Foundations of good support

Aspirations

Support for relationships

Positive approaches to behaviour that challenges

Support for engagement

Communication

Structure

United Response
*support that changes with you*

Introduction

Support teams make use of a range of complementary approaches, tools and frameworks when describing and delivering good support, such as Person Centred Thinking tools, Active Support, Positive Behaviour Support and Person Centred Planning and Reviews. These approaches are designed to help colleagues provide good support, but they can achieve an importance all of their own and there is a temptation to focus on the details of one perspective, or look for a solution in one particular tool or approach.

Good support is dependent not on approaches or tools, but on their **results**, the observable benefits for the person we support. Experience has shown that when trying to judge how good support is, and what to do to improve it, the best understanding of the effectiveness of support comes from seeing these results across a series of linked levels.

Good support provides:

1. **Structure:**
   creating predictability and consistency

2. **Communication:**
   understanding and responding to a person's communication skills and needs

3. **Support for engagement:**
   supporting engagement in meaningful activities, interactions and relationships

4. **Positive approaches to behaviour that challenges:**
   understanding behaviour that challenges as an expression of legitimate distress to which we must listen and respond

5. **Support for relationships:**
   improving a person's quality of life through relationships with others

6. **Aspirations:**
   working together to avoid complacency and contribute towards the person's rich and fulfilling life

Aspirations

Support for relationships

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Structure
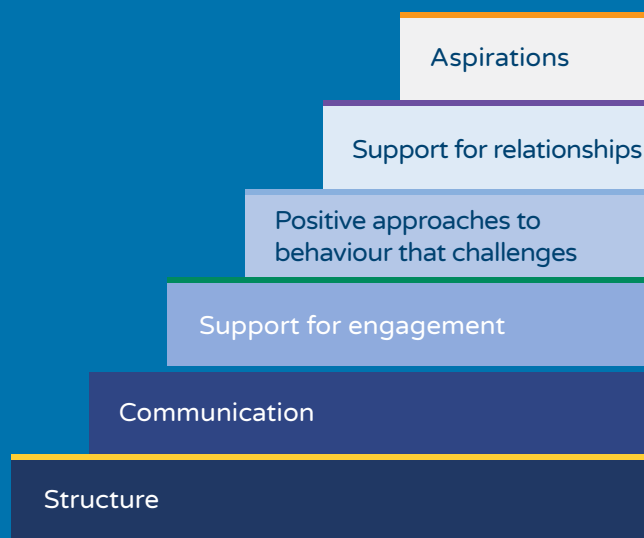
This sequence of steps illustrates the order in which each aspect of good support develops and should be assessed, irrespective of the nature or complexity of circumstances and needs. It helps us identify where to start improving support. Each level acts as the foundation for the next so the extent to which any level can be established and progressed depends on how securely the preceding levels are in place. For example we make little or no progress by focusing all our efforts on trying to support engagement in activities if we do not first organise our work in a way that is consistent and predictable for the person being supported and adapt our communication in a way that matches the person's communication needs and skills.

Similarly, much of the impact that behaviour that challenges has on a person's quality of life will be reduced by a team who respond to the person in predictable and consistent ways to reduce their anxiety; who adapt communication to meet their needs and skills; and who provide support for engagement in meaningful activities. Focusing all our efforts on behaviour that challenges without these foundations in place and implementing only reactive strategies will obstruct any real improvement in the person's quality of life.

In the same way, Person Centred Planning facilitators frequently feel frustrated by their powerlessness to facilitate progress towards aspirational dreams and wishes. Even teams with the best intentions will have no real chance of making progress towards such goals if there is no structure within which to work towards possible outcomes, no understanding of how to communicate effectively with people, no provision of meaningful participation in everyday activity, negative approaches to behaviour that challenges, and therefore few or no opportunities for relationships with anyone except staff.

Practice leaders and team members intent on improving a person's quality of life need to understand what each foundation of good support involves. To assess the progress being made and to identify where the focus of our work needs to be, we need to recognise, in what can be seen and heard, the indicators of each foundation being in place and the indicators of each foundation not being in place.

