Supporting Safely

A guide for anyone providing care and/or support to someone in their own home or in the wider community, whether or not you are being paid to do so
Overview

This guide sets out the important principles and, in some areas, the specific details of how people provide care and support in the community can protect and maintain the health, safety and well being of the person they are supporting, as well as that of themselves and the general public.

The guide covers issues that may arise when any individual receives support. In particular it covers support to:

- People of all ages with physical and sensory disabilities
- People of all ages with mental health problems
- Older people needing support due to ill health and the problems of aging
- People of all ages with learning difficulties

The guide has been written to provide support and guidance to anyone who is organising their own support, or anyone who is doing so on behalf of someone else.

If you have any comments or questions about the content of this guide or would like to suggest changes, please contact In Control by emailing admin@in-control.org.uk.

Introduction

There are two main areas in which we need to think about staying healthy, safe and well: Health and Safety, and Safeguarding. Both will be the concerns of any local authority that is providing the person you are supporting with an individual or personal budget to use to meet their social care and support needs, and so it is important that you are able to think about how you can address these issues as you provide care and /or support to them. This guide will help you to think about the things you need to do to demonstrate that you are acting in accordance with acknowledged best practice in relation to these issues.

“The governing principle behind good approaches to risk is that people have the right to live their lives to the full as long as that does not stop others from doing the same.” Independence, choice and risk: a guide to best practice in supported decision making – DH, 2007.

It is important to remember that as someone providing care and/or support to another person, whether you are paid directly by them, by an organisation or agency, or are unpaid, you have both responsibilities and rights. This guide will provide some useful information about both of these areas.
What is health and safety?

The Health & Safety At Work Etc Act 1974 makes it a legal requirement that no one should be put at risk through the work they do, including individual staff, the people they work with and any members of the general public who they might have contact with whilst at work. This means that you have a right not to be put at risk in the course of your work.

Section 2(1) of the Act says:

“It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees.”

This means making sure that everything they do seeks to reduce risks of any incident occurring that might lead to any of the following harms:

- Damage to relationships and personal reputations.
- Damage to or loss of property, (theft).
- Physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse.
- Trauma and mental health problems.
- Illness and the abuse of drugs or alcohol.
- Physical harm and injury, including violence to staff.
- Death.

Responsibility for health and safety

It is important to make sure that the care and support you are being asked to provide has been organised to minimise any risks of harm, to you, the person you support, and members of the public where appropriate.

Any individual or organisation employing staff has a particular responsibility to ensure that it makes sure that their employees are safe from harm. This means whether you are employed by an agency or provider organisation, or directly by the individual, for example by using a Direct Payment or a Trust managed Indirect Payment, then they are responsible for making sure that you are not asked to perform tasks, or work in ways which compromise your health and safety. This means that you cannot be asked to do anything which might put you at risk of harm, either physically or mentally. If the care and/or support you provide are unpaid, then the Health and Safety at Work Act does not apply, but it is still reasonable to expect that you will not be putting yourself at risk of harm when supporting someone.

Things to consider:

- Your physical needs if you are providing hands on care and support.
- Your mental well being if you are being asked to help someone to manage difficult behaviours or situations which may cause stress to them.
- Your need for time in between providing care and support to properly recover from the work you are doing.
Personal responsibility

In addition to this employer responsibility, we all individually have a responsibility under health and safety law to be mindful of health and safety issues and to ensure that we do not, by any action, or failure to act, put the health or safety of any other person at risk.

Therefore, whether you are paid or unpaid for the care and support you provide, you still have a duty to:

- Work safely and efficiently.
- Use all necessary equipment safely.
- Use protective equipment where necessary.
- Meet any statutory obligations.
- Report any incidents that have lead or may lead to injury or damage.
- Adhere to any agreed procedures for safe working.
- Assist in the investigation of any accidents so that any future risk of harm can be reduced.

