support Worker.

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. HOW IS SUPERVISION WORKING FOR YOU AT THE MOMENT? (WHAT IS WORKING WELL? WHAT COULD BE BETTER AND CHANGE?)
2. IMAGINE YOU HAVE SUPERVISION NEXT WEEK AND YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT YOUR DEVELOPMENT. WHAT 3 THINGS WOULD YOU WANT TO EXPLORE?
3. WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR SUPERVISION MORE ENJOYABLE?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** 'own' your supervision. It's your time. Plan what you want to say and be prepared to reflect, be challenged, challenge + grow.
2. **Do** build a relationship with your supervisor so you can be open and flourish in your role.
3. **Do** allow your superviser to help you develop. Don't be afraid of getting to know yourself.

1. **Don't** underestimate the power of supervision in helping you be the best Support Worker you can be.
2. **Don't** let fears and anxiety get in the way. Talk about them.
3. **Don't** let supervision slip. If you haven't been offered it when it''s due, ask for it.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/content-pages/open-access-resources/reflective-supervision-learning-hub/building-effective-supervision-relationships/

https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Managing-people/Supervision/Effective-supervision-guide.pdf

Case Study: If we shut staff down, they lose their creativity

When I reflect on my experiences of being supervised in various settings, I realised that a big influence on the supervision received, is culture of the company.

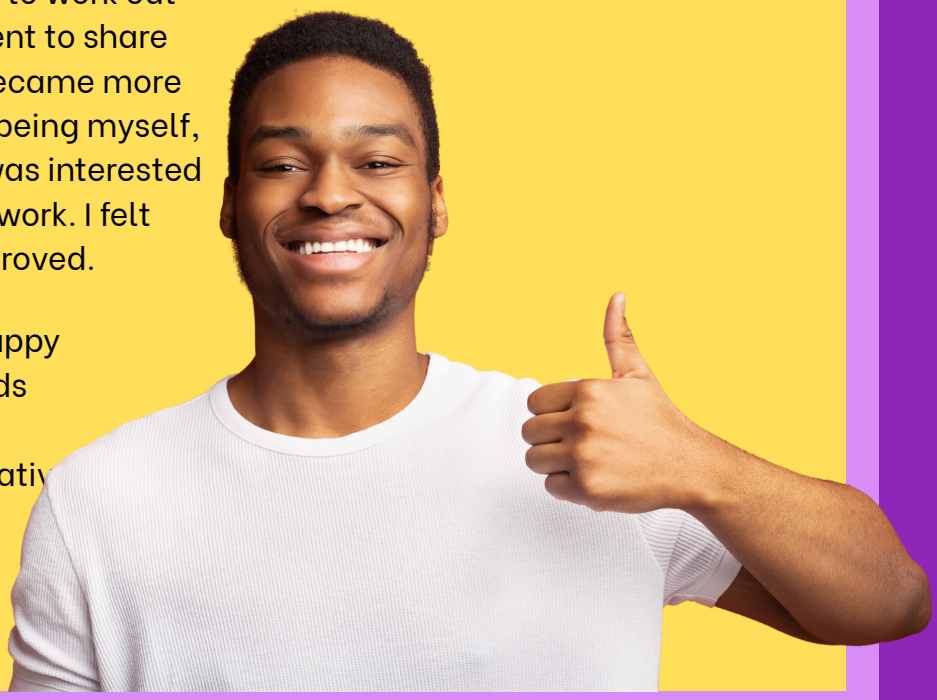
My first experience was in a setting that was happy to allow customers to break the rules and in fact the law - it wasn't a job in Social Care. I raised my concerns, and said, I wasn't happy to collude. The concerns were not addressed, I was moved. However the issues were the same. I continued to complain and I was told 'Carry on with your work and forget what you see.' **They stopped me thinking or having any integrity. I left.**

My second experience was in a Social Care setting that was closed to new ideas. In my supervisions I remained thoughtful, and offered ideas. However nothing changed. After several years, I stopped trying and remained quiet. I realised I had stopped bringing new ideas, and accepted things would always be the same. **They had closed down my creativity and curiosity. I left.**

I then worked in a humanitarian, international company with a planned long-term agenda. Through my supervisions here, I did manage to share ideas and some change happened. It always felt like a fight. **They made my creativity hard work. I left**.

Following this, in my first job with people with learning disabilities, I was shy. I held back in supervision while I worked out what type of manager I had.

Initially I was told what to do. It was all new to me. Then my manager began to work out my skills. Overtime I was confident to share my ideas and I saw changes. I became more comfortable about opening up, being myself, and contributing. My manager was interested in me and what I brought to the work. I felt valued and my self-esteem improved.



As a result I am a committed, happy Support Worker, who understands the values and puts them into practice. I am confident, imaginati and will go the extra mile. I look forward to my supervisions.'

Fred Ngamiye, Support Worker

Chapter 5

Freeing Support Workers

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Clare Seaby and **Sue Livett**
Support Worker and previous Chief Executive
The Aldingbourne Trust

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Support Workers support a range of people. Some of you might be seeing someone for a few hours a week and others of you may be working very closely with people for many hours on a daily basis.

If you are supporting someone for one or two hours a week to help with, for example, their bills and money, it's likely you will have less capacity and space to explore with someone how they live their daily life.

