

Enhancing Independence: A Consumer's Guide to Personal Assistance Services



ENHANCING INDEPENDENCE: A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES (PAS)

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Welcome

The Missouri Model Spinal Cord Injury System would like to welcome you to **your** Personal Assistance Services (PAS) program. To highlight the importance of this program we would like to take the time to share with you some history behind the personal assistance services program, the impact it has made on the lives of individuals with disabilities, and the significance it will make in yours.

History

Changes in attitudes and legislation over the past several decades have made a huge impact on combating discrimination and on fostering the current independent living view and philosophy. These changes have played an important role in the lives of individuals with disabilities.

The World War II era played an important role in developing the independent living philosophy. Paralyzed Veterans of America came into existence right after World War II, giving voice to a group of individuals with disabilities, and providing an arena for their voices and concerns to be heard.

The polio epidemic in the 1950's also resulted in new ways for people with disabilities to communicate with one another, planting early seeds for the later independent living movement. Gini Laurie's *Rehabilitation Gazette* provided a forum for different people with polio from around the country to communicate with each other.

One of those individuals with polio was Ed Roberts. Ed Roberts is known as the "father of independence," a well-earned, well-deserved title. Roberts contracted polio at the age of 14, and experienced discrimination first-hand when he was later denied access to the University of California at Berkeley. He viewed discrimination as dehumanizing and became determined to combat it. In a quest to give individuals with disabilities control over their own lives, Roberts and several others, including John Hessler, became civil rights activists. Roberts and this group of individuals challenged the university's denial of his enrollment and won in 1962. This was a major step forward for individuals with disabilities. Roberts and his peers also instituted a "Disabled Students" program on the Berkeley campus – the first of its kind.



The independent living movement took another step forward in Berkeley in 1971. At that time, Roberts and Hessler were living in a medical facility while attending school. They felt that this wasn't the appropriate place for them to live and wanted instead to live within the community while attending school. As a result, Roberts and an organized group of individuals with disabilities petitioned for and received funding for a new project. In 1972, the Berkeley Center for Independent Living (CIL) was started. It was the first consumer-controlled Center for Independent Living. There are now more than 400 centers in the nation, which contain many of the same elements as that first Berkeley Center. Roberts continued to fight for independence and civil rights for individuals with disabilities throughout his life.

In 1973 the Rehabilitation Act was passed, which prohibits discrimination in federal programs and services (and all other programs or services that receive federal funding). Section 504 of this Rehabilitation Act was, in the 1970's, considered our civil rights legislation. Although it lacked the enforcement of later legislation, it still offered new ways of thinking and hope for the removal of barriers to independence.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990, it helped tear down many more walls of discrimination on the basis of disability. This law was enacted to remove barriers to employment, transportation, telecommunications, public accommodations, and – most important – the right to live in the least restrictive environment possible. Justin Dart played a major role in the development of this legislation. With much drive and resolve, he organized and led other individuals with disabilities on a seven-year quest to get this legislation introduced and passed into law. Dart was known as the “father of the ADA,” and never gave up in the fight for equality and justice. One of Dart's most famous quotes was: “fight for your rights as if your life depended on it, because it does.” Dart died in June of 2002 but his flame and inspiration will live on through the ADA.

For more information on the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact your local center for independent living or the wide array of information on the Internet regarding the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



Where and How to Locate an Assistant

Now that you have been approved for the Personal Assistance Services program, one of the most common questions is: **“Where do I locate an assistant?”**

Each Independent Living Center keeps a list of available assistants. These assistants are not employees of the center for independent living, but individuals who want to provide assistance to those with disabilities. Therefore, the list of assistants may or may not include specifically what you are looking for. It is your responsibility to hire the best assistant to meet your own personal needs.

You will also want to advertise for the type of personal assistant you are looking for. There are some places in the community that consumers find more useful for advertising. Placing ads in these areas should help you gain more interested and appropriate applicants for your position. Here are a few suggestions gathered from other consumers:

- Employment Security
- Chamber of Commerce
- College bulletin boards
- Churches
- Guidance counselors at high schools
- Junior colleges
- Vocational schools
- Senior centers (Yes, believe it! Many senior citizens are looking for work to supplement their income. Assistant work also provides meaning and activity for their lives.).

Once you have located some areas in which to advertise, you will need to create an ad that will attract potential assistants. The following pages will show you how to write an effective ad, including samples of effective and non-effective ads. Finding the perfect employee is a difficult process, but an effective and well-placed ad can assist you in locating an appropriate employee who is suitable to your specific needs.



How to Write an Effective Advertisement

Part 1: Heading

In writing an ad, your first objective is to attract the eyes of the prospective assistant(s). For example, you should highlight the most important or attractive points. For example:

“Bi-weekly salary, flexible schedule, free furnished room (if you choose a live-in assistant)”

Watch the wording of your heading carefully. Sometimes when you advertise for a “home health aide or caregiver” you may find that some applicants are more prepared to take care of you as a patient than to work with you in an employer-employee relationship.

