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What is Active Support?

Active Support is a method of enabling people with learning disabilities to engage more in their daily lives. It appears to work well in all kinds of support settings, although research evidence in the main is from small community homes for adults (Mansell and Beadle -Brown 2004, 2005, 2012, Jones et al 2009, Stancliffe et al 2007, Toogood 2009, Tostika 2008, 2010). Active Support refers to the type of support provided - support that turns person centred plans into person centred action.

Active Support changes the style of support from 'caring for' to 'working with', it promotes independence and supports people to take an active part in their own lives. The support given to the person is also active. Active Support enables people with learning disabilities to live ordinary lives.

What is an ordinary life?

The experience of living an ordinary life, being a valued member of society and feeling accepted within the community where you live, are things most of us take for granted.

Although most people with disabilities value these things they can sometimes be quite hard to achieve.

Most of us spend our time taking part in a variety of everyday ordinary activities with or without help or support. Most people with learning disabilities like to do the same sorts of things, but many need additional support in order to have the same range of opportunities as anyone else to do ordinary activities in their own home and to fully access their community to build friendships and relationships.

Active Support enables people with learning disabilities to develop new skills, access a wider range of opportunities and engage in activities alongside other people, building important relationships and social networks that are part of an ordinary life. These skills give people more control over their own lives.

Without a good understanding of Active Support, staff and supporters can often provide too little, or too much assistance. There can be a tendency to provide less assistance to people who are less able and more assistance to people who are more able, instead of the other way around.

Active Support builds on the skills people already have. It ensures they have the opportunity to do things they already have the skills to do, or it can extend the range of available activities to include more complex and interesting activities.

How does it work?

For many staff, supporting people in this way is not a natural skill and they will need support to practice how to do it. Managers and team leaders will need to develop coaching and mentoring skills to support their team. Without practice leadership it is difficult for Active Support to become embedded within the service (Jones et al 2001). Staff can easily learn how to use simple tools such as activity plans. They can be supported to understand how to provide graded assistance and positive interaction and begin to recognise opportunities to offer the right amount of support at the right time. Activity plans support personal routines and are designed to be flexible responsive and spontaneous.

Outcomes

To monitor the success of the active support provided and to evidence outcomes for individuals, staff can record levels of engagement and skill development. This process of data collection and continuous monitoring gives services evidence to show that they are delivering what they say they are delivering and not just monitoring basic care outcomes.

Active Support and Positive Behaviour Support

Although not an intervention for challenging behaviour, Active Support can work as a proactive strategy and help to reduce behaviours that people may have that concern us or impact on the quality of people lives (McGill & Toogood, 1994; Jones et al. 2013). If people are engaged in meaningful things, have interesting lives, good social relationships and develop the skills to help them get what they need, they are less likely to need behaviours that make life difficult for them and others.

Active Support provides a good basis for enhancing people's quality of life by increasing opportunities for engagement, and for spending time with others and being in the community. Some people will require additional focused support on top of this, but in principle everyone can benefit.

To find out more about Active Support, and how CAPBS can support your team to work in this way, visit www.bild.org.uk/activesupport or call us on 0121 415 6970, or email capbs@bild.org.uk

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