

Guidelines for seeking a support worker in your home

1. What to look for in a respite care worker

Choosing a support worker to care for your family member with a disability can be a rewarding process when you find the right person. There are many factors to consider, such as whether the applicant can work with your family, is suitably experienced (or qualified), is able to work within your culture and preferences or if they are open to learning new approaches or skills.

Some Carers, who have attended previous workshops, have put together suggestions of attributes, qualities and skills that they seek in a support worker working in the family home.

Characteristics or attributes of a person

The six important characteristics can be summarised as “The Six Cs”.

- Competence
- Caring
- Compatibility
- Cooperation
- Communication
- Commonsense

Further attributes that families listed as being important include:

- Non-judgmental
- Punctuality including a commitment to coming
- Stability and reliable with the ability to be adaptable
- Trustworthy, honest, and friendly
- Respect for boundaries
- Patient
- Sense of humour and ability to not take things personally
- Empathy with family member, but ability to also be firm.

Identified skills of a person

Some of the skills or particular abilities that families identified as being important to look for were:

- **They should build and retain relationships**

It's important to determine whether you and your family member can build a rapport with the support worker. The support worker should demonstrate a strong interest in getting to know the family member they will be working with, and all other members of the family.

Explore with a potential support worker how they have maintained confidentiality in previous working situations. This will help you to know whether it's possible to build an atmosphere of safety and trust with them.

- **Communicates well**

The support worker should be a good listener and be able to provide comprehensive feedback to you. Give the care worker an opportunity to speak up and be candid at the interview. A relaxed, two-way conversation will help you determine if the care worker is able to assume the various duties required.

- **Be compatible with you and your family member, so time together can be enjoyable**

Ensure that they understand the requirements of the family and tasks to be undertaken. They need to be able to work with you, follow instructions, and not change systems or routines in the household. Discuss with the support worker some appropriate actions to common situations that will arise.

- **Demonstrate some experience or knowledge of disability or the specific disability of your family member, eg., autism, Downs**

Make sure the care worker is familiar with the needs of your child, e.g., medical, social, or equipment. Their experiences should indicate an individualised approach to working – working one-to-one with the person with a disability. They should be able to clearly express and give examples of how they have shown empathy and respect with people they have worked with. The care worker should display the ability to work in a consistent way, follow through on promises, and be keen about undertaking training if needed.

- **Be flexible and creative**

It may be useful for you to know if a support worker is flexible in terms of availability, e.g., school holidays. The support worker should demonstrate the ability to handle situations in a creative way, ensuring a person with a disability participates in activities/groups/sports teams as others in the community.

2. Interviewing a potential support worker

It's best to try to interview a support worker in person. Before you conduct an interview, try to determine what personal qualities you are looking for and make some notes about questions that you might have. It's easier to break the ice by describing your family and your child first and then asking questions about the support worker. The questions you ask that mention real situations will bring forth the most revealing answers. Include the person you care for as part of the process.

Possible interview questions

- Tell me about yourself?

- Have you had experience working with children/people with a disability?
- Why are you interested in providing support?
- What interests you?
- What special interest or hobbies do you have that you might like to share with the person I am caring for?
- What makes you the best person for this job?
- Can you provide me with references from other people you've worked with
- What special training or experience do you have (First Aid, CPR, other)?
- If my child has to be taken to the doctor/hospital for an emergency, what steps would you take?
- What would you do if you asked the person I care for to do something and he or she refused?
- What hours are you available to work? What about during holidays and weekends?
- How do you deal with difficult situations?
- What would you do if you found the person I care for with an open bottle that you suspected was poison or medicine?
- How comfortable would you feel about taking the person I care for out in the community?
- What are the barriers do you think you may encounter taking the person I care for into the community?
- What should we do if we disagree about something?
- Would you be willing to have a police check?

Referee check

Always make a phone call to at least one referee before you decide.

Some question you may want to ask referees.

- How long have you known the applicant?
- Tell me what you think are the applicant's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the position of support worker?
- How well does the applicant follow instruction?
- How does the applicant handle conflicts and emergencies?

3. Supervising a support worker

It is important to establish a good working relationship with a support worker from the very beginning. Be clear of what you expect from them. Allow time for them to get to know the person you care for and meet the family. There may be some specific tasks that need to be carried out in a particular way such as assisting your child/family member to eat, to move, or go to the toilet. Work with the support worker, showing how these tasks should be performed until they seem confident and meet your expectations.

It is also important for you to be consistent in your instructions and to provide prompt feedback if there is a problem with their performance. Be sure to recognise a job well done.

You may wish to establish a set of guidelines and job requirements, and discuss

these with the applicant before coming to an agreement of working for you.

Make sure the support worker understands what behaviour is unacceptable to you, e.g., being on time, performing duties to a standard you are happy with, attitudes.

If you and the support worker communicate clearly from the outset, any issues that arise will be less difficult to deal with.

Suggestions to consider when supervising a support worker

- Be sure you are clear about what you want the person to do.
- Explain the work you want them to do on the first day.
- Do not assume your instructions are always understood. It may also be useful to leave instructions in writing.

Review what to do in case of an emergency

- Be clear on work hours, and time off.
- If the worker is not doing the work correctly, address the issues immediately.
- If the job performance is not satisfactory let the support worker know. The person you care for and their wellbeing is what is most important.
- If a support worker does not seem competent to you, or has been unable or unwilling to follow your directions for safe care, consider finding another worker.
- Be clear how you want behaviours to be dealt with.

4. When a support worker is associated with an agency

Sometimes an agency is responsible for providing a support worker to work in the family home, and the carer chooses a worker from an agency list. In this situation carers agreed that there were some areas that the agency was responsible for.

The agency should:

- Arrange a visit first to get to know the person and family
- Arrange police checks
- Provide back-up cover
- Provide training
- Ensure safety on both sides
- Explain how to make a complaint to both parties.