When I was appointed as manager to my service I could see there were big problems with how we supported people and quickly there were lots of demands for positive change from everyone I spoke to. There was nothing we were doing well – everything about support had to get better: I ended up trying to change everything, flitting from one thing to another, and worrying all the time I wasn't doing anything effective and about the things I could see still needed sorting.

I spoke to Alan Williams from United Response's Practice Development Team, and he introduced me to the Foundations of Good Support, explaining that although I was right to be concerned, for example, about how isolated people we supported were, the fact that every day was chaos needed sorting before I could really get my teeth into improving other things. It didn't mean I was abandoning the things I believe to be important - we did some work on our relationships with the neighbours at the same time as developing better shift planning, and changed our daily plans as we became more connected with other people locally. But I realised how important it was to lay a solid foundation for these important things. It meant I could prioritise, tackle things in small steps and give my improvement plan a clear shape to guide us as we went forward.

Mary Taylor, Service Manager

The Foundations of Good Support

https://youtu.be/H8rPhqrervs

Structure

It's important and reassuring for us to have predictability and consistency in our lives. Everyone needs to know, at least to some extent, what is likely to happen and when. Most of us achieve the levels of predictability we need by following the routines and rituals that are important to us. For many of the people we support, when and/or how things happen is often dependent on other people and factors beyond their control. They may have several different individuals providing support to them who are more influential and bring their own priorities, rituals and routines with them.

Structure, the deliberate arrangement of events, activities, routines, rituals, interactions and opportunities over time, makes the world a more predictable, accessible and safer place for the people we support. It aids personal autonomy and independence by reducing dependence on others and enables those providing support to modify environments and processes to ensure each person knows what is going to happen and what is expected of them, reducing anxiety.

Where support is being provided by more than one person and/or more than one person is being supported it is important to develop an effective daily planning system (often called a shift plan or activity & support plan) based on the needs and choices of the people they are supporting, which:

- Indicates what activities and relationships the people we support are involved in

- Makes it clear when support will be provided

- Includes other activities that staff need to do, that don't (if only at the moment) involve the people they support

- Allocates support and activities to specific staff

- Indicates how things fit together – across people and across the passage of time

- Is used flexibly and includes options or contingency plans

- Is only as detailed as it needs to be, to ensure organised and smooth running support – in general terms less detail is needed when fewer staff are involved and when people we support are more able to organise their own lives

- Is reviewed in light of what works and what doesn't and new opportunities and goals

Having this kind of daily planning in place doesn't mean people have to stick to it religiously – it often needs to be adjusted throughout the day – for example to take account of individual choices, additional and/ or changes to planned activities and when things take more time than originally planned. Those providing support, plan in order to ensure that the flow of activity is maintained and opportunities aren't missed rather than getting hung up on precise timings and task lists.

A support team who know and respect the rituals and routines that are important to people and who structure their work to provide consistent support will create reassuring predictability in the lives of people they support. This structure will also provide a shared frame of reference for team members to compare their experience of supporting people. In turn this will help them to understand and anticipate the responses and needs of the people they support and extend their support into new situations, activities and relationships.

✓ **When structure is in place**

The support team know and respect the rituals and routines that are important to people and structure their work to provide consistent support, creating reassuring predictability in the lives of people they support.

✗ **When structure is not in place**

The support team's practice lacks the consistency and predictability required to support people effectively.

Support is provided in different and unpredictable ways, increasing people's anxiety and making it more difficult for them to take part in activities.

The team are not be able to make reliable observations and judgments about people's needs and aspirations because they lack the shared frame of reference that consistent support provides.

Structure - How can we support structure

https://youtu.be/oprPHMkeN3c

Communication

Communication is important for all of us. It is the means through which we control our environment and experience, express our feelings, thoughts and emotions and the way we make sense of the world around us. Communication matters for its own sake, but it's also important for what it helps us do. We need to communicate in order to learn, become independent and make choices. Being able to communicate with others is necessary if we are to make friends and build relationships.

We should think about a person as having a set of communication skills as well as needs and develop a communication profile which includes information on the different ways the person communicates, what information they understand and how they like to be communicated with. You can't always predict how someone will be able to communicate. We need to apply effort to understand each person's communication skills and learn how to adapt and organise our communication accordingly.