This guide will not be able to cover every possible issue, but we hope to deal with the more common or significant concerns, and to give enough guidance for individuals to use their judgement in more unusual situations.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the duty to make sure that people are not abused or neglected. It usually applies to people who have care and support needs as they can often be more vulnerable to abuse, although most things that are defined in safeguarding terms as abuse are, in fact, criminal offences: “financial abuse” is often simply theft, “physical abuse” assault, “sexual abuse” rape. There are also issues of neglect, where someone can be prosecuted for not providing the care and support an individual needs to keep them healthy, safe and well.

It is important to be aware that the local authority has a duty to safeguard vulnerable people in their area, and this extends beyond those whose care and support is directly funded by the local authority. It is essential that the way someone is choosing to be supported will not make them more vulnerable to these types of abuses.

Risk

Often concerns about both safeguarding and health and safety issues will be talked about as matters of risk.

We all have to make choices and decisions throughout our lives, some of which may be considered to be risky, either by ourselves or by other people. It is important that the person you are supporting is seen by any professionals who are working with them as an expert in their own needs, and that they are supported to make their own choices and have control over their life. In order for the person you are supporting to have choice and control in this way, it is important that anyone supporting them has a positive approach to risk.
This means that no one has the right to deny someone else the opportunity to enjoy and control their own life simply because they are a user of care and support services. On the other hand, social care staff have a responsibility to make sure that people who might be at risk of harm from others are aware that they have the right to live life free from abuse or neglect.

People who do not have the capacity to make some decisions and choices for themselves still have the right to be supported to make choices as far as they reasonably can, and any choices which may be made for them should be made with a clear discussion of what is in their “best interests”, as defined by the Mental Capacity Act Guidance (http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Deliveringadultsocialcare/MentalCapacity/MentalCapacityAct2005/DH_073511).

Things to consider:

- When you are providing care and support to someone, you must think about health and safety issues for yourself, the person you are supporting and anyone you might come into contact with while you are providing support.
- Identifying risks: the person you are supporting should be very specific about anything harmful that they think might feasibly happen given their particular circumstances, paying special attention to any problems that have occurred before.
- Responses to risks: you need to work with the person you are supporting to think about anything you could reasonably do to reduce or remove any risks that have been identified. Think about all the possible responses and be imaginative.
- Evaluate the options: you need to think carefully with the person you are supporting through the potential consequences of all of these possible responses in turn, thinking about whether it does actually reduce risk, and making sure that in doing so, you are not compromising their independence. It will help to talk these issues through with other people who know the individual well, and any professionals who might be able to provide advice or guidance, such as the person’s social worker or a health professional. It is important that the person you are supporting is enabled to weigh up the pros and cons of all the possible courses of action being considered before any final decisions about how the risk is to be managed are made.
- If you have been involved in these discussions, it is important that you keep a record of this thinking and decision making process, so that you can refer back to it if anyone questions why you are taking the approach that is eventually decided upon to manage any risks.

It is unlikely that all risks of harm can be reduced or removed, and nor should it be the goal of people providing support to do so. Life is full of risks for all of us, regardless of whether we need care and support, and so it is unreasonable to assume that people who need help to be independent should strive to have a life without risk. However, we are all under an obligation because of the health and safety act, and because of safeguarding principles, to minimise risks where possible.

One of the trickiest things to manage is when the person you are supporting makes a decision about how to be supported that other people think will be too risky for them. They have a right to make that choice, but other people also have a right to be safe, and this includes you if you are providing care and/or support to the person, or any members of the general public who you might come into contact with while you doing so.
Things to consider:

- Everyone has the right to make their own decisions, but they do not have the right to make decisions which put other people at risk of harm.
- Everyone has a duty of care towards people who they provide care and/or support to, regardless of whether you are paid or not to do so.
- Everyone has the right to make choices which other people think are risky, and to be supported to put those decisions into practice, even when that means taking certain risks.
- Everyone has a general responsibility not to put the public at significant risk.

