

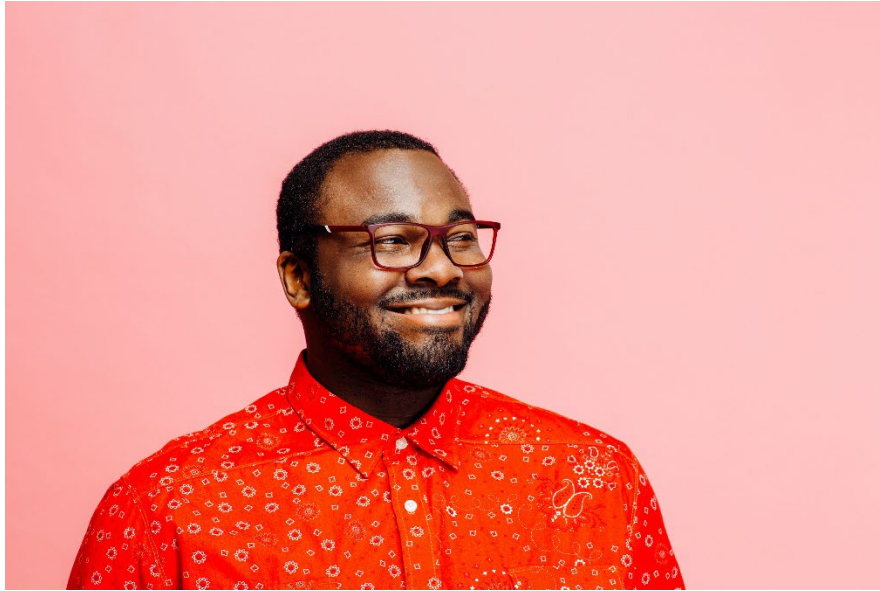
BUILDING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

**For Persons Served and
Their Support Staff**



First Edition
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Introduction



Whether you are a person served or a support staff, this book intends to provide you with specific tips and principles about how to work well with each other.

This book provides many ideas to consider, such as managing professional and personal relationships, the responsibilities of people served, the responsibilities of support staff, how to communicate effectively, and how to handle problems that may come up.

After reading this booklet, concepts and tools will have been presented so you can build a supportive relationship between you and those you work with.

This Is My Life – Nothing About Me Without Me



The person served is why the support staff has a job. Because the support staff's job is to meet the needs of the person served, the support staff needs to remember: their job is more than just a job. They are assisting someone to live their life.

The person served may need the support staff's assistance to do things that the support staff may take for granted. One of the most important things support staff can do is ask the person served what they want, when to do it, and how it should be done. This includes scheduling work hours. Support staff should schedule hours based on the needs of the person served.

Defining Relationships



It is important to know the difference between a professional relationship and a personal relationship. Each relationship has different boundaries. When someone is supporting you, it is important to know what you want those boundaries to be. This will be different for everyone.

The person served benefits from quality supports for different reasons. The person served may use a service in order to be independent, more involved in their community, and/or have a good quality of life. Support staff earn money from an agency to provide that support. Your support staff should help you live the life you want.

The person served and support staff must always respect each other and be consistent with communicating with each other. The person served must always realize the support staff does not know what they need when they first begin to do their job. The support staff should not be afraid to ask the person served what they may need, even if the person served has already told them. This will likely avoid a lot of arguments and misunderstandings.

The person served must always have an open mind when hiring new support staff and explain what boundaries the support staff has to know when they are assisting them. An example of this would be if the person

served wants to take a nap at a certain time. The support staff must be quiet and attentive to the person served even if they are resting. The support staff should not leave and do their own business just because the person served is resting, unless the person served indicates it's okay for the support staff to leave.

Personal relationships and friendships develop over time. The person served and their support staff can be friends if they choose to. They may want to keep their relationship professional. Different people will make different choices.

Responsibilities of the Person Served



The most important thing the person served can do is to find the appropriate support staff. Before choosing someone to work with, the person served may want to prepare and ask themselves a few questions. Examples include:

- What qualities do you want in a support staff?
- What job duties do you need the support staff to do? Can they do them?
- What schedule do you need them to work? Can they work that schedule? Do you need them to be flexible with their schedule during a particular time?
- Do they communicate clearly and effectively?
- Do you need staff who speak a language other than English fluently?
- How can they help you live the life you want?
- Ask them how you can make their job easier.
- What's their learning style? If you know their learning style, you can teach support staff using that style.