In particular we should identify:-

- the communications skills used by the people who communicate best with the person e.g. family members

- the most effective way of getting the person's attention

- How much communication support the person gets from the context or situation

- How many ideas in a sentence the person can usually process

We should integrate good communication throughout the people's lives by:-

- Making use of the environment: You can "make the situation speak for itself" using good task preparation and presentation

- Providing additional forms of communication: Using signed communication, objects of reference, symbols and photographs can all help people to understand what you are talking about

- Reducing the amount of information you are giving

- Simplifying language: Concrete language (relating to things you can see, touch, take a photograph of and easily describe) is easier for people to understand than abstract language

- Simplifying sentence structure: Take care that you use the simplest structure possible

This includes:-

- o Keeping the sentence order simple. Make sure that the thing you are saying first, is the thing that is happening first

- o Giving people one bit of information at a time

- o Using the person's name at the start of the sentence so that you can make sure that they know that you are talking to them

- Minimising distractions: It is much harder for people to focus on communication if there are lots of distractions in the environment. Try to keep other distractions to a minimum. Is a radio or television often on in the background? You might be able to tune it out, but people with communication difficulties might find it too distracting

Successful support for communication is built on the foundation of structure. For example, a visual timetable providing accessible information about what's happening when and with whom, will only be possible if it can be built from a series of relatively predictable and consistent opportunities, events and activities. Support for communication enables teams to proactively plan effective communication during activities and interactions which in turn helps to reduce anxiety and speed up processing. Knowing when, where and how things will unfold in advance makes it more likely that visual cues e.g. using labels on cupboards, materials set out ready for use etc. will be developed and used consistently.

✓ When communication is in place

The support team have identified the person's communication needs and skills. They use the most effective means of gaining the person's attention and match language, sentence structure and the variety of forms of communication they use to the person's skills, only conveying as many ideas as the person can process.

Effective communication involves a total communication environment which integrates communication for the person into the physical environment as well as during support.

✗ When communication is not in place

Support teams do not recognise the person's communication skills and needs, generally overestimate the person's verbal comprehension and fail to adapt communication to meet their needs.

Support staff use the wrong forms of communication. Communication used by support staff is too complex usually because the words they use are too complex and/or too many words are used at the same time.

Similarly support staff talk about things in the past or future which are not physically in the present, use complicated sentence structure and convey more concepts than the person can process in the time given.

Communication things to remember

https://youtu.be/bQvCb4F1nak

Support for engagement

A person's quality of life depends on their engagement in meaningful activities and relationships. In order to increase a person's participation support should enable them to succeed at what they are doing. Support needs to be individually tailored and responsive to changing circumstances to engage the person in every aspect of day to day life. If too little support is given the person will fail, too much and the member of staff will be doing the task or those parts of it that the person could do. Support that isn't correctly matched to the person's circumstances may also be obstructing relationships with others.

When effective support is not in place people experience long periods of inactivity and repeated failure. If people feel that they fail when they try new things, they will be less likely to try them again. Refusing opportunities for participation can easily become a person's favoured option because without the right level and type of support only refusal stops their repeated experience of failure and reduces their anxieties about unfamiliar activities or situations.

Active Support gives us tools and ways of working to bridge the gap between what people could do themselves and what was needed for successful engagement. There are four elements, or principles, of active support that can be applied to any activity or interaction to help those who are providing support to work out what they should do:

- **Every moment has potential** - viewing everything that happens at home and in the community (however mundane) as an opportunity for people to participate including: the things we all need to do as part of our home life or work responsibilities, activities we enjoy or aspire to at home and in the community and conversations/ interactions with all the people around us

- **Little and often** – recognising that everything that happens throughout the day is made up of smaller parts or steps and supporting people to engage in parts of each opportunity with slow, quiet, frequent and obvious support

- **Graded assistance** –As each activity unfolds, adjusting the amount of help provided to fit the particular task or step. This allows the person to try things out, get used to them, gradually do more for themselves and make more decisions about what to do next