Part 2: Further interest

Your next line should reinforce your heading with further interest.

Part 3: Description of duties

The third part of the ad should be a brief but fair **description of duties**.

Do not “sugarcoat” this – you only want applicants who are mature, serious, and ready and able to provide the services you desire.

The ad should also include the days of the week, whether it is full- or part-time, and whether you prefer a live-in assistant. A brief description of the duties expected, sex of the person with the disability, and nonsmoker if required, as well as any other important things to you, such as “must like animals.” Providing this information up front will cut down on the number of inappropriate phone calls you will receive if the interested assistant already knows what you are looking for.

Part 4: Additional information

You can include **salary, phone number, and time to call**. If you attend school or have any other special hobbies or interests that you may need



assistance with, such as artwork or ceramics, you may want to word your ad differently. Remember to make your ad specific to your needs. Because of discrimination laws you cannot ask height, weight, preference of sex, age, or race. You may however ask if they are able to do lifting.



Benita Nease is shown providing personal assistant services to Devron Yoakum while he was a student at the University of Missouri-Columbia.



Examples of Advertisements

Example ad # 1

Dependable person to assist male with a disability call 555-5555

Although this ad would be the least expensive to run in the newspaper, be prepared for a lot of calls and questions you will be asked. There is a lot missing from this ad. Additional information could help you avoid a lot of unnecessary calls. For example, have you ever sold a vehicle? Just listing the price avoids a lot of calls and saves you time. The above ad needs to give more detailed information.

Example ad # 2

Room and Board

Job working for an employed man with a disability. Ample time off during the day. Weekends off. Need assistance with dressing and bathing. Lifting required. Need breakfast prepared and lunch made to take to work. Driving and references required. \$7.50 an hour plus room and board.

Take the time to look at the difference between these two ads. The second ad will be more costly, but it gets right to the point. It clearly describes what is needed and expected. Using this ad, you can be sure that only interested assistants will apply.

Example ad # 3

Disabled person seeks part-time assistant during morning and evenings for assistance with daily living activities. Experience not necessary. Training will be provided. Contact John Smith at 555-555-5555 between 6 and 8 p.m.

Be prepared to explain in detail what is meant by “activities of daily living.” Many assistants may not understand this term. It would be helpful to write out on a piece of paper the **exact** job duties that you will be requiring from the assistant. Having your job description written out is a great way to be prepared for those phone calls you will be getting after you place your ad or flyer.



Example ad # 4

Need to supplement your income? Enjoy working one-on-one with people? Part-time position opening up in Stover. Flexible hours working with a disabled employer in reaching independent living goals. Experience not necessary, training provided. Call John Smith at 555-555-5555.

This ad provides a catchy opening that may catch the interested eyes of applicants. However, you may again need to explain what you mean by “independent living goals” and what exactly is expected.

Example ad # 5

Single, white, male needs assistance. Call Rick at 555-555-5555.

This is **not** an example of an effective ad. You can probably expect all kinds of calls to respond to this ad. When compared to the different examples above, you can see how much information it lacks.

Additional points

Start you ad on Monday – not near a holiday!

If you want to differentiate yourself from the young/old you should note that in the ad.

Note any specific preferences you feel strongly about, such as:

- Living close to the workplace
- Needing dependable transportation





Personal assistant trainer Benita Nease (left) supervises as Jackie Gluesenkamp demonstrates transfer techniques by moving her sister Angie from a wheelchair to a chair.

Telephone Interview

The phone is ringing and everyone is interested.

What do you say to them?

The phone interview is primarily designed to screen out the inappropriate candidates so that you can spend more time interviewing the people who are more likely to be appropriate for the position. As a general practice, it is not a good idea to hire someone over the phone.

Be prepared!

1. Start by outlining the **proposed duties**.
 - a. Be clear if duties involve bowel and bladder programs
 - b. Always discuss all of the job duties up front and do not sugarcoat them
 - c. Hours of duties

Once you have described the job to the prospective employee find out if they are still interested. If so, continue your conversation.

2. Discuss **additional factors**
 - a. Time off
 - b. Benefits
 - c. Schedule
 - d. Pay
 - e. Personal likes and dislikes of the employee
3. Provide a short **description of yourself**



- a. Your likes and dislikes
- b. Your activities
- c. Your lifestyle

After you have covered all this, and your applicant is still interested, you may have found a potentially appropriate candidate for your position.

Important qualities and red flags

1. Does the applicant sound really interested? Or does he/she seem willing to just put up with the job?
2. Does the applicant sound like he/she wants to take care of someone? Or does he/she sound like someone who is willing to work for you?
3. Do you feel that you would be in charge of the situation?

Checkpoint

If the interview is still going well, you may want to continue your conversation to more detailed information. Additional questions are provided below:

Sample Interview Questions

1. Have you had experience in assistant work before?
2. Have you had experience in working with individuals with disabilities?
3. What are the reasons you want the job?
4. What are your best qualities?
5. What are your worst qualities?
6. Tell me about your employment history.
7. What are your personal likes/dislikes?