Interview Tips

During the interview, focus more on skills, experience, and personality. It's easy to focus too much on whether or not you like the person and miss

important things like if the person can support you how you need.

If the person is being considered for a long-term position, think twice before hiring them in the first place. Approach it like a hiring manager – make sure you hire someone who will stick around for 3 months or more and who will be a good fit. Don't give in to pressure to hire just anyone. For example, if the service provider agency must cover the shift and you are pressured to hire someone quickly, even if they don't have the skills, experience, or personality needed.

Before starting the job, make sure the support staff fully understands the job and all the tasks they will do on a regular basis.

After Hiring Staff

Be consistent in what support staff do for you and what is important to you. Help your team work together. Communication is key. Make tasks, responsibilities, and expectations clear. When it's clear, it's easier for staff to predict what is needed and they can better anticipate your needs. This is a good thing in the long run!

Try to solve things together when possible. For small things, solving them on the spot or shortly afterwards is best while it's still on everyone's mind.

Show your support staff that you appreciate the hard work they do. Treat them with respect. They are not your servants; treat them the same way you want to be treated. "Please", "thank you", and good manners will always be appreciated.

Have a discussion with your staff about the refrigerator. You may want to make space for staff food and drink. Do you want to let them drink your drinks or eat your food? If so, do you want them to pay you back for anything that is yours that they eat or drink? Make the decision that is right for you and that you can live with for the long-term.

Responsibilities of Support Staff



One of the best things a support staff can do is listen, listen, listen. Of course, there is more: give choices, act professionally, and be respectful.

Listen, Listen, Listen

You have a responsibility to know what the person served needs you to do. If you don't know, ask. Try to establish some routines so you can anticipate the needs of the person served.

Listen closely to what the person served tells you. Respect the choices they make. Accept constructive criticism and know that it will let you better meet the person's needs in the future. Try not to take it personal. Remember, your job is about meeting the needs of the person served. It's not about you.

Be patient and wait for someone to respond to you. Some people need extra time to absorb what you said, to gather their thoughts and speak, or to make a plan to do something.

Choice

Ask the person served where they would like items to go. Learn their preferences for where things should go so their home can be the way they

want. It will also help them find things when you aren't there.

Act Professionally

Be on time. The person served relies on support staff for needed services.

Treat the person served like an adult or co-worker in the workplace. Be professional, avoid profanity, and avoid using devices such as smartphones, tablets, etc. Common mistakes include talking down to people served, treating them like a child, or making decisions for them. Speak to the person served the way you want someone to speak to you.

Remember you are there to do a job first. Perhaps a friendship develops, perhaps it doesn't. In either case, respect the wishes of the person served.

Help the person served to make schedules that suit their lifestyle, be independent, and make and maintain friends. Work with your supervisor to adjust shifts to make this happen.

Service provider supervisors should be involved, observe the work that support staff are performing, and provide adequate supervision. Be responsive to the comments of the person served. If there are issues, resolve them early and informally in order to avoid bigger and more serious problems later.

Never go through the belongings of the person served without their permission. Even if your reasons are innocent, it may feel like a violation to the person you work with if you don't get their permission first.

Be sure to maintain the cleanliness and tidiness of the person's home, including the restroom. Additionally, if support staff provide transportation for the person served, keep your vehicle clean.

Dress appropriately for the job, including appropriate footwear. For example, if support staff will accompany the person served to a formal event, support staff should wear appropriate clothing.

Think about asking for a place in the refrigerator where you can store food or drinks you bring with you. Never eat or drink the food or drinks of the person served without their explicit permission. It is best to sit down and

have a conversation about it to avoid long-term problems or resentment. If you are given permission, always offer to pay for or replace the food or drink the next time you work with the person.

With some cultures, you may be offered food or drink. It is probably okay to accept it the first one or two times, but do not take it for granted, expect it every time you work, or consider it a “fringe benefit”. Even in such cultures, people may have a difficult time bringing up the topic of stopping this or asking for reimbursement as time goes by. As above, discuss it to avoid long-term problems or resentment.