Active Support
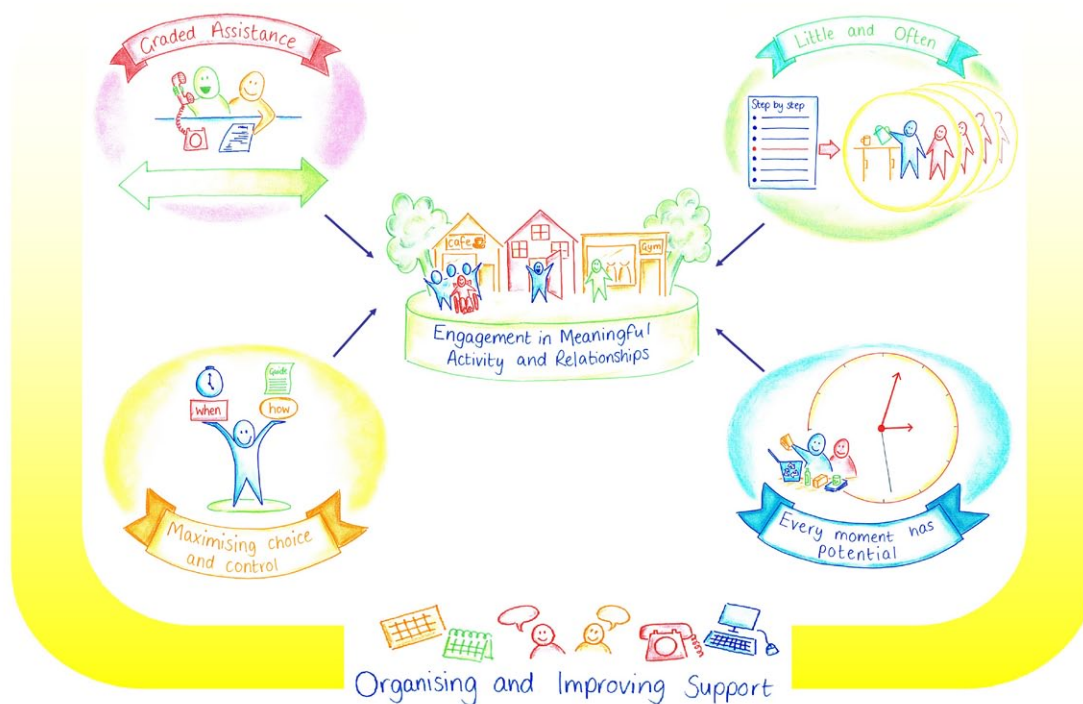
- **Maximising choice and control** – seeking opportunities for people to make more choices and take more control in when and how they will be engaged

Successful support for engagement is built on the foundations of familiar routines and effective communication. Being able to predict what is likely to come next and linking the introduction of new activities and experiences to existing routines and rituals, stops things 'coming out of the blue' and increases the likelihood of success. We are often too focused on verbal communication and don't appreciate the wealth of non-verbal information people are actually responding to. For example the first level of help which staff should be aware of is **simple** presentation of the materials – making the situation speak for itself.

Active Support Graded Assistance

https://youtu.be/gxEezOJbTiM

✅ When support for engagement is in place

People being supported are taking part in a wide range of activities and interactions. They are familiar with what's happening, what's expected of them and can be seen to anticipate what's coming next.

Support team members create the space and time to engage the person in the activities and tasks that are taking place.

Support staff can be seen to change their support between people and over time as activity unfolds.

❌ When support for engagement is not in place

People being supported are passive bystanders with no meaningful role in the activities or communication going on around them. They spend long periods of time not doing anything.

Staff offer support that is unfamiliar and communicate expectations that are confusing to the individual.

Staff may provide a commentary to their own activity but don't create or communicate an opportunity for the person to participate.

Positive approaches to behaviour that challenges

Behaviour that challenges is a term used to describe behaviour that interferes with an individual's daily life and/or the lives of those around them. "Behaviour is described as challenging when it is of such an intensity, frequency or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others and is likely to lead to responses that are restrictive or aversive or result in exclusion."