If you work closely with a person on a daily basis, its likely you will have more time and freedom to explore opportunities with them about how they live their life. Whatever your role, you are always there to be curious about who they are what they want in their life. You are there to get to know the person and build a strong relationship with them. A strong relationship where you look beyond the set tasks to address during the time you are together. Your role is to read situations and notice if the person is experiencing difficulties 'behind the scenes'. Your role is to look for openings and possibilities for the person to grow their community connections and passions in life so that they can live a **gloriously ordinary life**.

Say for example, Ije works with Ahmed a few hours a week to support him in doing his weekly shop. Ije could choose to go to the store with him, buy his food for him and then go home OR she could choose to be creative and see possibilities in this 'simple' task. She can support Ahmed to plan meals and in going to the local store, help him get to know staff there, so that he builds a relationship with them and grows his confidence and independence. Who knows ... this could lead to voluntary work, helping in the food bank or even paid work. He could see something on the community board that draws his interest!

What's the difference in these two scenarios?

One is a Support Worker who might feel trapped by red tape and the constraints they feel from their organisation that has a bit of a 'blame culture'. Their relationship with the person is 'transactional'. Perhaps their supervision is task-based, doesn't celebrate and value the small wins or even focus on the person living a full life. They are doing 'coverage'- the bare minimum. It doesn't bring them much joy or the person they support much joy.



The other Support Worker is likely to have been supported to look out for and notice opportunities through a lens of 'possibilities'. It's likely they have been trusted and encouraged with being creative in their thinking; that they have been freed to see beyond a small 'task', to see 'different ways', to find 'solutions', to be adventurous, to see a chance to connect someone to their community and grow relationships, to have a sense of belonging and feeling of value. It's much more likely that Ije and Ahmed, in this instance, enjoy their time together and laugh more together. And when this happens even more possibilities open up!

Which way of supporting would you like to embody? We know which we would choose!

Support Workers need to be free to see their roles through the positive lens of: adventuring, being resourceful, being supportive of a person's right to love and be loved, being respectful, being friendly, being encouraging, advocating and connecting- all the positive qualities described in Chapter 1. We believe in the power of unleashing these principles. This frees and lifts people to see the possibilities in their roles - It helps both the Support Worker to see this and the supervisor to see this. It reminds them that their role is to lift, stand up for, step up, advocate for and challenge with and on behalf of the person are supporting.

Support Workers are there to make noise if something isn't right with the person they support. They are there to be brave and make a difference. But they must feel free to do this.

Never ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble.
Necessary trouble.
John Lewis store

We are there to work for the person we support. We have a duty to do our best for them.

I feel I get a free rein. I am trusted by Aldingbourne to find opportunities and enjoy people having a voice. I use my life experience to be an opportunity maker – I'm always on the look-out for our next adventure and chance to try new things.
Clare Seaby, Support Worker

Clare sees her job as helping other humans to live **gloriously ordinary lives**. Her job isn't a chore. It's a role that enables her to bring her whole range of skills and way of being which is often quite different to how some of the public perceive a support workers role. Take a look at this short film **A DAY IN THE LIFE**!

Clare is a barrier breaker. She thrives on seeing people flourish.
Sue Livett, Chief Executive.

Clare's role, and any Support Worker's role, involves supporting people to make decisions on a daily basis. Tiny decisions and big decisions.

Some sources estimate that the average adult makes around 35,000 decisions each day, although the exact number is debated. Thinking about this across the Social Care workforce, we have a huge impact on the lives of the people we support and we must decide to listen, to watch, to share and to act. How Support Workers are freed to do and even see this, is game-changing and transformative for the person supported!

'Being able to support people in making decisions in their daily life is an opportunity to connect with people in a very personal, deep and meaningful way... it opens up into a beautiful rollercoaster ride with some amazing views'
Katie Peacock, Support Worker
taken from Paradigm's Practical Guide to Supported Decision Making

Clare shared an example that shows how she was determined enough to follow the voices and wishes of the people she supported, even though she encountered differing perspectives including some from senior management.

Here's Clare's story of Spock the cat!

Clare works at a Country Park Centre called The Aldingbourne Country Centre, supporting people (with learning disabilities) training to be horticulturalists.

'One day a very handsome, feral, tortoiseshell cat popped into one of the greenhouses. We learnt very quickly that the group were interested in and loved the cat. It was welcomed, fed, stroked, named and given a warm blanket to sleep on.

As cats do, Spock showed the team his autonomy and companionship. Spock took up residence, was introduced to visitors and team members cared for and respected him, all on his terms of course!