It is not always easy to find the right balance between these principles, and you might want to have some advice and guidance about balancing risks. The Department of Health guidance “Independence choice and risk, a guide to best practice in supported decision making” can help with this: [www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_074773](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_074773) or you can speak to your social worker for advice.

Issues of capacity

Where it is difficult for someone to make their own decisions, or if you are involved in making decisions on behalf of the person who you provide care and support to, it is important that you are aware of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the Act’s Code of Practice states:

1. Every adult has the right to make their own decisions if they have the capacity to do so. **You must assume that a person has capacity unless it can be established otherwise.**

2. Individuals should receive support to help them make their own decisions and all possible steps should be taken to try to help him / her to reach a decision themselves.

3. Individuals have the right to make decisions that others might think are unwise. **Making an “unwise” decision does not mean that a person lacks capacity.**

4. A person’s capacity must not be judged simply on the basis of their age, appearance, condition or an aspect of their behaviour.

5. It is important to take all possible steps to try to help people make a decision for themselves.

Personal identity, relationships and sexuality

For all human beings our personal identity is vital to our well being but for people with care and support needs, these issues can often be difficult and it is important that you are mindful of not restricting someone’s right to express their individuality when you are providing care and/or support to them.

Each of us has a unique identity which is made up of many different elements, such as age, gender and sexual preference. We also express our identity through our relationships with others, through family, friendships and loving relationships as well as through our community. We also express our personal identity through our beliefs, interests and achievements, for example, being a Christian, being passionate about football or having climbed the Munros. These things define us and give our lives meaning.

In thinking about how you provide care and /or support to someone, it is important to be mindful of the different ways in which having our personal identity denied or having to struggle to express ourselves can be very harmful, even abusive. For example it can really harm people:

- To be an adult, but to be treated as a child.
- To be homosexual, but to be treated as if that is wrong.
- To have a family, but to be separated from your family.
- To be kept away from your partner.
- To have no real friends. To be excluded from ordinary life.

Some people are at particular risk of having their identities dismissed and it is important that you are made absolutely aware of how the care and /or support you provide helps the person to live their life their way. Sometimes standard styles of working may not suit the individual you are supporting, or may even deny their identity.

For example, people should be able to expect help to have control and choice over their appearance, their relationships and their preferences for the places they wish to go and the people they wish to have in their life. This might include things like following a particular religion or being involved with a particular social scene. Sexuality is a private and personal matter and it is not the business of any supporter whether paid or unpaid to try and interfere with the sexuality of the person being supported.

Wherever possible, you should try to make sure when you are agreeing to provide care and/or support to someone, whether you are a friend or family member, employed by an agency or directly by the person themselves, that you will both understand and be able to actively support them in their lifestyle choices. If you feel strongly that your own views and opinions about particular issues might clash with those of the person you are considering providing care and/or support to, then you should be aware that any actions you take whilst supporting them which deny or inhibit their individuality may at best, impinge on your ability to provide good support to them, and at worst, could well be considered to be abusive.

People may want to use support to help them to make new friends or connections within their local area. This might be through getting a job, spending time following a hobby or special interest or simply getting out into places where they think they might meet new people. Meeting new people and building new relationships can be risky for all of us, and sometimes people who provide care and/or support to others may be concerned that they could be putting themselves at risk in this area. It is really important that people are supported to take...
reasonable risks to make new connections and relationships if this is what they want to do, and people who are supporting others should be mindful of their right to do so.

It is worth remembering that it can be particularly risky for individuals to have a highly limited network of relationships, and the risks inherent in making new friends should not outweigh the need to have a wide network of contacts and connections.

**Issues of consent**

If someone you are supporting or their partner are not able to give informed consent to things such as medical treatment, financial transactions or sexual activity due to not understanding the meaning, implications or potential consequences of any such consent being given, it is vital, both for the sake of the individual and for you as someone supporting them, that the matter is properly discussed and reviewed under the Mental Capacity Act. Sex where one party does not consent is illegal; imposing medical treatment on someone who does not consent is assault; making financial decisions on behalf of someone who does not consent is fraud.