People who spend time with a person who displays behaviour that challenges are highly likely to attribute the behaviour to something inside the person where there is no justification for doing so. This often leads to a culture of blaming the person for behaviour actually caused by situations, events around them or other people's responses. Where teams do not recognise or understand a person's behaviour that challenges it is often perceived as a 'problem' or 'illness' to be 'treated', 'cured' or 'stopped' and this can lead to the use of withdrawal of opportunities, punishment or sanctions. This is unethical (often illegal) and potentially damaging for the person.

The term behaviour that challenges is used as a way of focusing our attention on the behaviours as challenging, and as a means of communication, rather than labelling the person as the problem.

When we think about the people we support we generally understand this to include: aggression, self-injurious behaviour, damage to property and socially inappropriate behaviour. But we often fail to recognise that it also includes other behaviours which stop or make it very difficult for the person to be involved in ordinary activities and relationships at home and in the community such as self-stimulatory behaviours, stereotyped or ritualistic behaviours, obsessional behaviour, withdrawn behaviour and refusal or avoidance.

Recognising these behaviours as challenging prompts us to try to understand why the person behaves the way they do and places the responsibility on us to find constructive responses and solutions. We should not think only in terms of reducing the behaviour that challenges: we need to look beyond the behaviour that challenges to the person's quality of life.

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) gives us a framework to understand behaviour that challenges and reduce the likelihood of it happening. It focuses on creating physical and social environments that are supportive and capable of meeting people's needs, and teaching people new skills to replace the behaviours which challenge.

Many of the proactive strategies identified in PBS plans are directly linked to the presence or development of structure, communication, and support for engagement as well as changes in staff attitudes and responses in risky situations to reduce the need for the behaviour that challenges including:

- Changing the physical surroundings

- Making the day more understandable for the person

- Ensuring transitions between activities are efficient and orderly for the individual

- Responding to verbal and non-verbal communication

- Teaching the person alternative ways to get what they need

- Increasing the range of activities and interactions available to the person

- Changing the way the person is supported to increase their involvement

- Rethinking our interpretations of behaviour as intentional

- Responding effectively to signs of anxiety

When behaviour that challenges happens which requires reactive strategies there are a range of things we can do to keep people safe and get things back to calm as soon as possible. This might include:

- Reassurance

- Distraction

- Removing demands or reducing expectations

- The use only of agreed and authorised restrictive interventions in line with the person's positive behaviour support plan

- It must **not** include punishment, including for example verbal reprimands or isolation

✓ **When positive approaches to behaviour that challenges are in place**

People are supported (despite the presence of behaviour that challenges) in a way that, promotes engagement, conveys respect and maintains opportunities.

The support team measures progress in terms of the person's quality of life not just a reduction of behaviour that challenges.

✗ **When positive approaches to behaviour that challenges are not in place**

The support team see the person or some characteristic they have as the cause of the behaviour that challenges. The person is seen as needing to be controlled, even punished and their behaviour stopped.

Opportunities for effective communication and support for engagement are reduced or withdrawn. The person's quality of life deteriorates, day to day experience may become damaging and there is an increased risk of them being seen as less than human and subject to restrictive practices.