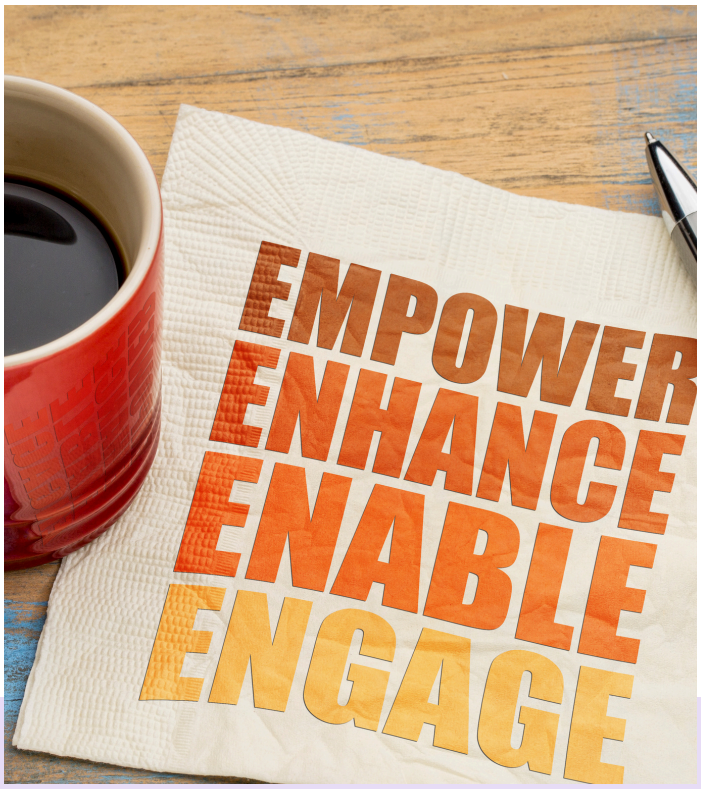
After many years of being with the team, Spock passed away peacefully. People were sad and put together a collage of him sharing memories. People spoke about having Spock around and how much they missed him. People were very upset when a senior colleague boarded up the cat flap without talking to anyone. Clare said she didn't think people had realised the impact Spock dying had had on people until that point, but it soon became very clear that people overwhelmingly wanted another cat. Clare, herself, was not a great cat lover but she could see clearly that the people she supported wanted another cat. They said that they had shown they were responsible and caring.

A small amount of money was requested from the Trustees to help with the costs of a new cat and help with the costs for the first year. At the same time, Clare became aware of a 'No cat' contingent lobbying trustees to reject the request for funding. The people supported started a petition, which Clare supported. But still the Trustees were thinking of rejecting the funding request following conversations with other members of staff.

Clare helped the team invite Sue, the Chief Executive, to come and meet the team to hear why having a cat was important to them. People talked about sitting down quietly with Spock and how he calmed them down. His unconditional love was reciprocated. It was clear how much the cat meant to people and how much it had helped them. Sue went away from this meeting and annoyed some of the Trustees who were not in favour as the vote went through. Enter Quentin, the new feral cat! He was cheered when he arrived, has a very different character to Spock and Clare hopes he has many years of adventures with the team.'

What did Clare learn from this?

She could see how much the cat had helped people and how much they had helped the cat. She knew her role was to make sure their voices were heard, no matter what the outcome. She had to be brave and speak up. Spock's story is a great example of the power of creating opportunities, listening, reminding ourselves who we are here to support, and the importance of taking action. Support Workers need to know they are freed and trusted by the managers to 'listen and do'.



Clare says, **'I'm not on a power trip but I am empowering people.'**

THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. DOES YOUR SUPERVISION ENCOURAGE YOU TO THINK CREATIVELY AND BEYOND PEOPLE BEING 'A SET OF TASKS'?
2. IF NOT, CAN YOU USE THIS PIECE IN A TEAM MEETING TO BRING UP A DISCUSSION ON HOW THIS WAY OF WORKING COULD BE EMBEDDED MORE IN YOUR ORGANISATION?
3. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TREATED LIKE A 'SET OF TASKS'? HOW DID THIS FEEL?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** remember that if you see and seize possibilities, the person you support will probably have a better life and you will get more job satisfaction!
2. **Do** think creatively about how you can support people to be part of their local community, so they have that sense of belonging and meet new people.
3. **Do** brainstorm with your team how you can all think more creatively together.

1. **Don't** ever see someone as a 'list of tasks'!
2. **Don't** go for the easy option when you support someone. This is their life and it should be the best it can be.
3. **Don't** forget what a massive impact you can have on someone's life.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://www.waterstones.com/book/fierce-conversations/susan-scott/9780349417363

https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/a-practical-guide-to-supported-decision-making/

Case Study:
Turning a bus ride into an adventure

Sam works as a Support Worker for Amira, who has learning disabilities. His job, on paper, is simple: support Amira with her weekly hospital appointments. That's it. The task-focused approach would mean picking Amira up, waiting with her, bringing her home. Job done. But Sam believes Amira is more than 'getting through a checklist'. He's learned to look for moments of possibility, even in routine tasks.

One week, while waiting for the bus, Amira noticed a café across the road with a sign for an art club. Amira loves painting but had never joined a group before. Instead of ignoring it, Sam encouraged Amira to pop in and ask about it (with his help). Together, they met the art leader, found out the sessions there were quite cheap, and agreed Amira would give it a try the following Saturday, after Sam had done a bit of liaising with other Support Workers in the team and his manager. Over the next few months, something amazing happened. The hospital trips didn't just stay hospital trips. They became outings where Amira planned which new cafés to try, which shops to explore, she loved her art making and, of course, she proudly gave Sam an invite to her first art exhibition at that first cafe they went to together.

All this started because Sam chose and felt free to be curious. He noticed an opportunity and possibility. He saw beyond his basic, delegated task and helped Amira build confidence, independence, and community connections.Without that freedom, Amira's world might have stayed small. Instead, she has met new people - some acquaintances, some friends - and she has found a hobby she loves, and a sense of belonging. Amira and Sam's story shows how trusting and empowering Support Workers to think creatively can turn ordinary moments into life-changing opportunities. It's about giving Support Workers the confidence to notice, to ask, and to act so that people with learning disabilities can live gloriously ordinary, interesting lives.



