

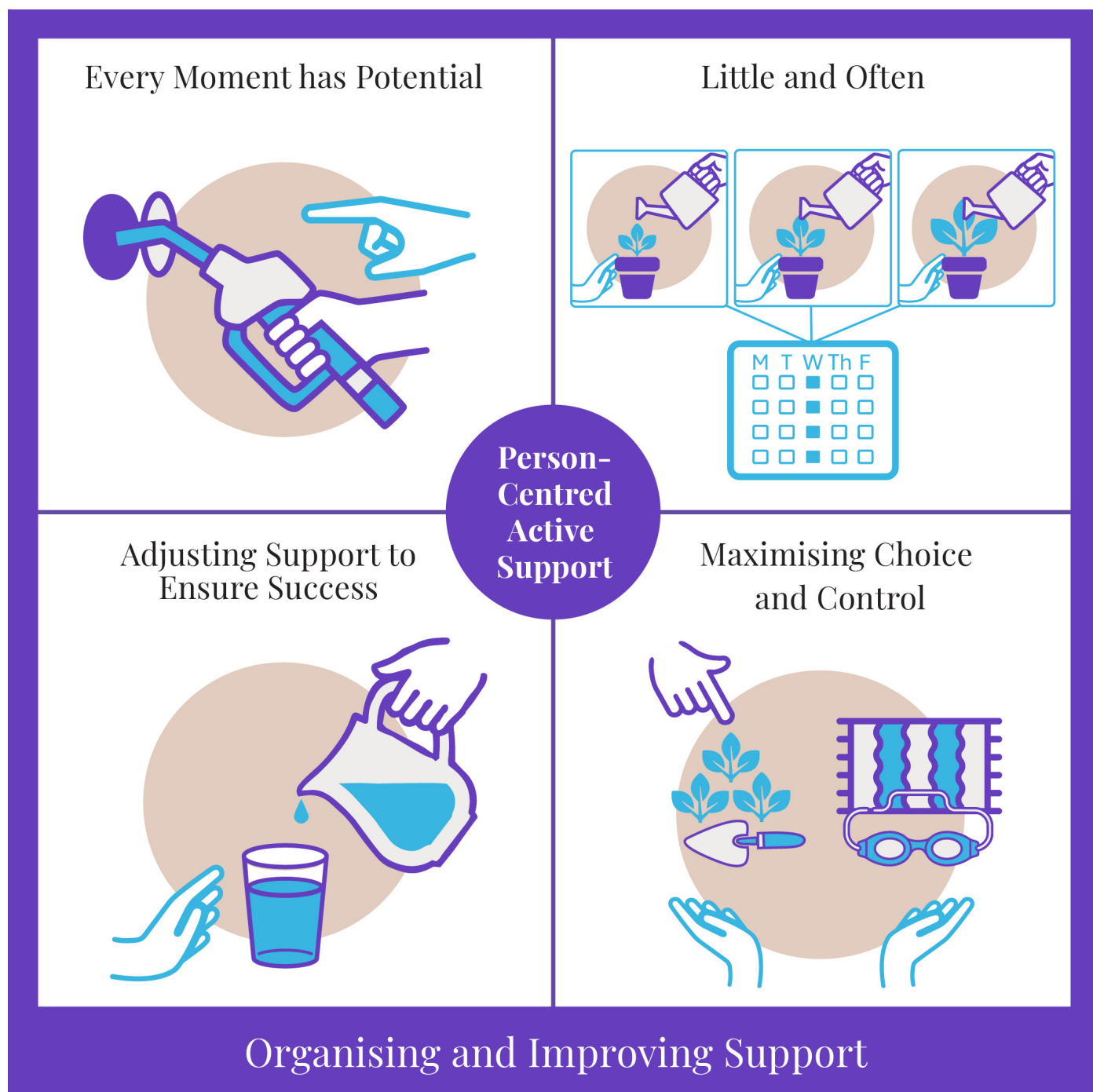


Person-Centred Active Support



BEADLE-BROWN CONSULTING

SUPPORTING QUALITY SERVICES
ENABLING BETTER LIVES



Person-Centred Active Support – How It Evolved

In the 1980s and 1990s, people with learning disabilities were beginning to move out of large institutions and into ordinary homes in the community. Supporters quickly learned that

being in the community was not the same as being part of it. Many people still spent much of their time disengaged or dependent on others.