Positive Behaviour Support
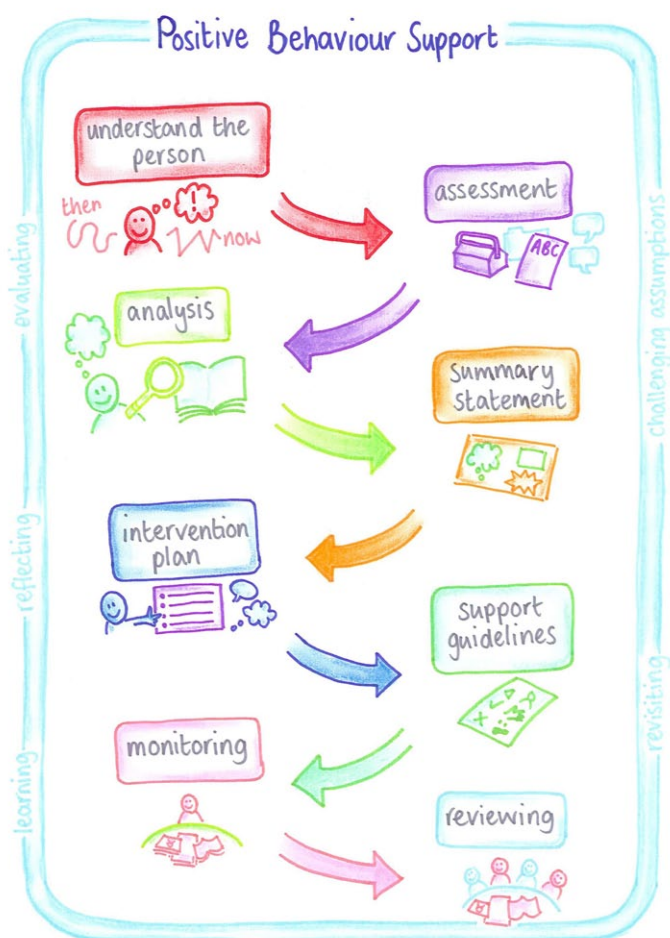
Support for relationships

Relationships keep us healthy and happy in a way nothing else can. They keep us safe and independent because they are the means by which we find out what is going on, how we can make a difference to others and who can help us. The more people we know, the more opportunities and new ideas will come our way.

Time and time again people we support tell us that relationships are what's most important to them, yet many have lost their connections with others. Sometimes family members are in a person's life but they have few if any friends, depending instead on people paid to be there. Paid support staff can be wonderful company but they frequently change jobs or assume new positions. The resulting instability and isolation can be devastating for people and is the root cause of many of the problems they experience.

But all too often support teams prioritise other things over the support people need to maintain their relationships or develop new ones. The more a person's life is spent within services or only with paid staff, the more isolated and vulnerable they become. We need to ensure that the work we do providing a service doesn't contain a person's life there.

A support team's work involves meeting a person's needs, but simply working with an individual person is not enough. Support teams need to work in collaboration with families and the communities where the person lives. In order to support a person to lead a full life they need to explore the community and learn about the people they find there. This will not only help create opportunities for other people to play a part in the person's life but it will enable the person being supported to make a difference in the lives of others.

Support teams should consider three approaches to developing relationships in the community:-

- Be a good neighbour e.g. taking in parcels when neighbours are out, putting the neighbours bins out when they are on holiday

- Join what's already there. There might be community centres or faith communities running coffee mornings or luncheon clubs or local sports clubs, food growing groups and allotments or neighbourhood watch. Whatever groups they find teams should get to know the people involved and what matters to them as well as the activities they organise

- Start something for the community with people who live there. It could be as simple as a litter pick or a coffee morning - but crucially when teams support a person to do something for the community they should try to involve other people who live in that community or are members of community groups. This will help create new opportunities and relationships for person they support

A support team should review their progress in working with communities and developing relationships. They can start by asking these questions of themselves:-

> How many people not being paid are involved in this person's life?
>
> How many people have we spoken to for the first time this week?
>
> How many people who didn't know each other have we introduced?
>
> What opportunities have we spotted for the people we support?
>
> How are we sharing what we learn?

Support for Relationships is built on a structure that provides the framework for ensuring people are routinely seen and consistently supported and ensures these interactions don't become lost in the day-to-day support. Effective communication strategies promote successful interactions; support for engagement and positive approaches to behaviours that challenge ensure people are supported in ways that recognise the contribution they can make as a valued member of their community.

✅ When support for relationships is in place

The person being supported is generally happier, healthier and safer. They benefit from a shared sense of belonging, with others in their life not paid to be there. They are recognised and respected for the roles they play in others' lives and have more opportunities to take part in new things. Team members have more to enjoy in their work.

❌ When support for relationships is not in place

Support teams don't recognise opportunities to develop relationships, obstruct the place in people's lives where relationships might flourish and displace others from people's lives who might have unpaid relationships with them.