Chapter 5

Healthy teams

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Angela
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KeyRing



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Community Support Specialist
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Chantay
Community Support Worker
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Matthew Vincent
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James Chester
Area Manager
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Lillian
Community Support Worker
KeyRing

We all want to be healthy, don't we? Everywhere you look there is information about how to stay healthy, eat a good diet, and look after your body. But when we sat down with one of our outreach support teams and asked what made them 'healthy', it's no surprise that no-one mentioned diet or exercise.

A healthy team is about being supported and feeling supported. Knowing who to turn to for the best help or advice – which isn't always the manager! It could be the person with the most experience in that situation, or someone with a particular skill set. This goes beyond the local team. Our team said they felt a part of the wider organisation and knew they could contact people outside their team for specialist support. And of course, sometimes when you need someone to talk to it's just whoever is available!

Chantay said about her role as a Community Support Worker:

> Isolation and loneliness can be a problem - meeting up is difficult, but we know that when we need support, people are there.

The manager or coordinator's role can be seen as a facilitator for the team. They make sure the team is doing the best work it can. They know the team's skills and experience, and they connect you with colleagues or outside agencies who can offer the best help and advice.

James, an area Manager, said:

> You don't work for your manager; your manager works for you. A manager's job is to help Support Workers do their jobs, because at the end of the day the support you give to people is the most important thing.

The team we spoke to do lots of lone-working in the community. They have worked really hard over a period of time to figure out what would help them to be a healthy team. In the rest of this piece, we share their insights into what makes a healthy team.

Staff told us they felt like they knew what was happening and what needed to be done while at work, and valued that they were trusted to get on with it. Supervisions and team meetings can be important in keeping the team healthy, but it's much more than that. The team actively reach out to each other when something challenging happens, offering support and help or just a listening ear.



Chantay went further, saying:

> When things go wrong it is important to feel that you don't have to suppress it or figure it out yourself. You are able to express it and feel that issues are being resolved. It is nice that members of the team reach out when an incident happens. Even if you are physically by yourself, colleagues can empathise.

In the team we spoke to, the manager promoted a positive atmosphere. Praise is done publicly, so everyone can see good work and be inspired by it. Examples are shared with the rest of the team and celebrated by the wider organisation. Staff said they were empowered by the positive feedback they received.

Josie, the team's hub Coordinator, described her work environment:

> I've had Matthew [Support Coordinator] and Richard [Area Manager] call me to tell me about some brilliant pieces of work that have been done by team members. Sharing and appreciating other people's work is important!
> Feeling trusted and having flexibility [to make decisions] is great. It is obvious that people feel the support they give matters, and they want to do it well.

Even the healthiest of teams have times when things don't go well. There are ways to reduce the impact on the team's wellbeing when it happens.

The team felt there was no blame culture. They felt that even when they made mistakes, it was seen as a learning opportunity. If the manager needs to talk about something that isn't right, this is done in private with the people involved. Highlighting poor work in front of colleagues is embarrassing and creates resentment.

The team are encouraged to flag up anything that isn't working well, hopefully before it becomes a real problem. Managers are open to suggestions from the whole team about how to solve problems and move forward. Josie said:

> We use emails to remind people when something needs to be done. It's good to stress the importance of tasks that are overdue. Highlighting the impact on people rather than a general approach of 'Why has this not been done?'
> It's never because people don't want to do it, more likely it's been an oversight

It was clear that the team know the people they support well, and that others had their back if something needed to be covered. The managers have frontline experience of being a Support Worker and are ready and willing to cover direct support themselves. This helps the team be flexible when urgent things come up. The staff all said that its important people know their jobs well. This really helps when the unexpected happens.

Chantay added:

If something needs to be done, we stress the importance. Even if someone is asking you to do something, there is also an element of help and appreciation, alongside practical instructions and praise. It doesn't feel stressful and managers are not breathing down our neck. The managers are empathetic and understand the challenges of being a Support Worker.

The culture of a healthy team starts at recruitment. Seeking staff with great values is much more important than finding staff with lots of experience. This team have adopted a values-based recruitment process to make sure everyone feels the same way about providing great support.

Matthew, the team's Support Coordinator, said:

If workplaces are toxic then staff become demotivated. They leave. This is a very difficult situation to pull back from.

The team have low turnover, which usually shows that staff are happy. One team member, Lillian, described herself as a 'new' staff member when she has worked here for 18 months!

A healthy team needs a combination of good communication, trust in each other, respect, open and encouraging leadership, collaboration, flexibility, and clear roles.

The team created a top 10 tips list covering different parts of being a healthy team. In no particular order:

1. **Having clarity about your role**, your expectations and those of others. Understanding what you can and cannot do and the best way to do it.
2. **Praise in public, criticise constructively in private.**
3. **Share your skills and knowledge** with the team so people know who to turn to when they need help.
4. **Employ considerate staff** with the right values.
5. **Communicate often** and share experiences with the rest of your team.
6. **Don't blame**, get the story instead. Understand.
7. **Make the person being supported the centre of everything you do.**
8. **Be empathetic** to your colleagues – check in with them. Be kind!
9. **Know your job.**
10. **Know the people you support.**



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WE SPEND OUR WORKING LIVES LOOKING OUT FOR OTHER PEOPLE, BUT WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU LOOKED OUT FOR YOURSELF?