If someone’s capacity to consent is an issue, then other appropriate parties, including their social worker or care manager, must be involved to discuss the matter and see whether any means can be provided to provide sufficient information and advice for them to make an informed choice.

**Personal development**

As we develop from children to adults, our personal identities are formed; we learn new things and face new choices. As we develop, we need each other’s support, in order to become a full person, and this is the same for people who need care and support from others. It is important for you to think about how you can best provide support to enable the individual to explore their own way of being in the world, and to carry on learning and developing if this is what they want to do.

**Relationships with supporters**

It is possible for relationships with the people who you provide care and/or support to become much more than a merely professional relationship, indeed support often seems to work best when the supporter is a trusted friend or family member. However, there are often concerns when a supporter and the person they support begin a loving relationship.

Strong emotions are involved in loving relationships and these emotions are even felt by others who are only indirectly involved. For instance, people can feel anger, envy, jealousy and suspicion and third parties may feel left out or that they might be treated unfairly. In addition, if a relationship ends, this can be very difficult to manage if one party relies on the other for care and/or support. People are often also concerned that someone who provides support might be taking advantage of the person they work with or for in moving into a more intimate relationship with them.
For these reasons, it is generally accepted that it is inappropriate for somebody to be in a loving partnership with someone and also to be working for them providing care and support. It is important to think carefully about agreeing to provide care and support to a close loved one, or about continuing to provide care and support to someone if your relationship with them progresses to a more intimate level.

**Relationships with others**

Whatever role people play in your life, there is always a risk to all of us that someone might try to take advantage of, or abuse our trust in them in some way. This can happen to people who are receiving care and/or support from others, but it can also happen to the person providing the support. Whether or not you are paid for the care and/or support you provide, it is important that you feel confident to speak to someone if you feel that you are being exploited or simply if you are uncomfortable with what you are being asked to do.

It is also important to be aware that if a person is receiving care and/or support, then any concerns raised about the appropriateness of the behaviour or conduct of their supporters might be considered as safeguarding matters and be referred to the social services and/or the police to investigate.

**Risks of abuse**

The main forms of abuse are considered to be:

- Emotional
- Physical
- Financial
- Sexual

As someone providing care and/or support to another person, it is important to be aware that your actions may well come under closer scrutiny than if you were doing the same things in an ordinary friendship. For example, you might think it perfectly acceptable to borrow money from, or lend money to, a friend or colleague, but it is generally considered poor practice to do so if the person you are borrowing from or lending to is someone to whom you also provide care and/or support. This is equally the case if you are not being paid to provide the care and/or support, as other people may see it as exploiting the relationship you have with the individual.

Evidence suggests that people who are vulnerable are abused by family and friends as well as by people who are paid to work with them. It is important to know that if you have any suspicions that the person you are providing care and/or support to is being abused by someone, you must report the situation urgently. Every local authority will have a safeguarding adult’s procedure which will deal with any such situations, and the way to access this is for you, or the person you speak to about the situation, to refer you to the local social services and/or the police.
Abuse of others

If there is any significant risk that the person you are supporting might pose a risk to others as a potential abuser, then every effort must be made to plan and deliver their care and support in such a way as to minimise that risk. Other members of the community are entitled to be protected from undue risk just as you are similarly entitled.

In general, any information about an individual that might damage their reputation should be treated as confidential. This does not mean that nobody should be told. Instead, it means that people should only be told if it will be helpful to the promotion of the health and safety of the individual, people supporting them, or other citizens.

Safe Environments

To be safe from abuse it is important that people live in a safe environment. As someone providing care and/or support to another person, it is important that you make every effort to ensure that you understand any potential risks of harm or abuse and support the individual to build a wide range of friends and connections.