Support teams focus on activities, staffing levels and their own skills, to the exclusion of the person's relationships with others. Without a place in the lives of others, the person becomes lonely, isolated and more vulnerable. Team members experience greater dissatisfaction with their work.

Aspirations

People with a learning disability usually experience a poorer quality of life than others: ill-health, isolation, boredom, mistreatment by others, etc. If that was your lot you'd have a plan – to escape or to change things. And you probably have some sense of what your ideal life would be, and how you can get closer to it than you are now. So developing aspirations with and for people we support makes sense.

Yet few people receiving care or support have any meaningful goals or aspirations. There's a number of reasons why this might be, eg.

- We find it difficult to imagine what those aspirations might be when people can't tell us directly

- We worry about imposing our own values on a person we support

- We struggle to get through just today, never mind thinking about further in the future

- We are concerned that it will take a lot of time and resources to identify aspirations, and to fulfil them in a meaningful way

- We accept too readily that people's lives are good enough already

- Our personal experience has taught us that we should all accept our own circumstances, our "lot in life"

Consequently we work in ways that satisfy any external requirements (e.g. using an agreed format to record aspirations but using language carefully so it sounds good, while actually meaning little), agreeing goals that are immediately attainable (eg. going on holiday), describing the maintenance of the status quo as an aspiration (eg. "goal: to be supported by the same staff"), or holding meetings that allow us to tick a box relating to goal planning, inclusion and working with family and friends, but which achieve little in driving change.

Person Centred Planning (PCP) provides a range of tools to generate, record and achieve aspirations. It was developed to help those who were concerned about the poor quality of life of people living in long stay institutions and others, to plan a way out – collaboratively, with the person and those who cared about them, and in a way that challenged the accepted order.

PCP helps us develop both short term "here and now" goals as well as aspirational, long term "hopes dreams and wishes" goals, using a "best guess" approach where necessary.

Here and now goals ensure a shared commitment to the individual's immediate future. These goals are agreed in response to the here and now and are focused on meeting the person's needs/preferences right now and/or improving our support.

Hopes dreams and wishes goals may lead to someone achieving part or all of a dream or ambition, or involve significant changes in a person's lifestyle. Key features of these goals are that they are:

- **Aspirational.** Things that reflect people's hopes, wishes, dreams and ambitions. Things that may seem impossible or perhaps only achievable in the long term

- **Bold.** Things beyond what we already know or do. Things that may at first appear too big to break down

- **Ambitious.** Things that might trigger significant changes in the person's life

- **Challenging.** Things that are difficult and have an element of uncertainty

A "best guess" approach enables staff and people who know the person well to use the knowledge of their likes, needs and preferences they've gained from providing good support and their experience of supporting people to be engaged in a wide range of activities and interactions as a basis for establishing what the person's aspirations might be if they were able to tell us directly.

Both "here and now" goals and "hopes dreams and wishes" goals should be regularly reviewed, and collective commitments to change and action sustained over time.

When PCP fails to have the impact intended on the day to day life of people, despite commitment and hard work, it is often because of the absence of Foundations of Good Support. To be effective PCP requires a structure within which to introduce new activities or lifestyle changes and good support for communication in order to discuss and agree possible alternatives and to understand the responses of the person as change happens. Similarly aspirations generated by PCP are likely to be more achievable when the person involved is already supported to be engaged in activity at home and their community, and when behaviours that challenge are approached positively rather than viewed as a block to change and increased opportunity.

When support for a person recognises the importance of relationships with others it will be open to a wider range of available resources, helping the team avoid working in isolation by collaborating with others in the community, working with families and ensuring their work is supported by other professionals. Making use of the diversity in team members' experience, skills and background means that everyone is given an opportunity to be recognised and valued for everything they bring to the team. Considering the widest possible range of resources when developing and sharing their aspirations also helps a team to avoid thinking only in terms of what they have always done before.

✓ **When aspirations are in place**

People being supported have a good quality and range of "here and now" goals and "hopes dreams and wishes" goals.

Team members can describe their aspirations for those aspects of their work and people's lives which make the biggest difference and contribute towards rich and fulfilling lives of people they support i.e. Family, Communication, Engagement, Relationships, Community and Employment.