2. WHAT IS EACH PERSON IN YOUR TEAM GOOD AT? THINK ABOUT EVERYONE'S STRENGTHS AND WHAT YOU WOULD TURN TO THEM FOR.

3. WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG, DOES YOUR TEAM HAVE A LEARNING CULTURE OR A BLAME CULTURE? IF IT'S A BLAME CULTURE, HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO CHANGING THIS?

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1. **Do** talk to your manager. Don't be afraid of them. They work for you. They are there to make sure you can do your job well.
2. **Do** ask your colleagues – if you're not sure how to approach an issue, others will have experience or it can be nice just to bounce ideas off someone.
3. **Do** share skills – everyone in your team has different skills to bring to the table and most people enjoy sharing what they're good at.

1. **Don't** risk exhaustion. Make sure you have breaks, take time for yourself and do nice things outside of work.
2. **Don't** blame. We all make work mistakes . If your colleagues aren't doing their job as they should be, it's your manager's job to sort this privately.
3. **Don't** put pressure on yourself . We have a duty of care, but there's only so much you can do. Talk to your Line Manager.

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://enliveningedge.org/views/real-happiness-at-work/

https://www.helensandersonassociates.com/wellbeing-teams-what-values-look-like-in-practice/

Case Study: Ade

Ade is a woman in her 60s who lives independently in her own flat. On a visit at the end of the day, I noticed that she was really confused and not her usual self. I called our Support Coordinator Matthew to ask some advice, and we agreed to call 111. They advised Ade should go to A&E as they suspected a stroke.

At the hospital, I stayed with Ade for several tests until she was admitted later in the evening. The Support Coordinator kept his phone on, so I could check in with him over the course of the evening until Ade was given a bed. It's a daytime service, so neither of us would usually work past 5pm.

The next day, I had an email from the Area Manager thanking me for going the extra mile, staying with Ade at hospital to make sure she understood what was happening and that she got the care she needed. He reminded me and the Support Coordinator to take time off in lieu for the work we had done with Ade outside of normal hours.

When Ade was discharged, I met her at the hospital and security escorted her out as she was refusing to go. When we got in the taxi she was very upset, swearing at me and telling me I was bad at my job. When we got to her home she wouldn't go inside. I called Matthew again for advice and we were able to arrange for Ade to go back to hospital.

It's important to me to feel supported by others in the team when things like this happen. We're working on our own a lot, so it's reassuring to have someone you trust on the other end of the phone when things aren't going smoothly. Staying late on the day Ade went to hospital wasn't something I was told to do – I offered, and my colleagues stepped in to cover some visits when I took the time back.

We've since discussed what happened with the whole team and agreed some new risk management measures."

Lillian John, Community Support Worker



‘How you treat yourself is how you’re inviting the world to treat you.’

Jane Travis, a counsellor who teaches other counsellors and therapists



Chapter 5

Self-care in your role

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



Tony Bamforth
Founder and Coach
Glow Yer Own Way



Carla Burrows
Support Worker
Exclusively Inclusively

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What is Self-Care?



Self-care isn't just bubble baths and scented candles (though if that's your thing, go for it!). It's about actively nurturing our physical, mental, and emotional health so we can show up as our best selves, for ourselves and the people we support. Think of it like charging our phone: we can't keep giving energy to others, if our own battery is at 1%.

While self-care starts with us, it affects the whole organisation. Identifying what we need to look after ourself comes first. When we share this with others, it becomes much more powerful, because our colleagues often notice we're struggling before we do, and if they know exactly how to help and what to say, it makes a big difference.

For people from faith traditions, religious and/or spiritual practices such as prayer, attending a place of worship or meditation retreat can form a strong foundation for self-care. For others, religion might play no part at all. What's important is getting to know what works for each individual; for us and each other.

We all share a need to nurture self-care. What that self-care looks like is unique for every one of us. For some, it's a solo walk in nature, or attending a place of worship; for others, it's belting out a playlist of 'noughties' pop hits in the shower. It can also change for us depending on the situation. The key is finding what genuinely refuels us in the moment and making it non-negotiable.

If we know what kinds of things nurture self-care in our colleagues, we are more likely to 'check in' and remind each other. It's in all our best interests that every member of our team is taking time to recharge their self-care battery! Remember, it's not selfish - it's our foundation.

Where to begin with self-care. What does it look like?

The 5 C's of Self-Care (adapted from 247DCT.org) offer a useful starting point:

1

Connection

Build supportive relationships (with colleagues, friends, or even a pet!).

2

Coping

Develop healthy ways to manage stress and deal with difficult emotions (mindful breathing, journaling, tools and techniques to help process emotions or simply talking it out).

3

Calmness

Develop ways and practices to stay grounded (meditation, yoga, or even just sipping tea slowly).

4

Care

Prioritise your needs (including regular good quality sleep, nutrition, health and exercise).