Early examples of good support showed something different: staff who involved people in everyday activities — cooking, shopping, chatting, deciding — helped people build skills,

confidence and connection. These practices became known as Active Support.

When these successes weren't being repeated everywhere, Jim Mansell and colleagues at the Tizard Centre began to describe, teach and research the approach more clearly. They developed the first training pack, videos and practical guidance to help staff understand how to provide this kind of support, and why it mattered.

As Active Support spread internationally, it became clear that being truly effective meant being person-centred — not just helping people to be busy, but helping them to do what is meaningful to them. This evolution led to Person-Centred Active Support: a way of working that combines person-centred thinking with structured, responsive support for engagement.

Since then, the resources, research and tools have continued to grow — from DVDs and handbooks to the Stay Inside, Be Inspired guide developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the heart of the approach has never changed: supporting people to be actively involved in their own lives, in their own way.

What Makes Support “Person-Centred Active Support”?

Person-Centred Active Support is more than encouraging people to join in. It's about creating opportunities for everyone to take part, make choices and connect with others — every day.

Here's what makes it distinctive:

It's about mindset, not just planning.

Plans and timetables can help, but Person-Centred Active Support is really about what



happens in the moment — seeing everyday life as full of opportunities for involvement, learning and connection.

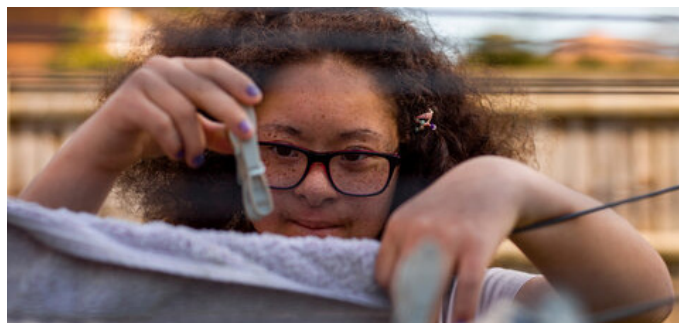
It values social engagement as much as activity.



Talking, laughing, helping or simply being together are as important as cooking or gardening. Relationships are part of a good life, and Person-Centred Active Support helps build them through shared experiences.

It promotes autonomy and control.

Supporters help people make choices and take decisions in ways that work for them — whether that's choosing what to do, how to do it, or who to do it with.



It's individual and flexible.



What “active engagement” looks like depends on the person. For one, it might be leading the cooking; for another, stirring the pot or choosing the music. The aim is success, confidence and enjoyment — not standardisation.

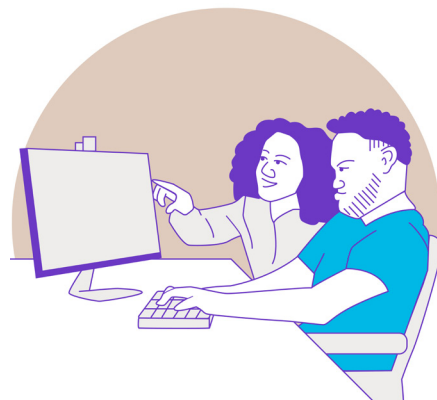
You can see Person-Centred Active Support in action when:

- a supporter slows down to give someone time to respond,
- breaks a task into smaller parts so the person can participate successfully,
- or adapts their help so the person can be involved in a way that works for them.

At its best, Person-Centred Active Support is not about paperwork or programmes — it's about what happens between people. It's visible in the small, everyday moments that build respect, autonomy and connection.

Active Engagement

Person-Centred Active Support is concerned with helping people, who would otherwise have difficulties doing so, connect with others and with the activities of living. It's those connections through which humans develop a rich quality of life, and which are enabled through **Active Engagement**.