✗ **When aspirations are not in place**

Team members believe that people's lives will never be substantially different and continue to do only what they have always done.

Using the Foundations of Good Support to improve our support:

The Foundations of Good Support is a useful way of understanding the support we provide. It helps us identify what's currently in place and where we need to focus our efforts to improve: enabling us to prioritise the most worthwhile strategies and focus our practice leadership effectively.

When faced with the range of difficulties and shortcomings common in social care settings it's easy to be overwhelmed and haphazard in attempting to develop better support, or to focus largely on our own favoured approaches without being sure they will lead to concrete and sustainable change.

Paper records, compliance with organisational returns and managers' descriptions of their service may be useful, but to understand what's really happening in a service requires direct observation of support and the results it has for people being supported. The Foundations of Good Support Observation and Assessment Tool (see link below) provides guidance for carrying out observations and indicators of what is in place and what is missing or weak.

While support teams are likely to be working across all foundation stages, we have found it beneficial to carry out observations and assessments on each foundation stage, one at a time, starting with Structure.

The assessment makes clear what specific actions are required to improve our support at each stage: providing relevant information for service audits and supervision and team meeting agenda items, and informing staff learning and development plans and service improvement plans.

In this way the Foundations of Good Support helps us to target our attention on the issues most likely to lead to real and long term change. When our observation and assessment confirm that our improvement plan has successfully secured a foundation stage we can move on. This is not to say that we have "finished" with that foundation stage – there will always be aspects of it that will require our attention, review and action; nor should we ignore everything in the later foundations stages while we focus on preceding ones – for example, Positive Behaviour Support and Support for Relationships can and should be implemented even when Structure is not in place. Rather the Foundations of Good Support helps us prioritise, step by step, the fundamental improvements that will facilitate and sustain the support people need.

Observation and Assessment tool

The **Foundations of Good Support - Observation and Assessment Tool** is now available on the United Response Web page
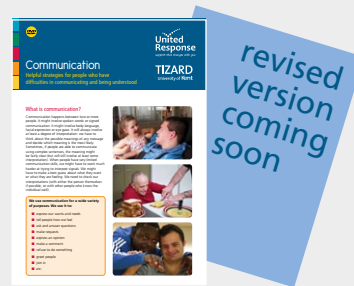
https://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/foundations-of-good-support

Foundations of Good Support Resources

Structure
https://bit.ly/2TgysqN

Communication
https://bit.ly/2RJ1EKa

Support for Engagement
http://bit.ly/PDTActiveSupport

Positive Approaches to Behaviour that Challenges
https://bit.ly/2sLjHjQ

Support for Relationships
https://bit.ly/2T9fZfC
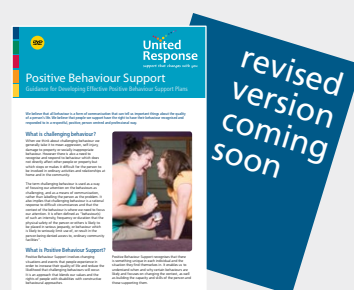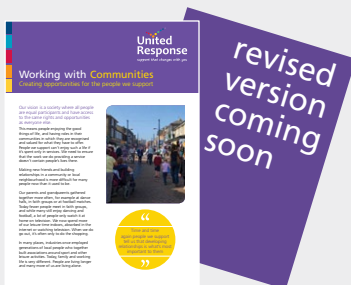
Aspirations
Coming soon
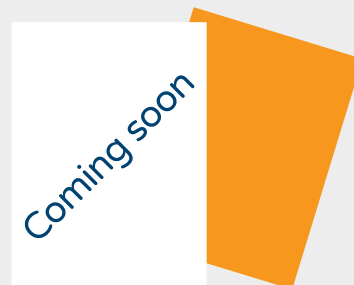
Promoting Person Centred Support and Positive Outcomes DVD
http://bit.ly/PDTDVD

You can find our
Practice Development Team
on YouTube
http://bit.ly/PDTYouTube

You can find videos illustrating
the Foundations of Good Support
on YouTube
http://bit.ly/PDTFoundationsYouTube