8. What is your opinion of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes?
9. Who are your references?
10. Do you mind if I check them?
11. Can you cook?
12. Do you have transportation?
13. Can you do heavy lifting? Will you be able to lift a wheelchair in/out of a car?
14. Are you uncomfortable with bowel or bladder care?
15. Is there anything about this job that will make you feel uncomfortable?
16. Do cats/dogs/etc., bother you?
17. Does music bother you?

Face-to-Face Interviews

The face-to-face interview is the first chance to get to know the person who may potentially become your personal care assistant. Neither of you will know exactly what to expect before this meeting, so don't be surprised if you feel a bit nervous. You will be evaluating one another to see whether this would be a good match for both of you.

1. To ease the tension, start by **thanking** the individual for coming to the interview.
2. Next, ask the applicant to **tell you a little bit about him/herself**. Listen in detail, pay close attention to red flags or potential problems.
3. After hearing about the applicant, **ask questions** that require a more detailed answer than a simple yes or no. (You may want to use the sample interview questions above.)



4. Describe in detail all the **job duties** that will be involved. It is essential that your job description be well-defined and detailed.

Unclear job descriptions can create many problems later. For example, a man with a spinal cord injury described several problems after hiring assistants. During his interview, the consumer stated to the applicant that he needed to be simply “thrown in his chair in the morning and thrown in bed at night.” The reality was he needed repositioning during the night, three meals a day cooked for him, laundry twice a week, cleaning twice a week, shopping once a week, banking once a week, computer set-up, and so on.... In addition if he had a skin breakdown, he would need additional care for that and would require more time in bed and more frequent repositioning. He did not provide this information to applicants during any of the interviews, but later he wondered why those he hired quit so abruptly! In this case, it is not the assistants who are to blame, but the interview.

5. Does the individual have dependable transportation? This is very important because it will greatly enhance the ability of the person to arrive on time.
6. Find out if the applicant has other responsibilities such as school, another job, etc.
7. If you have job tasks that may make the person feel uncomfortable, please explain them in detail. Find out whether the applicant would be comfortable with these duties. (Examples could include positioning for sexual relations with your partner, body massages, etc.)

Additional points to consider

Do not rush the interview. Take all the time you need to get to know the applicant and to determine whether he/she is an appropriate candidate for your position. This is a big decision for both of you, so think carefully about it.

Do not hire the applicant immediately after the interview. Let the person believe you have other interested assistants and that you will be in contact later after making your final decision. Hiring someone on the spot sometimes makes the job seem less desirable and may allow assistants to



assume you are desperate. This can create complications later on in the employment relationship.

Don't assume that the individual understands all of your job descriptions. Go over your list of duties **again** so both of you have a clear understanding. Have the person explain to you his/her understanding of what you want. This will allow you to check for any misunderstandings.

If the person is unacceptable to you, (such as having bad grooming habits, personality conflicts, etc.), ask a few brief questions and simply say that you are interviewing others and you will get back with them. If your applicant does not appear to be someone you are going to hire, cut the interview short. This will save time and effort for both of you.

Sometimes a single question can eliminate a prospect. Maybe you failed to mention that you have a pet python, or you don't hire smokers. Maybe the assistant failed to mention to you that he/she has a bad back. If you both agree this job position is inappropriate, apologize for the inconvenience and thank them for coming.

Trust your instincts! Trust your instincts! Trust your instincts! Pay attention to subtle cues, and be aware of your own reactions to the person. Watch for the following pieces of information:

- Is the assistant looking at you when you are talking to them?
- Is the assistant cutting you off before you complete your sentence?
- Is his/her first question: "How much does it pay?"
- Does the assistant claim to already know how to do everything? Remember this is impossible, because the job is individualized to meet your specific needs. As one consumer told all his new assistants, "you are about to learn brand new skills for the first time." Every individual has his/her own specific needs. This makes each job unique.



Know your likes and dislikes in other people. Finding trusting and dependable assistance requires knowing yourself and letting others know what you like. Whom do you like to be around and why?

Learn to assess personality. Pay attention to how people express themselves and how people look, talk, and act. Notice if they are well groomed and confident. Did the conversation flow smoothly? Do you feel comfortable around this person? Do you want to spend a great deal of time with the person?

Who's the Boss?

Now that you have chosen your personal assistant, you will need to consider how to be an effective employer. Your new working relationship will be made up of two very different people. Each of you will have preferences for how things are done. Each of you will have different ways of doing things. To avoid later problems, it will be best to deal with these differences from the beginning.

For each new task, be very clear from the beginning how you would like it done. Otherwise, the assistant will not be aware of your preferences. For example, assistants may tend to do your laundry the way they do their own. If you have certain preferences, be specific in how you would like your laundry done. This should be the case in all tasks – even the most basic such as dishes, food preparation, and housecleaning.