It is important to remember that safety from abuse comes not from increased isolation, or from being supported by only a small number of people. In general, we are safer the more people we know, and the better, more open and sensitive are our relationships with others.

Personal care

Where you are responsible for supporting someone with their cleanliness and personal hygiene, you should be provided with a support plan detailing clearly how to do this properly in ways that make sense to them. This includes dental care, hair care and shaving, continence and menstruation issues nail and foot care. If the person needs assistance to use the bath, shower or toilet, it is vital that their dignity and self-respect is maintained. As a minimum, when providing support to someone with their personal care, you should:

- Close doors wherever possible to provide privacy.
- If possible, provide the person with time on their own in the bathroom or toilet.
- Cover the person’s lap with a towel if they are using the toilet.
- Always explain what you are doing clearly and respectfully.
- Use respectful language, not saying things like “You’re dirty”.

In general it is accepted as good practice that people should be supported with their personal care by someone of the same sex. However, if the person you are supporting has a clear preference which differs from this, and any potential questions of risk of abuse have been considered, this preference should be fully respected.
Moving and handling

If you need to physically move the person you support then it is vital that you and they receive training in how best to move and handle people in ways that reduce the risk of injury to either party. If you are employed by a provider organisation or agency then you should have been given the correct training by your employer. If you are employed directly by the person you support, or if you are an unpaid care, family member or friend, then the local authority may be able to offer training to you on behalf of the person you are supporting. They will also be able to visit the person’s home and discuss their moving and handling needs with them and you.

The following principles are generally accepted as best practice in matters of moving and handling:

- No one should try to move someone, by hand, if that person cannot bear any of their own weight, without the assistance of somebody else.
- No one should try to use any equipment to lift someone unless they have been shown how to do so by someone who understands and has used the equipment before.
- Advice must be sought from a physiotherapist or occupational therapist about any equipment that will make moving and handling easier.

The person’s support plan should describe any relevant techniques and issues regarding the use of any equipment.

Accidents and spills

If there is an accident, and blood, urine, vomit or faeces are spilled, it is essential that cleaning takes place as soon as possible, and you should use protective clothing and gloves when doing so.

Person-specific risks

If there are particular risks associated with the individual character, history or method of communication of the person you support, which you are going to be required to manage with them, then you will need clear guidance on how to do so, and this can usually be found within their support plan. It is important that you are given clear details of the particular risks and how they have affected the person in the past, as well as guidelines on how to provide good support to manage them in the future. This is important because it will ensure that you understand what the potential risks are, and how you are required to work with the individual to minimise and manage them in ways that keep them safe and well, without compromising their right to make choices and decisions.

If the person you support sometimes acts in ways that might cause a significant risk to themselves or to other people, then you must know how to help them to avoid situations where this might occur, and to manage them if they do occur. You will be better able to provide support in this context if you understand the reasons for any such behaviour, which are often complex and can take time to understand.

People behave in ways that can be harmful to themselves or to others for a variety of reasons, including ill health or a response to physical pain, mental ill
health or a psychiatric disorder, a way of dealing with certain situations, of
communicating something or of expressing emotions or frustrations

Often there will be detailed management strategies and tried and tested
responses to a particular risk or behaviour which you will need to understand and
feel confident to work within if you are to successfully support the individual to
stay safe. Other times these may be in development, and you may be asked by
professionals who may be working with the person you are supporting to keep a
record of what works well and what does not work so well when you are providing
direct support in these situations, so that strategies can be refined.

In general, it is easier to manage difficult behaviour when support is designed to
give the individual maximum choice and control over their life, and to enable
them to live their life in ways that make the most sense to them. A person’s
support plan should be written in such a way as to make it clear what things are
important to them and what outcomes they want to achieve in meeting their care
and support needs.