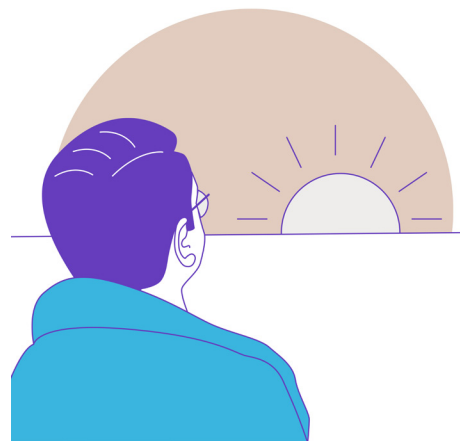
Active Engagement

Too often people who need support actually experience long periods of **Disengagement**: doing nothing or making use of self-stimulatory or repetitive activities which don't add to (and often diminish) their quality of life.



Disengagement

When a person's daily experience is largely one of disengagement, there are things we can do, to and for them, which will improve their quality of life but which only need their **Passive Involvement**. We could do this by seeking to resolve their physical and emotional needs through better health and personal care, for example. Similarly there are things people can do that are passive or sensory but which do improve their quality of life by increasing happiness or reducing anxiety, such as listening to music or using a fidget in a stressful situation.



Passive Involvement

But Person-Centred Active Support helps us go further and enables people we're supporting to experience Active Engagement in interactions and relationships with others and in the activities

of living, such that it adds to their quality of life. It's only through Active Engagement that people can connect with, and thereby exercise control over, the full range of opportunities that make for a rich and fulfilling lifestyle.

The Principles of Person-Centred Active Support

There are four key principles of Person-Centred Active Support that can be applied to any activity or interaction to help those who are providing support to tailor what they do to enable a person's Active Engagement:

Every Moment has Potential

Seeing everything that happens at home or in the community (whether exciting or mundane) as an opportunity for active engagement.

Little and Often

Supporting participation in the small parts of each opportunity with slow, quiet, frequent and obvious support.

Adjusting Support to Ensure Success

Providing just enough of the right type of help to enable the person to take part successfully in that interaction or activity at that time.

Maximising Choice and Control

Seeking opportunities for people to make more choices and take more control in when and how they will be engaged.

These four principles are underpinned by **Organising and Improving Support**, which focuses on ways of working that promote consistency and predictability for people being supported, and which encourage ongoing learning and continual improvement of the support provided.

Every Moment has Potential



Person-Centred Active Support encourages us to think about activities and interactions and to see them in a

different light. Everything that is happening at home, in the neighbourhood and in life generally is an opportunity to

- be involved
- make choices and have control
- try out something new
- interact and connect
- do something with or for others

Too often we think only of special activities as being suitable for engagement, and we ignore the wealth of readily available opportunities that come with daily living.

You can see in the example of Brian (below) that his support worker is so focused on the special activity that's been identified for him, that she misses the opportunity for Brian to be central to the ordinary activities of his daily life.



There's nothing wrong with roller-skating - and Brian's played a part in choosing it, so it's important - and it may well be a brilliant experience for him, but it needs to be in balance with everything else. Quite possibly Brian's support worker sees "everything else" as being unimportant and her job is to get it done and out of the way, but you can see what gets missed as a result: Brian sits doing nothing, interacting with no-one while his support worker does his living for him. She needs to rethink: "how could Brian be involved in (at least some of) the things she did while he waited".

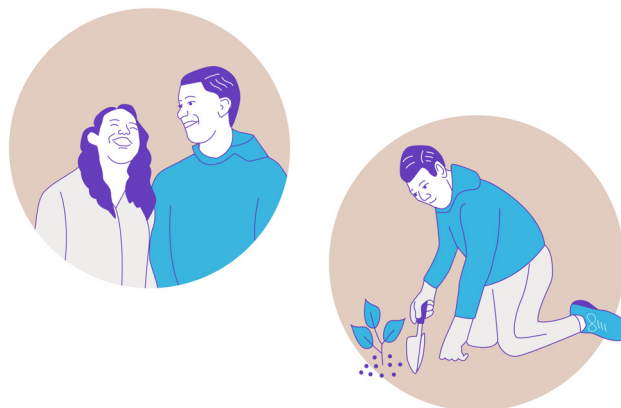


More generally Brian's team need to consider the opportunities available in household activities, gardening, cooking and baking, self-care, in leisure activities and hobbies, and in social connections with and contributions to family, friends, acquaintances, neighbours and the wider community.