Communicating clearly with your assistant is essential. This will help him/her be effective in the job, and as a result you will be more pleased with the job that is done. Communication is critical in making your employer/employee relationship work. If things aren't going well, you will need to discuss them as they develop. The longer you avoid discussing it, the harder and more difficult it becomes. (Communication is covered in more detail later).

Another important thing to consider at the beginning of your working relationship is **respect**. Mutual respect is essential in making your relationship successful and in helping your assistant feel like a valued employee. You will also earn more respect from your employee if you actively show him/her respect and appreciation. Have an “attitude with gratitude” for assistants who are dependable, trustworthy and have a real willingness to assist you.



Keep in mind that you should not treat assistants as servants. It is important for both of you that you are doing everything possible for yourself and utilizing the assistant for the things you cannot do. This will ensure that you are making the most of your time and theirs. Also, try to balance the workload, especially if you have more than one assistant.

Throughout your working relationship, remember that you are an employer, running a small business. Your assistant can be your employee and your friend; however, you must be able to balance the difference.

A successful employer/employee relationship depends upon the actions and attitudes of both individuals. Below are some attitudes and actions described by assistants who have developed good working relationships with their consumers:

Assistant's part:	Consumer's part:
<p>To recognize each individual as a human being, not as a patient or case number</p> <p>To acknowledge the consumer's strengths and needs</p> <p>To view the consumer without judgment or pity</p> <p>To respect the consumer's personal space and personal property</p> <p>To remain fully available, both physically and mentally during working hours</p>	<p>To recognize the assistant as a human being, not a servant</p> <p>To acknowledge the assistant's strengths and needs</p> <p>To view the assistant without judgment</p> <p>To respect the assistant's personal life, both by asking questions and knowing when not to</p> <p>To express appreciation for the assistant's work</p>

Training and Managing

No one is better qualified to run a Personal Assistance Services system than the consumer of those services-----**YOU!**

Below are some suggestions from consumers who use Personal Care Assistants:

Prevention of bad work habits is easier than correcting them. Try to consistently enforce the little things in the beginning, especially things that matter to you.

It can be beneficial if you can hire more than one assistant and separate the duties instead of having one assistant do all the work. By having more than one assistant, each assistant is solely responsible for their job duties and not the duties of others. This also helps reduce conflict between the assistants, which will make your life simpler.

Think about the possibility of a two- or three-week “trial period” during which either the consumer or assistant may decline to work without a reason.

Organize your home so that there is a particular place for everything that is used frequently. This will make the working environment much more accessible to the assistant.

Color-coding can help assistants learn locations of important items. For example, you could place colored labels on drawers (such as using one color for the drawer that holds the underpads, catheters, etc., and another color for the drawer that holds the deodorant, antibiotic ointment, medications etc.). This system can make it a lot easier for the assistant to learn where things are kept.

It is imperative to have a back up assistant in place for unexpected situations (such as when the assistant is sick or employment is terminated).

Be flexible and willing to compromise, but always remain in control of the situation.

Offer a pleasant working environment for your assistant.



Know what you want, and how you want your household or business to run and be organized. Communicate this clearly to your assistant.

Make sure the time sheets are filled out correctly and mailed on time so that your assistant will be paid on time.

Give your assistants as much positive feedback as possible on their job performance. Feedback and praise is motivating, demonstrates respect and appreciation, and boosts morale. Do not take lightly the efforts of your assistants.

Be open to suggestions, but be firm and honest about your ultimate preferences and decisions.

Communicate! Your life depends on it!

Be sure that your personal care assistant understands that you are not sick – you are an independent individual, with a disability, who requires assistance.

When you are able to manage your assistants effectively, you are creating a rich and rewarding working relationship.

Effective Work Schedule

In the beginning of the working relationship, it is best to have a clear work schedule. The days of the week need to be posted, along with the duties that need to be completed each day and the time of day for completion (if appropriate). Developing a structured schedule is an example of effectively communicating your expectations to the assistant. The assistant will appreciate knowing what is expected of them, and what you (the consumer) prefer to have completed on which day. A clearly outlined schedule will also allow your assistant to work more independently.

Making a schedule will help you to evaluate the assistant's performance. It will allow you to ensure that your assistant is following the schedule and that the work is being completed as listed. If your duties are being completed on time and the work is to your satisfaction, provide feedback and express your gratitude.



Assertive Communication

Developing assertive communication skills will help you to be a more effective employer. Assertive communicators express thoughts and feelings in an honest, straightforward fashion that shows respect for the other person without violating the rights of others. Using assertive communication will help you to get your needs met without having to dominate, humiliate or manipulate your assistant to do so.

If you communicate in an aggressive way, you might get your needs met that day, but you may eventually lose your employees. On the other hand, if you communicate in a passive way, you relinquish your decision to your assistant. In the end, this will make you unhappy as you begin to lose control over your own decisions. **Assertive communication** will allow you to remain in control, to get your needs met in the situation, and to earn the respect of your assistant.