5

Compassion

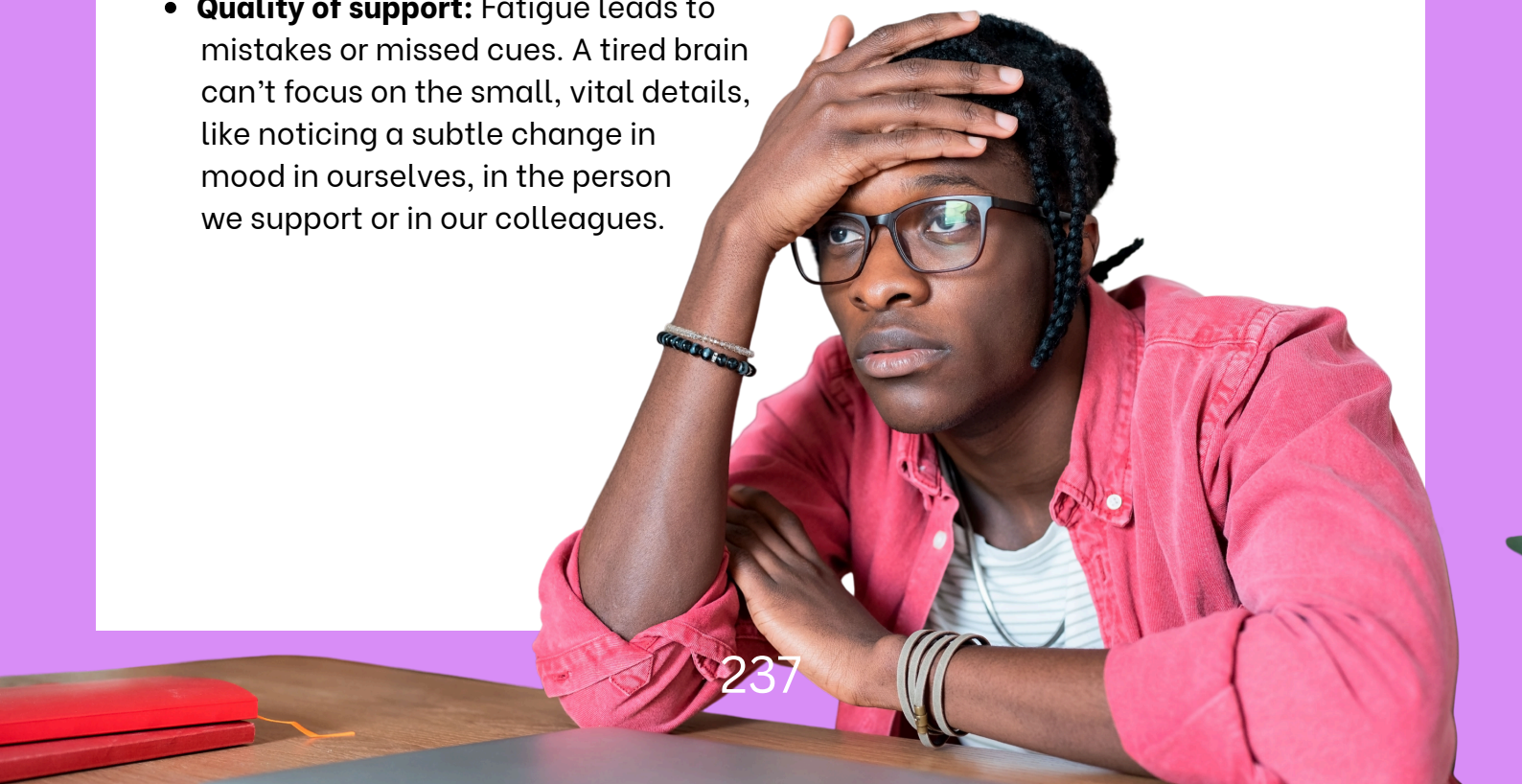
This starts with **self-compassion** - being kind to yourself, especially when things go sideways. Read more about Tony's discovery of self-compassion **here**.

Self-care is also about boundaries. It's saying, 'I can't cover that extra shift as I need rest,' or 'I'll finish that report tomorrow. Right now, I need to clock out.' Boundaries protect our energy so we don't end up resentful or burnt out. Boundaries mean being clear with ourselves and others about what's okay and what's not okay, being assertive and taking action to protect our wellbeing.

What's at risk?

Neglecting self-care is like driving a car on empty: eventually, we stall. Risks include:

- **Health:** Burnout, chronic stress, exhaustion, and detachment. We might start to dread work, or feel numb.
- **Relationships:** Irritability or negativity can affect the whole team, the person you support and your personal relationships. Imagine a domino effect - one stressed out negative person snapping at colleagues, dragging down morale for everyone.
- **Quality of support:** Fatigue leads to mistakes or missed cues. A tired brain can't focus on the small, vital details, like noticing a subtle change in mood in ourselves, in the person we support or in our colleagues.



Carla a Support Worker in Yorkshire describes,

Neglecting self-care can look a bit like this: We become stressed, it feels like we're carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders and have very little space in our heads, or capacity for anything else.

This builds up bit by bit and we don't notice ourselves becoming stressed. It happens like this in our team and organisation too and everyone's behaviour starts to change a little over time. People become a little less tolerant and less friendly. Instead of addressing it, we brush it off, make assumptions and allowances because we feel too busy to face it.

We start to notice when things get worse, but we think it's too late, we should have dealt with it earlier, we hope things just get better by themselves. Eventually we experience the 'final straw' when someone reacts with anger or aggression. A conflict starts. It appears to be an over-reaction to something minor. Others involved feel unfairly treated and aggrieved. It then leads to formal disciplinary action or avoidance, back-biting and sabotaging behaviours.