A significant element of Person-Centred Active Support involves this change in perspective:

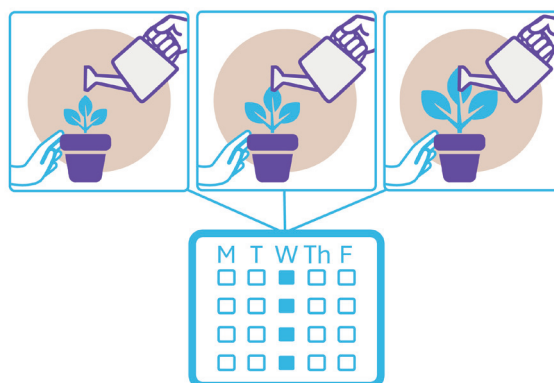
- seeing activities and social connections as being made up of many smaller parts – each of which is, in itself, an opportunity. Some won't work, but some will.

- realising that people don't have to be able to, or want to, do the whole activity – doing just a part of it means being actively engaged and connected.
- changing when, where and how activity happens so it's easier to get involved.



People can't choose how to live their life, if others are living much of it for them.

Little and Often



Active engagement in any moment that has potential will look different for different people. Person-Centred Active Support is always an individual approach: one person may be able to engage in the whole activity or interaction, while another person, at least for now, might only be able or inclined to do some, or very small, parts.

Supporters need to bridge the gap between what

a person can do, or wants to do, and what's needed to successfully complete the activity. Similarly one person might want to see the whole activity or interaction through, but another individual might feel more comfortable dipping in and out. It's helpful for supporters to think through what parts of an interaction or activity the person could do without support, what they can do with help, and which parts need to be done by the supporter.

Little and Often is about making it as easy as possible for each person to participate:

- using communication that works best for the individual and making the situation speak for itself: seeing, hearing or feeling what's involved to better understand it.
- adapting where, when and how the activity or interaction happens: moving it so it's easy to reach, changing the order of things to suit the person, doing things together, making objects easier to hold or move.
- breaking things down into smaller chunks and spreading them out over time.
- adjusting our expectations to meet the person's abilities where they are: typically starting small and building up as the person experiences success and feels ready.

We all have our own ways of understanding the activities and interactions of daily life. Person-Centred Active Support reminds us that our unwritten rules are less important than the successful active engagement of a person we're supporting in the activities and interactions of their own life. Little and Often means we ask ourselves: "how can I break down, adapt and present this activity or interaction so it's easy for the person to get involved"

Adjusting Support to Ensure Success



We've considered the potential of every moment, and what parts would work for a person. Now we need to actually assist them to participate. Adjusting

Support to Ensure Success means we provide support – for this person to get involved in this activity, in this place and in this moment.

This is about tailoring our support to meet the person where they are, not just using a standardised approach. It's different strokes for different folks – and different strokes for the same person in different circumstance or at different times.

Using the most effective type and amount of assistance because we're aiming for the person to experience success is key. We all need a sense of success to feel encouraged, willing and positive. Person-Centred Active Support is about responsiveness: changing our support so it suits the individual and the opportunity they're taking to make the experience successful. There are many different sorts of assistance we can use to help each person – they're all available to select from, do more of or less of, and to move between.

Words

We are likely to use words as our default way of assisting a person, and for some people they work well. However, words alone can be too complicated and confusing when people are stressed and when assisting people who need support because of their intellectual or



developmental disability. If a person doesn't respond to words in the way we're expecting we should always consider the possibility that they haven't understood.

Adjusting Support to Ensure Success often involves the use of additional, often visual, cues. These can help the person to understand the words being used and unlike speech (which disappears once spoken) can provide a more permanent cue.