Communicate Professionally

Resist the urge to tell the person served what to do. Instead, teach or coach the person served without criticism – your mindset changes and so does your language. This helps you to avoid making personal comments. For example, many people served have said they have been told things like “You need to fix this table because I don’t want to look at it anymore,” or “No, you can do it yourself,” in response to a request. Teaching and coaching help you avoid these insensitive comments.

If you have a problem doing your job, tell the person served. Be open, talk about it, and work towards a solution.

There is such a thing as too many meetings. Don’t meet just to meet or check boxes off a list. Ensure meetings have a purpose and that the purpose is clear to everyone. If there are papers that need to be signed at the end of the month, plan so there are no emergencies at the last minute for the person served.

Mutual Understanding of Job Duties

The support staff and the person served must have a common understanding of the job duties. This is part of defining the relationship, but it is also about creating expectations. Both the person served and support staff should have expectations for what is expected of them. Have ongoing conversations to define and revise what those expectations are.

Communication



Working with People Who Communicate Differently

People communicate differently. Some people communicate verbally, some use their behavior, others use gestures, and still others use communication devices. Some people use picture exchange communication, a specific method some people use to communicate. Regardless of the way in which people communicate, the point is that people *do* communicate.

Always assume the person served understands everything support staff say. In assuming this, you will ensure that support staff respect the person served, treat them with the dignity they deserve, and address the person served directly. For example, some support staff have reported that when they provide personal care to someone, they like to narrate what they are doing. It lets the person served know what is about to happen, it gives staff something to talk about, and staff are engaging the person served.

A key ability in communicating with the person served is patience. Patience may be needed when the person served uses a communication device. Be observant, look for nonverbal cues while they are using the device. There are many reasons why someone may communicate or use a communication device slower than you may expect – perhaps they need extra time to absorb what was said, to gather their thoughts and speak, or

to make a plan to do something. It is important to give the person served the time they need to communicate, which may require patience on the part of support staff.

Support staff will need to learn the ways in which the person served communicates and adjust their actions based on what they have learned. For example, if the person served is deaf, they may watch your lips when you speak – so you will need to be sure the person served can see your mouth when you speak. Or, perhaps you may need to speak slowly and pause between sentences so the person served has enough time to process what you said so they can understand it. Whatever the way, support staff must take the time to learn how to communicate appropriately with the person they serve.

Working Together to Communicate

Talk to the person served to learn how to communicate with them. Check with them to see if they want a friend, family, or other people to train support staff on how to communicate and take care of the person served.

Support staff should take notes and listen closely so they can learn how to properly take care of and communicate with that person. The person served, or their friends, family and others, must look for confirmation and understanding from the support staff about the information presented.

Just as support staff may need patience communicating with the person served, the person served may also need patience when communicating with support staff. The person served can use different phrases or words so support staff can understand what they are trying to communicate. Just like how support staff come up with different ways to communicate and confirm their understanding, the person served can come up with different ways to do the same thing. For example, if someone doesn't speak, they may point at something they want. They could also use a picture to communicate the same thing. Have patience when communicating with each other.

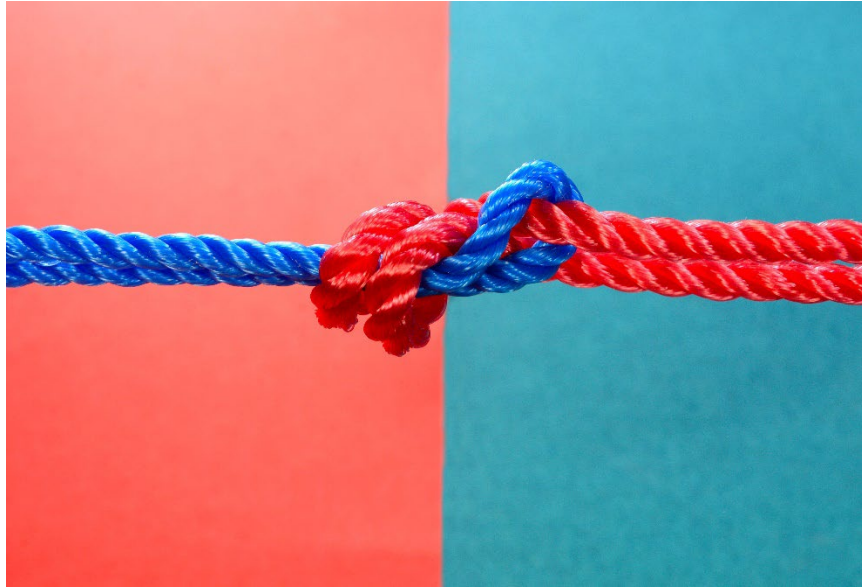
Support Staff Communicating with Each Other