Being assertive takes practice and is not a skill you can develop overnight. Practicing the characteristics and skills listed below will help you become a more assertive communicator.

Characteristics of the Assertive Communicator:

Open and willing to take risks.

Actively engages in meeting others' needs.

Capable of expressing both positive and negative feelings and opinions.

Sensitive to the feelings and rights of others.

Examples of Assertive Behavior:

Addressing a problem situation while it is in progress, rather than waiting until later.

Objecting to specific behavior that infringes on the rights of others.

Being brief and to the point.



Avoiding bringing up the past.

Never apologizing for asserting rights.

Telling people how their behavior affects others.

Being friendly, firm, and initially, if necessary, asserting more authority.

Avoiding threats and aggressive behavior.

Making your needs known to others in a direct, non-threatening manner.

Talking to others with respect.

Assertive individuals do not swear. They simply keep reinforcing what they need and want.

Starting sentences with “I:”

- I need you to...
- I would like to...
- I feel this is what is right for me.
- I would appreciate your help with...
- I don't feel so well today, so don't take it personally.

Again, assertiveness skills enable one to stand up effectively for one's own dignity, respect and courtesy without violating the rights of others, while at the same time helping others to recognize and better obtain their rights.



Practice writing these skills in the lines provided below:

Assertive body behaviors

Assertive vocal behaviors



The Aggressive Model

As described above, aggressive communication can undermine your relationships with others, and does not allow you to get your needs met respectfully. It is best to avoid this type of communication when interacting with others and especially when communicating with your employees.

“Civilized society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through this primary hostility of men towards one another....”.

----- Sigmund Freud

Aggressive Communication

People who communicate aggressively show that they don't care about how others perceive them and that they don't care about the needs or feelings of others. This type of behavior is perpetuated because, for the most part, it works in the short run. Other people are hesitant to “take on” the aggressive person because it's so unpleasant.

Aggressive Behavior Cues

Using a loud, blustering voice

Swearing or using abusive language

Violating other people's personal space

Using domination, humiliation, or manipulation to get something

A lack of concern for the feelings of others

Preferring to use fear and intimidation



Practice writing these skills in the lines provided below:

Aggressive body behaviors

Aggressive Vocal Behaviors



The Passive Model

Passive communication can also create problems in your relationships with others and in your working relationship with your personal assistant. If you are not able to assertively communicate your needs, you will give your assistants the power to make decisions for you. This will result in dissatisfaction and unhappiness. It is also best to avoid this type of communication when interacting with your assistant.

“Behavior is a mirror in which every one displays his image.”

----- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Passive Communication

Passive people communicate indirectly and do not say what they want. They expect others to figure out what they need and give it to them. When they don't get what they want, they “pout” or become passive-aggressive. When people communicate passively, they demonstrate that they are very concerned about how others see them. This style of communication shows that it is very important to the person that everyone likes him/her. This causes the individual to behave in self-sacrificing ways, but later to resent the person for whom they made the sacrifice. This behavior perpetuates a negative cycle.

Passive Behavior Cues

Hoping that others will give them what they want or need without directly communicating those needs

Being concerned about how others judge them and their actions

Needing to be liked



Practice writing these skills in the lines provided below:

Passive body behaviors

Passive vocal behaviors



Active Listening

Active listening is another communication skill that can help avoid miscommunication and show respect for the other person's thoughts and ideas.

The following are two examples of different approaches to the same problem. Can you identify which one involves good listening skills?

Example #1

Assistant: "John, I can't cook this roast today. The refrigerator has to be cleaned, the floor washed and you need a bath."

Consumer: "Well, I've got to eat. Besides, the meat will spoil if you don't cook it today."

Assistant: "Look, you know the bus was late today. It wasn't my fault."

Consumer: "Can't you stay over an extra hour? I can't do all this myself. Besides, this is your job. You're getting paid, not me!"

Assistant: "That's right, I don't know how all that money slipped my mind. Sure, I'll do everything, but I'm not staying over and don't blame me if the roast gets burnt."

Example #2

Assistant: "John, I can't cook this roast today, the refrigerator has to be cleaned, the floor washed and you need a bath!"

Consumer: "Sounds like you're pretty upset. Do you feel rushed today?"

Assistant: "I sure do! The bus was late today. I guess I haven't had a chance to settle down. There is so much to do."

Consumer: "The bus really put you behind schedule. I guess this isn't your day. Why don't you sit down for a moment and relax a bit."



Assistant: “Thank you, maybe that’s what I need. I guess I was about to blow up. If I put the roast in now, it can cook while I am helping you with your bath. Could the refrigerator wait till tomorrow?”

Consumer: “Sure.”

As you can see from these two examples, active listening allows you to better understand a situation and the other person’s perspective. This skill will help prevent conflict and enhance your working relationship. Active listening will also demonstrate to your assistant that you value them enough to take the time to listen to their concerns.