Showing



There's a range of ways we can use visual communication to assist a person. We can model the physical movements involved in an activity; we can write things down or represent information in pictures; we can use the materials involved in an activity to make it clear what's about to happen; and we can be clear in our gestures – using our body, hands and eyes to indicate place and direction.

Physical

Sometimes people need more physical assistance. This may involve direct contact like hand-over hand support or touch support using other parts of the body, but could assist the person by positioning objects so they're easier to access or guidance through objects (using the object involved to provide physical support).



Some people will experience particular sensory impairments or difficulties, so we adapt the ways we assist to suit: using a sign language or helping the person feel an object they can't see, for example. Adjusting Support to Ensure Success is always about the person, asking ourselves: "what's the best way to assist this person, to get involved in this activity or interaction, here, now, so that they'll feel that glow of success?"



Maximising Choice and Control

None of us enjoy the feeling that we have no choice or control over our life, but it's a

common sensation for people who need support from others. By creating opportunities to be actively engaged, in ways that suit the person,

and adjusting assistance that ensures success, we are using Person-Centred Active Support to provide more activities and interactions to make choices about and to control, so we should use them for that purpose whilst simultaneously supporting them to build their experience. Real choices are those offered respectfully:

- providing the number of options each person can handle
- using the person's preferred means of communication
- ensuring the person understands what will happen when they opt for a particular choice
- waiting while they process what's on offer



We also need to respect choices the person makes whenever possible. Prompts to get involved in an activity are often framed as a question, when there is no choice intended at all. How can we expect Brian to embrace his potential for being in charge of his own life following the (all too familiar) exchange opposite?

Additionally, it's easy to override a person's choice when it's different to our preference, or our sense of the "right way" to do something. Very few activities have a single set way, but we tend to have our own preferred way and we need not to impose it.

Clearly there are some situations – usually where the consequences would be unsafe – in which we can't just go along with what a person appears to be choosing, where our duty of care takes precedence. But whenever we can, we should be supporting the person in ways that promote a sense of autonomy, choice and control.

Organising and Improving Support

It takes organisation and a willingness to learn from each other for our support to be person-centred and active. Random and isolated support, no matter how good or well-intentioned, will not provide the predictability and consistency that's required in the life of a person who needs support. Most of us achieve the predictability we need through successful experiences and by developing our own routines, and every person's routine is unique to them. Person-Centred Active Support enables us to develop opportunities for active engagement into a predictable, consistent, individual routine with each person that we support. It will reflect their identity, their personal rituals, their preferences and interests – and it should be as rigid or loose as the person needs.

Good routines matter – they structure what life has to offer in ways that the person enjoys and that they can understand. They are flexible, allowing for spontaneity and creativity – for example you can see Brian's support worker thinking about possibilities beyond a written plan in the box opposite

Good routines also have contingency plans built in, to cope with the unexpected things in life, but remain the plan we return to in due course. Structures evolve as the person at the

centre changes and they should adjust to reflect the time of year and cultural celebrations – but how much they should change depends on the individual, not on others' expectations.

Structure is reassuring, especially when it is visual as well as verbal – lists on the fridge, notes on a tablet, visual timetables, pictures of “now and next” and picture recipe books are examples of the range of visual supports from which we can select with the person. And structure, like effective support, is a team effort – the person at the centre and each of the people supporting them, learning together what works and what doesn't.

Person-Centred Active Support is fundamental to Good Support

People who need support to experience the same human rights and quality of life as everyone else, need that support to be good, if they are to live, not just exist.

Good Support is built on Respect for the individual, as the person they are, and also sets the occasion for the person to experience Respect, as a contributor to the lives of others; it enables increasing Autonomy, and therefore promotes confidence, self-worth, competence, self-determination and dignity; and it requires Connection that is sensitive to the person's unique circumstances and that acts as a bridge to fuller human experience.

Person-Centred Active Support is a fundamental component of Good Support because it enables Respect, Autonomy and Connection through the positive and skilful support of Active Engagement.

To find out more about Person-Centred Active Support and to access a wide range of resources visit our website:

www.beadlebrownconsulting.com/resources