People involved start to suffer physically, mentally and emotionally as the stress breeds suspicion, distrust, maybe even contempt and resentment.

It can be a fast and slippery slope.

Why Does It Matter?

Jane Travis said wisely,

'How you treat yourself is how you're inviting the world to treat you.'

When we're rested, nourished, and emotionally regulated:

- We're more resilient during challenging times at work.
- We think creatively, not reactively.
- We model wellbeing for colleagues and those we support.



As Support Workers, a key part of our role is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the people we support. How can we be effective in doing this if we are not prioritising our own self-care and wellbeing?

When we do prioritise self-care, it makes it much easier to support others to do the same, because we are walking the talk. We understand

the challenges in prioritising self-care and have found ways to overcome them.

Ignoring self-care, isn't just tough on you, it impacts on everyone around you.

Let's talk numbers:

- **Burnout drives 30% sector turnover** and is linked to poorer care quality and compliance issues.
- UK care providers with strong staff wellbeing programs, on the other hand, benefit from approximately 22% lower turnover and are three times more likely to earn 'Outstanding' **CQC** ratings.

After introducing staff 'wellbeing hours' and free counselling in 2022, a London-based domiciliary care provider slashed turnover from 35% to 12%, upgraded their CQC rating to 'Outstanding', and won £1.8 million in new contracts. Their secret? Investing in their team's self-care.

The Care Quality Commission 'State of Care 2022/23' **report** found that providers with self-care initiatives reduced staff sick days (in some cases by over 40%) and were far more likely to earn top ratings.

Your wellbeing isn't a luxury! It is a professional responsibility.

We are worth it! Life is too short to miss out on the benefits of self-care.

Self-care isn't about perfection - it's about progress. By refilling your cup, you'll keep making a difference, one day at a time.



THREE QUESTIONS: for you

1. WHAT'S ONE GOOD THING THAT HAS HAPPENED TODAY? SHARE THIS WITH YOUR TEAM. ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK, AND NOTICE WHAT HAPPENS.
2. HOW CAN YOU TURN NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES? IF SOMEONE IS SAYING SOMETHING NEGATIVE, IDENTIFY THE HIDDEN POSITIVE.
3. HOW CAN YOU TURN WEAKNESSES INTO STRENGTHS? USE SUPERVISION TO WORK THIS THROUGH.

DO'S. AND DON'TS

1 **Do** set boundaries (e.g. 'I won't check emails after 8 pm').	1 **Don't** ignore stress signals (Headaches, irritability = time to pause).
2 **Do** practice self-compassion (Ask: 'What would I say to a friend in this situation?').	2 **Don't** compare your self-care. (Your colleague's meditation habit isn't yours—and that's okay!).
3 **Do** use downtime wisely (e.g. walk, nap, call a mate - replace scrolling on social media with self-care research).	3 **Don't** isolate yourself (Lean on your team—you're not alone in this!).

LINKS FIND OUT MORE

https://self-compassion.org

https://www.glowyerownway.com/

Case Study:
Sarah's journey back to 'balance'

Sarah, a Support Worker and mum of two, used to love her job but started to feel constantly drained. She'd rush through her support sessions, skip meals, and lie awake worrying about work.

One day, the daughter of a person she supports thanked her for her patience but Sarah felt like a fraud. 'Inside, I was a ball of stress,' she admits. 'I'd snap at my kids, zone out during work, and barely recognise myself. I stopped doing things that were good for me and spent more and more time scrolling on social media'.

Her manager, Jess, noticed. During a supervision meeting, Jess asked gently, 'What's one thing you could do this week just for you?' Sarah shrugged, 'I don't have time.' Jess persisted: 'What if 'YOU time' made you better at everything else?'

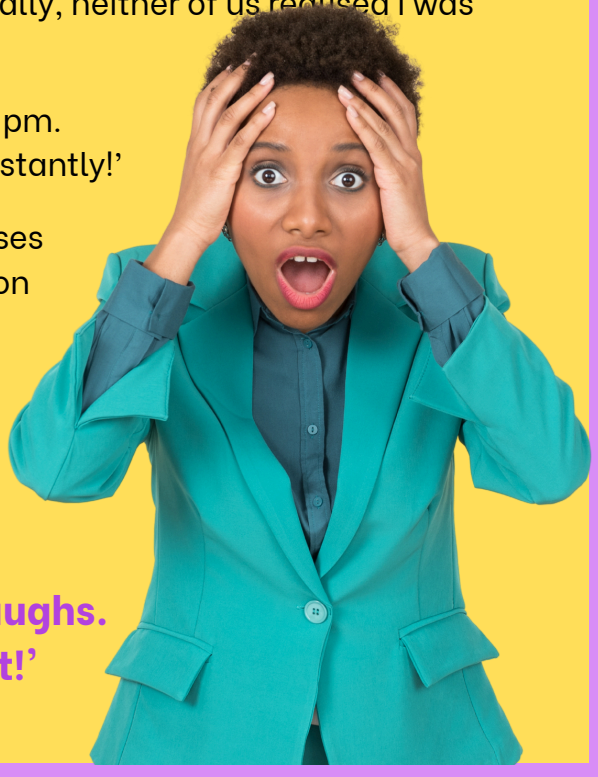
Together, they crafted a plan:
1.**Small Wins:** Sarah started with 10-minute walks after shifts. She'd blast her favourite playlist and leave work thoughts behind.