Conflict Resolution

Resolving conflicts effectively is another important skill to maintain within the employer/employee relationship. Identifying and addressing problems as early as possible will help prevent further problems and will enhance your working relationship.

The following steps and points can be useful in handling potential conflict:

Tell the other person clearly what you need, want, or feel. Make sure that you are understood by the other person.

Ask the other person what he or she needs, wants or feels. Make a special effort to understand him/her, repeat what you have heard to ensure that you understood correctly.

If a conflict arises, **discuss it immediately**. Don’t sit on it until resentment builds and you blow up. It is easier to deal with minor irritations than a major crisis.

Set aside a time to discuss and resolve the conflict. Schedule it so that both you and the assistant can calm down and think over the problem.

First, you should focus on clearly **identifying the problem**. One way to do this is to have each person write down what he/she feels the problem is. Then, compare notes and look at the similarities and differences.



Next, each person should be allowed to **explain his/her position**, thoughts, feelings, etc.

After each person has a chance to explain, the other person then **summarizes** the first person's position. Use listening skills and feedback to reach an understanding.

Problem solving techniques may be helpful to both in finding a solution to maintain a good working relationship.

Emergency Back-up

Regardless of how dependable your personal assistant is, there will be times when an emergency arises and he/she will have to miss work without much notice. By planning ahead you will be prepared for those unexpected times. Also, if you should have to terminate a personal assistant without notice, or if your personal assistant quits without notice, you will need to be prepared.

It is important to have on hand a **list of names and phone numbers** of people who might be willing to work for you on a temporary basis. This list could include:

Qualified people you have interviewed and not hired

Family members

Friends

Personal assistants who have worked for you before. If you have had a good assistant in the past and they have left to move on to school, or another job, consider staying in touch with them. Good ways to keep in touch from time to time include sending birthday cards, greeting cards, or another friendly notes to show your appreciation. If they are available, these individuals will most likely work as an emergency back up for you.

Think about your schedule and what kind of assistance you need for each different time period (morning, lunch, bowel program, evening, etc.). Decide what periods and services are most important.



If the back up is someone you do not know, give that person a detailed description of the duties he/she will be performing. Be as specific as possible so that the person can make decisions more quickly and will be less likely to misunderstand the situation.

With an emergency back-up assistant, you may want to have your basic needs met first. This is the most important! Some of the non-essential activities may have to wait, or you may be able to find an acquaintance who is willing to help you out in those situations.

Money can be an important factor when you're trying to locate an emergency personal assistant. Realizing that a back-up has to disrupt his/her normal routine, keeping extra money put aside for such emergencies will help to ensure finding and keeping good back-up support.

Scenarios for Terminating a Personal Assistant

Unfortunately, a time may come when you need to consider terminating a personal assistant. It is important to plan carefully for this situation, and to put a lot of thought into how you approach it.

Remember to always have a back-up assistant in place at all times to smooth the transition.

Weekly or bi-weekly performance evaluations are also a good idea. This will allow both you and the assistant to be aware of any potential problems and to address them as they arise and before they get worse.

Below are potential scenarios that could arise between you and your personal assistant. Please read them and consider how you would respond in each case, and what the consequences might be.

Scenario #1

Consumer: “This is the third time you have been late this week. Last week you were late two times. We discussed the importance of punctuality with this job, and what would happen if you were more than 15 minutes late when it was not an emergency. I have a job and I need you to get me there on time. Since you are not



able to do this and this is your second warning, I am giving you two weeks notice of termination.”

Points to Consider: Remember when you give too much notice (in this case 2 weeks) you could be at risk for negative outcomes as a result of your assistant’s anger. For example, you could be at risk for possible abuse, money theft, and other acts of violent behavior. If the assistant was informed of the consequences ahead of time, it is best to let them go immediately. This is why regular performance evaluations and having a back-up assistant are important.

Personal Assistant: “I told you last week that I was having car problems and that I do not like to ride the bus, so I have to wait to get a ride from my neighbor when she gets home from work. I really need this job, so please don’t fire me.”

Points to Consider: If the assistant’s performance is good in every other way, you might consider temporary termination until he/she gets the car fixed. Or, you could consider using them for back-up until the transportation problem is worked out. Your specific needs may not allow you to have an assistant who is consistently late. If you allow the situation to continue without consequences, the assistant may not feel that fixing the car is a priority, and late arrivals may be ongoing.

Scenario #2

Consumer: “In our work agreement, we discussed the use of the phone during your scheduled work time. It is simply impossible for you to talk on the phone and complete all your job duties in the amount of time scheduled. At the end of your schedule many tasks remain unfinished. We have had a disagreement over this before, and we discussed how this needed to change. Since this behavior hasn’t changed, I have no other choice than to dismiss you.

Points to Consider: If your major concern is the use of the phone during working hours, consider discussing allowing the assistant to use the phone after working hours. Can you think of other ideas or points?