It maybe that you need training to help you to support the individual safely and
within the law. This training might include things like de-escalation and
breakaway techniques, and in some exceptional cases, restraint. If you work for
an agency or provider organisation then they should provide you with all training
necessary to safely support the people they are asking you to work with. If you
are employed directly by the person you are supporting, or are providing support
as an unpaid carer, family member or friend, then the local authority may be able
to offer training to you on their behalf.

**Liability**

The dictionary definition of liability is "when you are legally responsible for
something".

Vicarious liability means that employers may be liable to persons injured by the
wrongful acts of their employees, if such acts are committed in the course of their
employment. For example if an employee's careless driving injures another
employee / contractor / customer, the employer is likely to be held liable.

If you are employed by an agency or provider organisation then the organisation
will be liable for the actions of their staff, and may have policies and procedures
which affect how you can work with individuals. If you are employed directly by
the individual, then you must be aware that they could be held liable for your
actions if these result in injury to anyone else during the course of your work with
them.

There is no vicarious liability if the act is not committed in the course of
employment.

**Duty of care**

Every member of society is under a 'duty of care' to take reasonable care to avoid
acts or omissions which they can reasonably foresee are likely to injure their
neighbour. A neighbour means anyone who ought reasonably to have been kept
in mind. This means that you have a general duty of care to anyone you are
providing care and/or support to, and to anyone with whom you come into
contact while you are supporting them. It also means that the person you are
providing care and/or support to has a general duty of care to you, whether you
are paid or unpaid to support them, and to anyone with whom they come into contact in the course of their everyday life. What is considered to be 'reasonable' will depend on the circumstances.

**Lifestyle risks: Diet**

We all know that we should eat a good balanced diet in order to maintain our general health, but equally we all make choices which do not reflect this knowledge sometimes, and we all have an absolute right to do so. No one has the right to tell anyone else what they can or cannot eat or drink, regardless of whether that person has a disability or is vulnerable in some way. However, you may be asked through the individual’s support plan to help them to make good choices on a day-to-day basis. If the person you are supporting has a particular health problem which is or could be made worse by eating or drinking certain things, or by not eating or drinking certain things, then this should be detailed in their support plan, and you should be made aware of how to support them best to balance these issues with their right to choose for themselves what you eat and drink.

If you are providing care and/or support to someone who is not able to choose or control what they eat and drink, you have a responsibility to make sure that they have a balanced and healthy diet which includes foods and drinks that they like and enjoy, and food that is appropriate to their culture or religion if this is important to them.

**Lifestyle risks: Smoking**

Smoking is bad for health, but it is a legal and common practice and as such it is everyone’s right to smoke if they choose to do so. However, it is also your right to choose not to expose yourself to passive smoking – being in the same space as someone who is smoking – and this may well affect your ability or willingness to provide care and/or support to someone.

Under Section 2 of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, employers have to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. This means that if a risk to health can be demonstrated, for example, if a worker with a respiratory condition is forced to work in a very smoky atmosphere which may make that condition worse, the employer must take action to deal with the risk. In this case, the employer might be the agency or organisation you work for, or the individual if they employ you directly.

**Lifestyle risks: Use of drugs including alcohol**

Drug use, including alcohol, tobacco, illegal and prescribed drugs, and the misuse of all of these, is common, and a feature of today’s society. If the person you support chooses to use or misuse substances, you should be aware that you do not have the right to force them to cut down or stop, though you may be asked within their support plan to encourage them to do so. However, you should also be aware that you cannot be expected to help someone you support, whether you are paid or unpaid to do so, in any activity which is against the law.

This means that someone who you provide care and/or support to should not ask you to support them to buy or use illegal drugs.
Medication

If the person you support has to take regular or even occasional medication, then you should encourage and enable them to manage this for themselves wherever possible. If someone needs support in taking medication, that support should be provided in a way that still maximises their control over their own life.