2.**Fuel Up:** Sundays became meal-prep days. Prepping overnight oats and veggie stir-fries stopped the 'I'll just grab crisps' cycle.

3.**Yoga Reset:** Sarah joined a lunchtime yoga class at a local gym. At first, she felt silly in downward dog, but soon it became her mental reset button, and she found a community of people she connected with. 'My husband encourages me daily to come here just because I'm so much better mentally, neither of us realised I was struggling, I clearly was' she says.

4.**Boundaries:** Sarah silenced work emails after 7 pm. 'Turns out, the world doesn't end if I don't reply instantly!'

Sarah now feels so much better and goes to classes in the gym regularly. 'I'm just a much better person to be around in general, a happier wife and mum and I've started to love my job again!'. Within months, Sarah slept better, reconnected with her kids, and even led a team workshop on stress management.



'I thought self-care was selfish,' she laughs. 'Now I see it's how I keep giving my best!'

A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

My Self-Care Plan

I can also use with my team (see last paragraph)

People that I can turn to for support

Be specific about what each person helps with (eg. Chi Chi is great to go out with, have fun and a good laugh. Johan is great to talk to when I'm feeling sad or stressed) :

Name:	Name:	Name:
For:	For:	For:

Things and activities that boost my wellbeing that are good for my mind, body and heart.

Write down any that are good for mind body AND heart!

What's one small self-care habit I can start this week?

Tip: Think '5 minutes' not '5 hours'!

What are the signs that I'm struggling?

E.g. tiredness, irritability, anxiety, constant moaning, poor sleep, complaining a lot, being negative, stop doing things that are good for me.

When do I feel most drained at work?

How can I recharge in those moments?

Who is a good person to share this information with at work who could also notice when I'm struggling?

Daily non-negotiables:

Morning:
E.g. 5-minute stretch, affirmations

Evening:
E.g. gratitude journal, screen-free hour)

Weekly must-do's:

E.g. gym, coffee with friend)

When I'm Struggling, I'll:

Reach out to:
(Name a colleague/friend)

Do: (e.g. walk outside, breathing: 4 sec inhale, 4 hold, 6 exhale)

TEAM MEETING IDEA

1. Ask people to share examples of activities, places and things that boost wellbeing on post-it notes ... the big + small things. Ask people to read out their ideas and put their post-it notes on the wall on a big heart shape.
2. Give this sheet to each person and ask them to fill them in. Invite team members to share any parts of their own plan they feel comfortable sharing, particularly 'Signs that I'm Struggling' and then 'How could I recharge?' or about self-care, so that their colleagues can be aware of signs they might need some support, to normalise peer support and discussions around self-care. Note these up on the wall - there will be commonalities. Reflect on the importance of noticing these things in ourselves and colleagues.
3. Create a map of do's and don't's and invite team members to personalise them.
4. Ask people where you can keep these post-it notes/ messages safely as a reminder to notice and take action!

‘The time to relax
is when you don’t have time for it.’

Sydney J. Harris, journalist



A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

Chapter 6

More about this guide

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Chapter 6

Who co-produced this and why?

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

Written by:



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Over the years at Paradigm, we've met hundreds of Support Workers. Time and again, we've heard the same thing: the basic training and induction you get at the start of your new job (things like 'moving and handling') is useful, but it's not enough. Many Support Workers told us they wanted something more - something value-based that would get to the heart of what it really means to be a Support Worker.

At the same time, we also heard how often Support Workers feel undervalued. We thought: **How can we create something that reminds Support Workers just how important they are?** Something simple but meaningful; something that can be used in team meetings, shared with new staff, or just picked up when you need a boost.

So in 2024, we got to work. We brought people together – teams of Support Workers, people with learning disabilities, families, and managers - from 11 different organisations to coproduce and sponsor the resource. Through different online meetings, together we talked, shared ideas, and shaped what this resource should look like. Every meeting was full of honesty, passion, and commitment.

And then there's the many co-authors, some known, some not known. Some Self-Advocates, some not. Some Support Workers, some Managers, some Chief Executives, some family members and many experts and visionaries in their field - all chosen because of good practice and heart when they work. We wanted to bring together amazing thinkers and doers from across the UK from us all to learn from. We hope their words help you see the support you give with fresh eyes and possibilities.



Chapter 6

A few thank yous

Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

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Thank you!

A heartfelt thank you to all the amazing co-producers, sponsors, and co-authors of this resource.

It wouldn't have been possible to create this without the time, thoughtfulness and care you so generously gave this resource.

It's our deepest hope that, together, we've created something that will make a real difference for Support Workers across the UK - something that truly values what they do and something that supports them to give Gr8 support so people with learning disabilities can live gloriously ordinary lives just like anyone else.

Thank you to all our sponsors:

pss

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A Guide to being a Gr8 Support Worker

SCAN ME

NEVER FORGET HOW WILDLY CAPABLE YOU ARE

There's no time to waste! Be a Support Worker who opens up people's worlds. Listen deeply. Help people connect and discover. Really see people and make them feel valued. It's quite literally ...

GAME-CHANGING

... for you and the people you support!