



# 3. Supporting your client through the process

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](http://www.rethink.org/personalbudgets)

## Understanding your local processes

Many of the mental health workers we spoke to told us that the process of applying for a Personal Budget could be long, complex and time-consuming. People using mental health services also struggled to understand what was involved in making an application. People are better able to cope with the process and to take control of decisions when they understand what is involved. So before you embark on the application process with the person you support, it can be helpful to map out the application and approval process in your area. In some cases your local authority may have already produced written guidance, in other cases you may have to find out by asking your manager.

## Maintaining good communication

Communication between mental health workers, people using services and any family members supporting them is crucial. Some people who had applied to receive a Personal Budget found the process stressful because they did not always know what was going on.

Being kept well informed of the situation with their Personal Budget reduced anxiety and enabled people to take a leading role in planning and managing it. It can be difficult for mental health workers when they are unclear about whether a Personal Budget application will be approved or not, and how long it will take.

Several mental health workers told us that going through an application for a Personal Budget could impact on their relationship with the person they support. It is important to protect your relationship with the person you support.

### Manage expectations

Be open and honest about the process from the start, avoid making promises about what will happen if you are not sure.

### Be clear who is making decisions

Mental health workers can feel caught in the middle when a support plan is not approved by the local authority. It is important to let the client know who is making final decisions, and to be clear about your own role in the process.

**Social Worker:** “It is detrimental to relationships, and it is actually more detrimental to someone to say – ‘you’re going to have something’ and then say, ‘It’s not here this week, it’s not here this week’, and then keep saying that, than it is to not say you’re going to have something.”

**CPN:** “Because we’re the ones with the face-to-face with the clients in the community, and if you can say, ‘well, I need to discuss that with the panel’, and it’s not totally your decision, then it does make it easier to maintain the therapeutic relationship afterwards.”

### Keep people informed

Give the person you support updates about what is happening with their application, even if there has been no progress for a while. Reassure them that the process is on-going, and, if you have one, the expected date that a decision will be made.

### Consider short-term alternatives

If it takes a long time for the Personal Budget to be approved, is there anything that can be put in place to help move your client towards their goals in the meantime? [See our guide for service users [Planning your support – how to use your Personal Personal Budget](#)].

## Enabling your client to take control

Once a Personal Budget has been approved, clients need key information to manage their Personal Budget effectively and to minimise any anxiety. For people we spoke to it was important to know:

- **How much money will they will receive, and when they will they get it?**  
Will it be a lump sum, a weekly or monthly payment? Will the amount change over time?
- **What can the Personal Budget be spent on, and how flexible is this if circumstances change?**  
Are there rules about what can and cannot be purchased? What is in the support plan? How flexible is the plan?
- **What records of spending need to be kept?**  
Do they need to keep receipts and bank statements? When will they be checked?
- **When will the Personal Budget be reviewed? What does this mean for your client?**  
Might the amount they receive change or could the Personal Budget end? Will they have to re-apply for a Personal Budget? How can your client request a review?
- **What if they become unwell or circumstances change and they can no longer continue using the Personal Budget as planned?**  
Can they suspend or carry over payments? Can they change what the Personal Budget is spent on?

**Lisa:** “Last time [my mental health worker] didn’t tell me anything like that, so I didn’t really know what was available or what it could be used for...this time round knowing what I can use it for is going to make such a big difference, because I’ve helped plan it and it’s something that I want to benefit me.”



## Who else can support your client?

Often, clients struggle to write their support plans and are worried about the responsibility of managing money within a set of rules. Some mental health workers are concerned that managing their client's Personal Budget diverts their limited time away from other aspects of the individual's care. If your client needs help managing a Personal Budget there may be other sources of support to help your client make informed choices and manage their Personal Budget effectively, whilst saving you time:

### Brokers

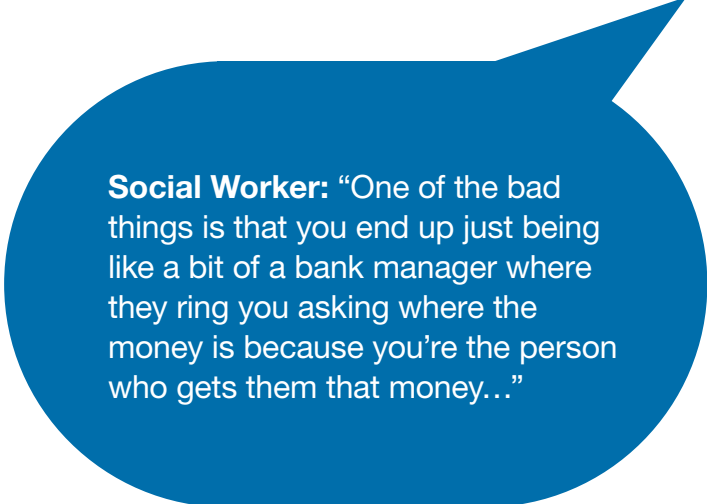
These could be peer-led, not for profit or private organisations. They normally offer a range of services in support planning, managing finances and recruiting and employing Personal Assistants. We found that brokers were particularly important for people who had a Personal Budget for a Personal Assistant.

### Specialist colleagues

Some local authorities have a staff member dedicated to supporting the use of Personal Budgets, or who has specialist knowledge, for example, around supported housing. If this is the case you could find out what exactly their remit is and how they can support or signpost you and your client.

### Family

Does your client have supportive family or informal carers who are able and willing to help with managing the Personal Budget? See our [Working with families](#) guide for considerations to make when involving family members in this.



**Social Worker:** “One of the bad things is that you end up just being like a bit of a bank manager where they ring you asking where the money is because you’re the person who gets them that money...”

# 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](http://www.rethink.org/personalbudgets)



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