Personal Assistant: “I have had so many things to take care of since the start of the semester, that the only time I really have access to a phone is when I am working here.”

Points to Consider: Same as above.



Scenario #2

Consumer: “I noticed the other day that two checks were missing from my checkbook. As my Personal Assistant you have access to my checking account to cover various household expenses. I called the bank to ask about these two checks. They were written at places I never shop. The bank also said the checks were signed by you. What can you tell me about this?”

Personal Assistant: “I was running a little short of cash and I didn’t think you would mind if I paid the money back when I got paid.”

Points to Consider: Handle the current situation as you see fit (discussion, termination, warning, etc). In this case as employer, you should assume partial responsibility because you allowed the assistant to use the checkbook without monitoring. In the future, it would be wise to monitor the use of the checkbook closely. For example, request to see every check that is written. Keep the checkbook in your possession at all times unless you authorize the writing of a specific check. Or, if the assistant is purchasing items independently, ask for receipts when he/she returns.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How soon will my assistant get his/her first paycheck?

Your assistant will be paid the first payroll period following your approval to the Personal Assistance Services program. Before payment, all the appropriate paperwork and the assistant background checks need to be turned in to the Independent Living Resource Center.

2. I usually get my check on Friday or Saturday and today is Monday. Where is my assistant’s paycheck?

Inform your assistant that payday is actually on Monday.

3. I am going to hire my cousin as my assistant. Does she need the background check done?



Yes, she does. Only immediate family members (including mother, father, brother, or sister) are excluded.

4. Can my assistant begin to work for me while the background check is still being completed?

Yes; however, the assistant will not receive a paycheck until the Independent Living Resource Center has a copy of the results notification letter.

5. Will the Family Care Registry send the Independent Living Resource Center the results notification letter?

No. It is the responsibility of the consumer/employer to mail/bring a copy of the letter to the Independent Living Resource Center. Also remember, when mailing the information for the background check, use the address on the back of the form. **Do not** mail this information to the center.

6. Since it is easier for me to fax my time sheets, may I do that?

No. The original time sheets are needed for auditing purposes. On rare occasions you **MAY** be allowed to fax them, but this will require approval from the Independent Living Resource Center.

7. I worked my assistant more than I should have this month. Can I use some hours from next month to pay him/her?

No. You are allotted a specific number of hours each month, and you may not use more than that amount.

8. Should I allow my assistant to keep the payroll sheets or should I keep them?

You are required to keep them. Your time sheets become a legal document once you sign them and care must be taken to ensure that they are not edited once you have signed them. Treat them as if you were financially responsible for them.



Hints for Success

Do not take the efforts of your assistant lightly.

Express your appreciation frequently.

Have an “attitude with gratitude.”

“Please” and “Thank You” go a long way.

To get respect, you have to give respect.

Make sure you turn in your time sheets on time.

Ensure that the assistant leaves the job each day on time.

Remember your assistant’s birthday.

Give frequent feedback on the assistant’s job performance.

Offer flexibility.

Make expectations very clear and understandable.

Address problems as they arise, rather than allowing them to build up and become larger problems.

Be patient and expect mistakes rather than perfection.

Answer questions clearly and patiently so that tasks can be done correctly.

Remember that listening is the most important part of good communication; good employers listen to their employees.

Actively encourage your assistant to be everything he/she can be.

Be ready to start work when your assistant arrives.

Be home when your assistant is scheduled to work for you.



If you live with your parents, remember your parents are not their employer - **you** are.

Do not allow your spouse or parents to interfere with job duties. If you need to discuss a situation, be assertive. Remember you are the employer, and will need to discuss the situation - not your spouse or parents.

Think of ways to show your appreciation for your assistant's work. For example, if you have good computer skills, and he/she is in school, perhaps you could help with term papers, research papers, etc.

- Find out his/her favorite magazine and purchase it once in a while, if possible.
- If you have a dollar movie theater in your area, put a ticket or two in an envelope for him/her.
- Give him/her a flower or vegetable you grew.
- Find out his/her hobbies and contribute in some way as a surprise.
- If you can give a small gas or fast-food gift certificate, do so once in a while.

These suggestions cost little, but go a long way. Use them to show your appreciation, especially if you have an assistant who is dependable, trustworthy, and hardworking.



Centers for Independent Living in Missouri

Access II Independent Living Center

611 W. Johnson

Gallatin, MO 64640

Debbie Hawman, Executive Director

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Email: access@accessii.org

Web site: <http://www.accessii.org/>

Counties: Caldwell, Carroll, Davis, Grundy, Harrison, Livingston, Mercer, Ray

Bootheel Area Independent Living Services

1111 Rear Independence, Suite A & B

PO Box 326

Kennett, MO 63857

Tim Shaw, Executive Director

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Web site: <http://www.bails.org/>

Email: tshaw@bails.org

Counties: Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Stoddard

Delta Center for Independent Living

Weldon Springs Professional Building

5933 Highway 94 South, Suite 107

St. Charles, MO 63304

Nancy Murphy, Executive Director

Voice/TTY: (636) 926-8761; Fax: (636) 447-0341

Web site: <http://www.dcil.org/>

Email: dcilpas@accessus.net or nancymurphy@dcil.org

Counties: St. Charles, Lincoln, Warren

Disabled Citizen Alliance for Independence

PO Box 675

Viburnum, MO 65566

Rich Blakley, Executive Director

Voice: (573) 244-5402; TTY: (573) 244-3315; Fax: (573) 244-5609

Web site: <http://www.viburnum.net/dcai/>

Email: blake@misn.com

Counties: Iron, Crawford, Dent, Reynolds, Washington



Disability Resource Association

420-B South Truman Blvd.