Support staff should communicate with each other in order to make things run smoothly, and especially during shift changes. Support staff should keep notes of what must be communicated to other staff, so the person

served isn't inconvenienced by being involved in the conversation amongst support staff. For example, if the person served is watching a movie, don't interrupt the movie so the person served explains everything. The support staff can explain what is needed to each other during a shift change.

Some people served may want to be a part of that conversation between support staff, so talk with them for their preference.

If Problems Arise



Problems may arise when people work together. There are some things that can be done to avoid such problems.

Listen, Listen, Listen

It is important to have good listening and communication skills between the person served and support staff to prevent problems, set limits, and understand each other. Take the time to establish how you will communicate with each other to have an open dialog and prevent problems from arising.

Make sure your language, tone of voice, and body language are neither aggressive nor passive to avoid offending the other person. Be aware of what you say and how you say it. Often times later, when one is asked about a conversation they had with someone else, they may not remember what was discussed, but they will almost certainly remember how they were spoken to.

Collaboratively Problem Solve

Look for solutions together to resolve issues as a team. Raise the issue respectfully, indicate what the issue or problem is, talk about options

together, and then weigh which options may be best. Once you decide upon the best option, consider having a conversation to make a plan to avoid similar situations in the future.

Bring in Help

If you can't resolve the issue, bring in help. Consider bringing a friend, clients' rights advocate, supervisor, service coordinator, or someone else to a meeting to discuss how the issue can be resolved. Figuring out what factors that lead to the problem and the things that can be done to avoid it next time may be helpful. When you bring in help, you can have some more people help you collaboratively problem solve the issue as a team.

Formal Complaint Process for the Person Served

If no solution can be worked out and the problems continue, the person served has the right to make a complaint. The complaint can be made to the provider, the regional center, or both.

For the person served, send the grievance in writing to the program supervisor. Include a description of the problem, what has already been done to try to resolve it, and the solution proposed by the person served to resolve the problem. Within a week or so, the program supervisor should contact the person served to understand the issue and what it will take to resolve it. The supervisor may then investigate or ask for a meeting with the person served. Typically, they will propose a solution to the problem. If the person served accepts the proposed solution, then the grievance is resolved.

If the problem couldn't be resolved by the supervisor or if you feel that you must complain to both the provider and the regional center, you can make a complaint with the regional center. There are different kinds of complaints you can make.

Consumer Rights Complaint Process – this process should be used when the person served believes that any right has been wrongly or unfairly denied by a service provider, regional center, or a developmental center. This process shouldn't be used to resolve disagreements about eligibility or services. More information is available at <https://bit.ly/3qOdnYf>.

Title 17 Complaint Process – if you are a person served by a developmental center, community care or health care facility, this procedure can be used when one’s personal rights have been denied and the person served does not agree. A few examples of personal rights include the ability to keep one’s own clothes and belongings, see visitors and access the telephone, and to have one’s own storage space. More information is available at <https://bit.ly/3dyjJmK>.

Regional Center or Vendor/Contractor Whistleblower Complaints – this process can be made to report an “improper regional center or vendor/contractor activity”. Improper activities include breaking state or federal law, violating contracts, misuse of government property or funds, or gross misconduct, incompetency, or inefficiency. More information is available at <https://bit.ly/3IB0ZkL>.

If your problem or complaint does not fit one of the other formal processes, DDS has created a form that the person served can use to submit these complaints or comments to DDS. The form is available at <https://bit.ly/3qO8RJh>. The form can also be used to tell DDS about anyone who has done something particularly good or positive.

And of course, the person served can always call their local clients’ rights advocate (CRAs) or local State Council (SCDD) Regional Office. The list of CRAs can be found at <https://bit.ly/33gGwl7> and the list of local SCDD offices can be found at <https://scdd.ca.gov>.

Thank You

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Plain Language

This booklet was written in plain language so it can be understood by as many people as possible. There are many online resources about plain language, including the Center for Plain Language, which can be found at <https://centerforplainlanguage.org>.



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