

Personal Assistance Services: For Youth with Significant Disabilities

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The Basics of PAS

The term “**personal assistance services**” has become the more preferred term in the disability community to refer to someone, or several people, who assist a person with a disability in performing certain tasks during the course of the day that s/he cannot perform on his/her own.

The Basics of PAS

- **World Institute on Disability (WID) definition:** Assistance, under maximum feasible user control, with tasks that maintain well-being, comfort, safety, personal appearance, and interactions within the community and society as a whole.
- **Medicaid Eligibility definition:** Range of human assistance provided to persons with disabilities and chronic conditions of all ages, which enables them to accomplish tasks they would normally do for themselves if they did not have a disability.
- **Rehabilitation Act and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) definition:** A range of services provided by one or more persons designed to assist an individual with a disability to perform daily living activities on or off the job that the individual would typically perform if the individual did not have a disability. Such services shall be designed to increase the individual's control in life and ability to perform everyday activities on or off the job.

Transitioning to Living Independently

- Begin by asking friends or family what it takes to be more independent.
- Make an informed decision: this requires some serious needs assessment, targeted research, and personal and financial planning for anyone. For some, it means considering PAS needs.
- Be honest and realistic with yourself.
 - *Your personal care needs.*
 - *When you will need assistance and for how long.*
 - *Personal assistant preferences.*
 - *Knowledge, skills, and abilities.*

Identifying Your PAS Needs

- Which tasks will you need help with?
- Approximately how many hours of help will you need?
- How will you manage/schedule your assistants to ensure that you receive assistance as needed?
- How many assistants will you have?

Covering the Cost of PAS

- Typically, PAS are paid for in one of three ways:
 - **Cash benefits:** payments go to qualified consumers or their representative payees.
 - **Vendor payments:** to provider agencies, where a case manager determines the types and amounts of covered services, and arranges for and pays authorized providers to deliver the services.
 - **Vouchers:** consumers use funds for authorized purchases.
- *It is best to talk to someone in your state and/or county.*

Covering the Cost of PAS

- **Private Funds**
- **Private Health Insurance**
- **Federal/State Funded Programs**
 - Medicaid
 - Social Security Programs
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - State Funds for Residential Services
- **Employers**

Searching for PAS

- There are a wide variety of ways to find the assistance you'll need. There is no one-size-fits-all method
- Be familiar with the various sources in your community for locating assistants, such as from PAS registries, independent living centers, community provider agencies, etc.
- Think carefully about the kinds of things that you need from your personal assistant and what you want the job to entail.
- Understand the going wage in your community for personal assistance work and decide the benefits you will offer.
- Be assertive and creative in your outreach efforts to find a personal assistant.

Searching for PAS

Advertising

- Do you want your assistant to help prepare your meals, clean your place, do your shopping, drive you places?
- Do you want a live-in assistant or just someone to come at specific times?
- Do you want a back-up assistant or two or three?

Thinking Outside the Box: Service Dogs

- A growing number of people with disabilities have come to rely on animals, such as dogs, monkeys, and ponies, for assistance.
 - Service vs. Assistance Dogs
- Be Realistic in Your Expectations
 - Dog Person
 - Time Commitment
 - Cost
- Choosing a Program

Identifying Your PAS Needs

Initial screening

- **Ask open-ended questions, rather than questions that elicit simple “yes” or “no” answers.**
- **Be consistent with each caller; that is, make sure you’re asking similar initial questions and then delving deeper into issues that pique your interest.**
- **Do not end the telephone call by setting up an interview time and date.**

Identifying Your PAS Needs

In-Person Interviews

- It's a chance to see whether the applicant can physically perform the required duties and whether your personalities are compatible.
- Body language, facial expressions, attentiveness, and talkativeness provide clues to daily interactions.
- Meet in a public place near your home or even in the lobby of your apartment building.
- Consider having a friend or family member present. Having another person's perspective of the interviewee can sometimes be helpful.

Identifying Your PAS Needs

Follow-up to Interviews

- References can help you determine whether the candidate has been truthful during the interview.
- Contacting the references can be uncomfortable, but it is essential for making a good hiring decision.
- One of the most important steps in the hiring process doing background and driving record checks.
- Don't forget to sign a contract.

Managing Your Employees

- Mutual respect is essential. You will also earn more respect from your employee if you actively show him/her respect and appreciation.
- Consistency, open communication and clear direction are critical.
- Share your schedule, routine, and introduce them to important friends and family.

Managing Your Employees

- Discuss concerns or problems as they develop. The longer you avoid discussing them, the harder and more difficult working together becomes.
- Think through how you will handle awkward moments, because they will come.

Paying Your Employees

- Various factors impact how your personal assistant costs will be covered.
- Different laws, policies, and procedures govern personal assistant compensation.
- Make sure you know the reporting requirements of the funding source(s) and follow the rules strictly.
- Keep good, well-organized records.

Evaluating Your Personal Assistants

- **Give feedback often.**
- **Do not save praise or criticism for the evaluations.**
- **Keep copies of the evaluations in your personal assistant's file and give a copy to him/her.**
- **If feedback and evaluations do not improve performance, give a written warning that things need to improve by a certain date.**

Avoiding Abuse

- Abuse can come in many forms— physical, emotional, sexual, and financial.
- Do thorough background and reference checks.
- Be careful about giving personal assistants access to your cash, checks, bank account, or credit cards.
- If a personal assistant quits or is fired, be sure to get the keys back and give him or her the last paycheck.
- Seek assistance from a friend, family member, or another adult you trust. And, if necessary, involve the authorities.

Firing Your Personal Assistants

Some common reasons for termination:

- Performance is not acceptable.
- The personal assistant is frequently late or does not show up for work.
- Personal habits bother you.
 - For example, the personal assistant smokes while doing your care or has poor personal hygiene.
- The personal assistant does not listen to your instructions.
- You do not feel safe with the personal assistant.

Additional Resources

- **Office of Disability Employment Policy :** www.dol.gov/odep
- **National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth:** www.ncwd-youth.info
- **Disability.gov:** www.disability.gov
- **Center for Personal Assistance Services:** www.pascenter.org/home/index.php
- **Independent Living Centers:** www.ilru.org
- **PACER Center:** www.pacer.org
- **Job Accommodation Network:** askjan.org
- **Parent Resource Centers:** www.taalliance.org

Contact Information

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