Crystal City, MO 63019

Craig Henning, Executive Director

Voice: (636) 931-7696; TTY: (636) 937-9016; Fax: (636) 937-9019

Web site: <http://www.disabilityresourceassociation.org/>Email: dra@disabilityresourceassociation.org

Counties: Jefferson

Independent Living Center of Southeast MO

511 Cedar St.

Poplar Bluff, MO 63901

Bruce Lynch, Executive Director

Voice/TTY: (573) 686-2333; Fax: (573) 686-0733; Toll-free: 1-888-890-2333

Email: ilc@semo.netWeb Site: <http://www.ilcsm.org/>

Counties: Butler, Carter, Ripley, Wayne

Independent Living Resource Center

3620 W. Truman Blvd., Suite-D

Jefferson City, MO 65109-6125

Stephanie Cox, Executive Director

Voice: (573) 556-0400; TTY: (573) 634-3876; Fax: (573) 556-0402; Toll-free: 1-877-627-0400

Web site: <http://www.ilrcjcmo.org/>Email: ilrcjcmo@earthlink.net

Counties: Camden, Cole, Miller, Moniteau, Morgan, Osage

LIFE Center for Independent Living

1109 Sainte Genevieve Ave.

Farmington, MO 63640

Tim Azinger, Executive Director

Voice: (573) 756-4314; TTY: (573) 760-1402; Fax: (573) 756-3507; Toll-free: 1-800-596-7273

Web site: <http://www.lifecilmmo.org/>Email: lifecenter@lifecilmmo.org

Counties: Madison, St. Francois & Ste. Genevieve



Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living - MERIL4420 S. 40th St.

Saint Joseph, MO 64503-2157

Debbie Merritt, Executive Director

Voice: (816) 279-8558; TTY: (816) 279-4943; Fax: (816) 279-1550; Toll-free: 1-800-242-9326

Email: meril@meril.orgWeb Site: <http://www.meril.org/>

Counties: Andrew, Atchison, Buchanan, Clinton, DeKalb, Gentry, Holt, Nodaway, Worth

NorthEast Independent Living Services

109 Virginia, Suite 560

Hannibal, MO 63401

Michelle Green, Executive Director

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Website: <http://www.neilscenter.org/>Email: neils@neilscenter.org

Counties: Clark, Lewis, Marion, Monroe, Pike, Ralls

On My Own, Inc.

111 N. Elm

Nevada, MO 64772

Jack Brock, Executive Director

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Email: onmyown@sofnet.com

Counties: Vernon, Bates, Cedar, St. Clair, Hickory

Ozark Independent Living

109 Aid Ave.

West Plains, MO 65775

Cindy Moore, Executive Director

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Email: ozark@townsqr.comWeb Site: <http://users.townsqr.com/ozark/>

Counties: Douglas, Howell, Oregon, Ozark, Shannon, Texas, Wright



Paraquad, Inc.

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Email: paraquad@paraquad.orgWeb Site: <http://www.paraquad.org/>

Counties: Saint Louis city, Saint Louis County

Rural Advocates for Independent Living

715 South Baltimore

Kirksville, MO 63501

Jack Lambrecht, Executive Director

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Email: ritt@kvmo.netWeb Site: <http://www.nemr.net/~ritt/>

Counties: Adair, Chariton, Knox, Linn, Macon, Putnam, Schuyler, Scotland, Shelby, Sullivan

SEMO Alliance for Disability Independence

121 South Broadview Plaza, Suite 12

Cape Girardeau, MO 63703-5702

Maryann Miki Gudermuth, Executive Director

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Counties: Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Mississippi, Perry, Scott

Services for Independent Living

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Counties: Audrain, Boone, Callaway, Cooper, Howard, Montgomery, Randolph



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Web site: <http://www.swcil.org/>Email: scil@swcil.org

Counties: Christian, Dallas, Greene, Lawrence, Polk, Stone, Taney, Webster

Tri-County Center for Independent Living

1420 Highway 72 East

Rolla, MO 65401

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Counties: Laclede, Phelps, Pulaski

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Counties: Barry, Barton, Dade, Jasper, McDonald, Newton

The Whole Person, Inc.

301 E. Armour Blvd., Suite 430

Kansas City, MO 64111

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Counties: Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte



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