Self-administration: If the person can administer their own medication, then your role as a supporter is to encourage them to use some system that reduces the risk of any errors occurring, and possibly to agree with them to keep a check on how self-administration is progressing. Pharmacists can provide advice on different systems for organising medication, and can also organise the system of the person’s choice.

Non Self-administration: if the person is unable to administer their own medication, or can only do so with direct help to make sure that they have taken the correct medication, then this should be detailed in their support plan. Your role as their supporter is to make sure that the correct medication is taken at the correct times, and there will need to be specific written records kept detailing where and how medication is to be stored and administered.

Storage of medication: There are risks from keeping medicines too long and from having too many unnecessary medicines in the home. If you are to be responsible for the administration of the individual’s medicine, then you will need to make sure that stocks are kept low and safe.

Review of medication: if you are supporting someone who takes regular medication over a long period of time, then it is important to be aware of when and how this is to be reviewed by their doctor: this should be recorded in the person’s support plan.

Communicable diseases

If you are supporting someone who has a disease that is communicable, which means that it can easily be passed on to people who come into contact with the carrier, then this information should have been shared, on a confidential basis, with you prior to your starting to support them if you might be at risk as a result of providing care and/or support to them.

Communicable diseases include things like Hepatitis B, HIV / AIDS and MRSA.

It is equally expected that if you carry a communicable disease you should discuss this with the person you are to be providing care and/or support to in order for them to assess what risks, if any, exist, and how those risks might best be minimised.

If there is a risk of cross infection, then everyone necessary should know how to prevent it and should understand what the implications of not carrying out these measures.
Disability-related health risks

If you are to be providing care and/or support for someone who has any illness or are particularly likely to suffer from ill health, for whatever reason, then this should be detailed in their support plan. This might include things like epilepsy and diabetes. Equally if they have a particular health condition which must be actively managed to avoid deterioration, then this too must be detailed, and the strategies for managing it described, in their support plan. This might include things like a risk of pressure sores if they are not very mobile, tube-feeding if they use a gastrostomy tube or administering oxygen. You will need specialist training to help manage conditions such as these, and this can be provided whether or not you are paid to provide support by the local health authority.

Safety in the home

It is important that the person you provide care and/or support to is able to feel safe and secure in their own home, and equally that they feel able to expect you to maintain their standards of safety and security. The local police will be happy to come and speak to you and the person you support about security and general safety issues if this seems appropriate.

The possibility of a fire presents a significant risk to everyone, whatever their living situation and you may need to think about strategies for minimising risk if you are going into someone’s home to provide care and/or support for them. The fire service will be happy to come and visit you and the person you support at home to provide advice about appropriate fire safety measures you could take.

If the person you support might find it difficult for you to react quickly in the case of a fire, you should give some thought to the measures that you need to put in place to safeguard them and yourself should a fire occur. This would include how you would summon help and get out of the building safely, and if there are specific strategies for managing this then they should be detailed in the person’s support plan.

Preparation of meals and eating

Poor hygiene, particularly poor food hygiene, can lead to food poisoning, serious illness and, in extreme cases death. If you are to be providing help with preparing food you may want to consider the need for food hygiene training: if you work for an agency or provider organisation then they will provide this training for you.

If you are to be providing support to the person to eat, then their support plan should give clear guidance as to how this is to be given. You may need to receive some advice from a speech and language therapist if there is a risk of the person choking, to make sure that you have the right skills and training to help the individual to stay safe and well.
Risks outside the home: Travel and transport

If you are to be providing help to the person to get about outside their home, then you will need to know how to do this in ways that make sense to them and that allow them to be as independent as they wish to be. If you are to be expected to use your own car, or to drive a car which is owned by the person you support, in order to transport them, then you should expect to have to provide them with proof that you have the correct licence and insurance, and that the car is safe and legal to drive.

Risks outside the home: Personal safety

If the person you are supporting feels that their personal safety may be at risk when out and about then you will need to know how you can help to minimise or manage these risks. The person’s support plan should describe strategies for this, and may include things like always carrying a personal alarm or mobile phone. If the person you support has experienced bullying or so called “hate crime” in their local area, then you may wish to ask the local police to come and talk to you and them about their policy for tackling such things.

