



What Are My Options for Support?

Introduction

Seeking support at home can feel overwhelming. This guide outlines the key options, what to look for, and what to avoid when choosing a support agency or a Personal Assistant (PA).

First Steps

1. Be clear about your needs

Identify the specific tasks you want help with (e.g. personal care, medication, meals, cleaning, social support, specialist care). Write them down and focus on what makes daily life easier.

2. Choose how support is delivered

- Use a **support agency**, or
 - **Employ a Personal Assistant (PA)** directly (often via Direct Payments).
- There is no right choice only what fits your life and priorities.

3. Explore funding and entitlements

Ask about Direct Payments, Carer's Allowance, Attendance Allowance, council support, Blue Badges, equipment, and Occupational Therapy. Many people miss out by not asking.

If Using a Support Agency – What to Check

- **Management:** Visible, approachable, and responsive.
- **Recruitment:** DBS checks, references, proper training, and competency checks.
- **Supervision:** Regular reviews and ongoing training.
- **Continuity:** Consistent staff and clear cover arrangements.
- **Emergencies:** Reliable out-of-hours and on-call support.

Your Rights

- **Dignity and respect:** Support must be delivered in the way *you* choose.
- **Safety and risk:** Any restrictions or equipment must be properly assessed.
- **Right to complain:** Raise concerns without fear—silence allows poor practice.

- **Delegated tasks:** You have the right to know who trained carers and how competence is checked.

Agency vs Personal Assistant (PA)

Agency – Pros: Backup cover, managed recruitment, less paperwork.

Agency – Cons: Less control, rotating staff.

PA – Pros: Full control, continuity, tailored support.

PA – Cons: You manage employment and cover if they're absent.

Support Options in More Detail

- **Live-in care:** Live-in care usually involves support workers assisting in the person's own home, often working in shifts with planned breaks. Costs can typically range from £1,100 to £3,000+ per week depending on the level of care needed. Agencies often manage recruitment, training, compliance, and cover for sickness or holidays, which can reduce the administrative burden compared with directly employing carers. When choosing an agency, consider its reputation, local presence, and experience matching carers to individual needs.
- **Private Personal Assistants:** Private PAs can offer a more personalised and flexible approach. Success often depends on finding the right match and building a trust-based relationship, while keeping clear professional boundaries. If you employ a PA directly, you may need to take on employer responsibilities such as contracts, pay, expectations, and backup cover. Platforms and local organisations can help with recruitment, but the responsibility is greater than when using an agency. Independent Lives may be a useful resource to explore: <https://www.independentlives.org/>
- **Agency-based PAs:** Agency based PAs can provide greater reliability and flexibility, particularly where short-notice cover may be needed. Agencies usually manage training, vetting, and compliance requirements, making this option suitable for people who want support without managing employment responsibilities themselves.

Training and Professional Standards

- Support workers typically complete mandatory training such as moving and handling, safeguarding, and infection control. Training is often CQC-approved and funded by agencies, although more advanced or specialist training may need separate funding. Time pressures can affect the quality of care, so realistic support planning is important.

Key Considerations When Choosing Support

- No single solution fits everyone. The best option depends on your individual needs, lifestyle, circumstances, funding arrangements, and long-term sustainability. Compatibility, trust, and clear professional boundaries are essential for long-term success. It is also acceptable to change providers if support is not meeting your needs.

Backup and Contingency Planning

- Backup arrangements are critical in case a regular support worker is unavailable. Family members may sometimes help, but this is not always possible. Planning for worst-case scenarios can reduce stress and disruption. Keeping a record of daily activities for a month can help identify your true support needs and make planning more accurate.

What to Avoid

- Accepting rushed or poor care as “normal”.
- Thinking you’re difficult for asking questions.
- Choosing solely on cost.
- Ignoring gut instincts.

Red Flags

Poor communication, no care plan or risk assessments, constant staff changes, invisible management, or feeling rushed and unheard.

Green Flags

Clear communication, gradual introductions, regular reviews, flexibility, and feeling respected and listened to.

Final Thought

Good support protects dignity, independence, and quality of life.
You are entitled to **choice, control, respect, safety, and continuity**.
Start small, ask questions, compare options and trust your instincts.