



What is a personal assistant in social care?

A personal assistant (sometimes called a PA or a support worker) is employed by people who need social care, either because of their age or disability, to enable them to live as independently as possible.

Personal assistants carry out a wide range of tasks as required by the employer, including support with things such as washing and getting dressed, cooking, feeding, and supporting people to go out and about so they have greater independence and the ability to live their life more fully.

The key skills needed for being a PA are the ability to listen, be flexible and a willingness to learn and respond.

Who employs a personal assistant?

A PA is usually employed by people who are directing their own care through a direct payment or individual budgets from the local authority, or are funding their own support. This is about a person having control over their own life, by employing their own staff and organising their own services. These types of employers are often referred to as 'individual employers'.

Personal assistants can be employed directly by one employer, can work for a number of different people or could be self employed.

Individual employers have employer's liability insurance and where necessary are registered with HMRC. Individual employers should also offer the necessary training to do the duties required.

What does the role of a personal assistant involve?

The job can be very flexible, offering part-time and full time work on different days and at different times. Some people become a personal assistant part time whilst also working in an entirely different job.

The role is suitable for people from all walks of life, from someone in college who may only want to work evening or weekends, to someone who is retired and may only want a few hours a week.

Duties can include:

- Personal care, including assistance with bodily functions such as feeding, bathing, and toileting if required; taking food, refreshment and medication; mobility; bed making; monitoring and recording temperature, pulse, respiration etc.
- Healthcare tasks such as dressings, catheter management, administration of medication.
- Support to assist with living independently as far as possible, including assistance as necessary with meal preparation, cooking, cleaning and domestic activities, shopping, social and leisure activities, attending appointments, administration and paperwork, assisting with pets and gardening, generally assisting with overall comfort and well being; providing interest and activities to stimulate and engage.
- Supporting the person while at work.
- Helping to look after children and pets.
- Supporting the person in their chosen activities such as shopping, meeting friends, going on holiday or gaining education.

What are the qualities that employers value in their personal assistant?

- Flexibility – support the employer the way they want to be supported.
- Boundaries – understand the professional and personal boundaries.
- Adaptability – adapt to the context and circumstances of the employer.
- Motivation and self esteem – are important qualities to an employer but also very individual.
- Trust – very important quality that is central and underpins other areas about the PA.
- Privacy – the ability to keep things private and keep to ground rules about privacy.
- Culture - this relates to the life style of the individual and knowing how someone likes something done.
- Values and attitudes – employers value PAs who understand how to work on the basis of equality with their employer.