Financial safety

If you are to be providing help to someone to manage their finances, it is important to be aware of how to do so safely and in ways which minimise the risk of mistakes. You will need to be extremely careful to protect yourself by means of the records you keep from suspicions or accusations of mishandling the person’s money or of stealing from them.

Some accepted standards of good practice are:

- Where you are to be handling money for someone, then an agreed cash limit should be set for funds held by them on a daily or weekly basis.
- The person’s money must be kept separate from your own money at all times.
- Receipts must be kept for everything, and there should be a written record of all financial transactions.
- Signatories for bank accounts or benefit books must be defined in accordance with appointeeship or legal guardianship guidelines.
- You should not take the person’s property, keys or money, home with you.
- You should not ‘hold on to’ the person’s money, benefit or bank books.
- You should not accept financial gifts or borrow money from the person you support.
- You should make sure that you do not seek to influence the person’s spending decisions.
Employment-related risks: Violence and abuse

It is important to remember that you have a right to feel safe from, and to protect yourself from, violence and abuse. Sometimes support staff feel that they are under a greater obligation than is reasonable to put up with difficult or abusive behaviour from their employer, and people employed directly by the person they provide care and support to can feel especially vulnerable, and may not feel confident in challenging the individual if they think they are being treated unfairly.

Make sure that you discuss any worries you have about your working conditions or the expectations of the person you support with them, if possible, in the first instance. If you are employed directly by the person who you support, or are an unpaid carer, family member or friend, and you are not comfortable speaking to the person you support directly, then you should talk to someone else about your worries. This may be a friend or peer, the people at the Direct Payments Team, or the local social services, who will be able to advise you. If you are working for an organisation or agency then you can speak to your line manager about any such worries.

Remember, you have the right not to be placed at undue risk, or to be asked to perform tasks which would put you, or other people, at risk.

Monitoring accidents, incidents and new risks

While a good support plan will describe all the risks that you can reasonably expect to have anticipated, and detail the ways in which you are best to manage these when working with / supporting the individual, there will always be times when accidents occur, or when despite following guidance contained in the support plan, there is an incident of difficult behaviour or dangerous occurrence. There is also the possibility of new risks occurring as the person and their life change and develop.

It is important that you keep a record of any such accidents, incidents, near misses or new risks, and that you discuss them with the person you support and/or any professionals involved with them as appropriate. It may be that a review of the support plan or reassessment of the person’s needs is necessary to enable you to continue to manage risks positively.

If existing plans are no longer adequate or possible to follow then you must take action to make sure that you have considered how to minimise any risks until such time as you can sensibly review and update the plans. It may be that more information or input from professionals is needed, or that plans simply need to be better communicated, or that you need more training to be able to carry out the plans properly.

In the first instance, the main responsibility for managing risk sits with the individual themselves, where they are able to make informed decisions for themselves, although they do have a responsibility to consider professional advice and guidance and to have due regard for the safety of others, including people who support them, whether paid or unpaid. If the person you support is unable to make decisions about risks for themselves, then people who do so for them must work hard to include the person in the decision making process and make sure that any decisions that are made on their behalf are ones that they could reasonably be expected to make for themselves, were they so able.
Sometimes, a risk may seem to be so high that you, a professional or an organisation engaged to support the individual may need to seek advice under safeguarding procedures. This can sometimes mean breaking confidentiality or acting even when you have specifically asked by the person you support not to. If you feel that there is a genuine and real risk of harm to you, the person you support or others, you absolutely must contact the local authority to discuss it. Your local authority can provide you with information about their safeguarding policy and procedures on request.

Further information and useful resources

- The Mental Capacity Act and associated Guidance.
- Independence and choice, a guide to best practice in supported decision making – DH.

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