

4. Working with families

This guide is for professionals who support someone with a severe mental illness who has, or is thinking about applying for, a Personal Budget. It draws on people's real experiences. We have brought these together to offer you advice and guidance on supporting the person in this process.



This is one of six guides for mental health workers:

1. Considering a Personal Budget
2. Thinking about outcomes: effective support planning
3. Supporting your client through the process
4. **Working with families**
5. Reviewing a Personal Budget
6. Reaching goals and moving on

In creating this guide, we asked 54 people with a severe mental illness about what it was like to get and use a Personal Budget. We also spoke to 18 family members of people with a mental illness and 30 mental health practitioners. Each group told us the good and the bad things about getting and using Personal Budgets. They told us that some steps were easy but others were more difficult.

For more information about the study see our website www.rethink.org/personalbudgets

Tapping into the strength of personal networks is a crucial element in promoting recovery. This guide highlights some things to think about when you work with families of individuals who are considering and/or receiving a **Personal Budget**.

Here we use the term **families** to mean informal carers of people with mental illness – they could be relatives or friends who provide some form of support to your client.

How Personal Budgets may impact families

Our research found that Personal Budgets for people with mental illness can have both positive and negative impacts on their family.

Amount of caring

A Personal Budget may give some family members a break from caring, while others find it creates more demands, for example, when a person needs help attending new activities.

Health and wellbeing

Personal Budgets are sometimes used to explicitly maintain carer wellbeing, for example, some of one person's Personal Budget was used to pay for her husband's gym membership. In other cases, the reduced amount of caring or increased independence of the Personal Budget holder resulted in a boost in the carer's own wellbeing.

Jack: "I got gym membership, and that's helped a lot. It's stopped me getting ill as much, and I'm not as stressed, and it's made a great deal of difference to me, because I think I was near... I was really depressed, and I was really feeling down, which comes with the territory of being a carer." [Husband]

Finances

Sometimes Personal Budgets reduce the financial strain for families supporting someone with mental health problems. However, there can be hidden costs attached to activities that carers pick up. For example, one carer we spoke to was worried about the cost of petrol for taking her daughter to and from her voluntary placement in the rural area where they lived.

Relationships

Personal Budgets can improve close relationships as well as create new ones, by providing a common interest and reducing stress levels associated with caring. On the other hand, increased worry about managing finances or additional caring responsibilities can have the opposite effect.

Lydia: "I think he is a lot more trusting, because he did finally get what he wanted, and it's improved our relationship no end, we don't really have, we don't have rows at all." [Mother]



Families' involvement in the process

Your local **assessment** paperwork may already include questions about families and carers, but below is an outline of how families in our research study were involved, and some considerations you may want to make in each stage of the process. It is worth remembering that:

- While families have an important perspective, the client is at the centre of the care package.
- It may be difficult for family members to talk about their own problems in front of the person you support, so you may need to arrange a time to speak with them separately.
- Mental health workers must consider **confidentiality** issues when working with families – you can find advice on how to manage confidentiality here <http://www.carersandconfidentiality.org.uk/>
- Some people are very isolated or prefer not to have anyone else involved. In some cases the Support Plan will be developed to address this. Be aware that you may need to revisit these considerations as circumstances change.

Initiating the process

What people told us	Considerations you might make when talking to carers
<p>Families sometimes approach mental health workers to initiate the process of applying for a Personal Budget for someone they care for.</p> <p>Sometimes this is helpful, and other times it may seem problematic to go through the application process when there appears to be little chance of success.</p>	<p>Why did the family member think a Personal Budget was a good idea?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have they had conversations with your client about a new goal or aspiration? • Do they have a new insight or creative idea for promoting recovery? • Have circumstances changed and caused them to need extra support with their caring role? <p>If you think an application for a Personal Budget is inappropriate or unlikely to succeed, explain this clearly to the carer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there another way you can address the family's concerns? • Can you signpost the family member to other support?

Goal setting

What people told us	Considerations you might make when talking to carers
<p>Some family members helped the person applying for a Personal Budget to identify personal goals.</p> <p>Some goals related directly to improving relationships with family members.</p>	<p>Family members may be in a good position to make suggestions or prompt the individual to identify personal goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the person you support have difficulty setting their own goals? • Where goals are about family relationships, is it appropriate to bring family members into the discussion to talk about how to address this?

Support planning and managing the Personal Budget

What people told us	Considerations you might make when talking to carers
<p>Both people with mental illness and their families found it helpful when families were involved in Support Planning.</p> <p>Families were often able to voice ideas and concerns that people applying for a Personal Budget did not feel able to make, or had forgotten.</p> <p>In some cases family members' needs were considered in the planning and this was helpful to both families and the people they supported.</p> <p>If people with mental illness found it difficult to understand the process, families often played a vital role in explaining and keeping them informed.</p> <p>Many families had a role in helping to manage finances and Personal Assistants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What support does the family already give? • How well is this working (for the family and for the person you support)? • How does it fit with the Personal Budget holder's personal goals? <p>Where a supportive relationship is under strain due to the caring role – is there a way the Personal Budget can be used to support the carer in their role?</p> <p>Will the introduction of the Personal Budget mean that the family does anything more? E.g. travel to activities, help with budgeting, recruiting and managing Personal Assistants.</p> <p>How do they feel about this? Is there a way around it? E.g. including an allowance for taxis to get to the activity, or a brokerage service to help manage the money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you need to refer the family member for a separate carer's assessment? <p>Some family members act as Personal Assistants. There are rules about employing a family member as a Personal Assistant – you will need to check locally, but a general guide can be found here http://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/practical-help/care-and-support/direct-payments/paying-family-members</p>

Ending a Personal Budget

What people told us	Considerations you might make when talking to carers
<p>The impact on families of Personal Budgets ending could be equally as significant as the Personal Budget beginning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the Personal Budget end impact on the family's caring role? • Will they take on additional caring or financial responsibilities to compensate for loss of the Personal Budget? • Has this been considered when planning long term sustainability with the client? See: (6. Reaching goals and moving on) for ideas on how to incorporate sustainability into the Support Plan.

If you are working with families through the Personal Budget process you may find it helpful to show them our guide: **(Personal Budgets in mental health – an insider's guide for families and carers)**.

About this project

This booklet was developed by researchers at The McPin Foundation and Rethink Mental Illness. We conducted interviews with people using Personal Budgets, families and mental health workers in four areas of England.

The project was paid for by the Big Lottery Fund, and supported by King's College London and the University of Birmingham. For information about how this research was done, visit our website: www.rethink.org/personalbudgets



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