

Working together: clubs, people with disability and their support workers

Support workers play an important role in helping people with disability participate fully and confidently. When clubs and support workers collaborate well, everyone benefits: the person with disability, the club, and the broader community.

Understanding the role of a support worker

Support workers assist people with disability in daily life and community participation. Their role depends on the person's individual needs, preferences, and goals. They might:

- Support communication or understanding during activities.
- Help with physical access or safety.
- Encourage confidence, inclusion, and skill-building.
- Facilitate relationships and participation in club life.

Every person is different, so the level and type of support will vary.

**Some support workers
are very hands-on;
others take a step back.**

If they seem quiet or “not doing much,” it may mean the person doesn't need help at that moment, which is a good thing!



What does good support look like?

Support workers help a person with disability **achieve their personal goals** and **promote independence**. A good support worker acts as a facilitator, supporting natural relationships to flourish, without taking on the role of gatekeepers or meddlers. A good support worker will:

- Encourage inclusion within the club and broader community.
- Step back gradually as the person builds skills and confidence.
- Only step in when needed. Sometimes their best work is invisible.

Good paid support adds to natural, unpaid connections; it doesn't replace them.



How to work together effectively?

1. Talk to the person with disability directly, not the support worker

It's important to always **directly greet, address, and include the person with disability** in all conversations. It might be tempting to only talk to the support worker, but their role is simply to assist the individual with disability, **not to replace their voice**.

Some questions you can ask are:

- How do you prefer to communicate?
- How can we make you feel included and comfortable?
- What's the best way to contact you or share updates?
- How should we work with your support worker(s)?

Include the support worker in discussions when relevant.



2. Build relationships early

Take a little time to get to know both the person and their support worker(s). Every relationship will be different. Avoid assumptions and check in regularly. You might say:

“We want to make sure we are supporting you in the best way possible. Is there anything you or your support worker(s) would like us to know before we start?”

3. Plan for smooth communication

It’s helpful to find out early on who is part of the person’s support team and who needs to be contacted if something comes up. Having these discussions early builds trust and avoids confusion later.

Check out the *Conversation starter: questions to ask members with disability* for more ideas!

Support worker versus carer: words matter

Term	What it means	Example
Support worker	A paid professional who assists a person with disability to meet their goals and participate in the community.	“Taylor is Jordan’s support worker and helps them communicate during training.”
Carer	An unpaid person , often a family member, friend, or neighbour, who provides ongoing support.	“Jordan’s mum is their carer and comes to watch the games.”

If issues or concerns arise

So what do you do when things are not going as planned or as smoothly as possible? **If possible, bring up concerns with the person directly.** If the issue continues, include the support worker.

If problems continue, and you have **consent**, you can contact:

- The person's support coordinator or service provider.
- A family member or carer, if appropriate.
- **Seeking consent and being solution-focused is key!** You might say:

"We've noticed Sam seems quieter during group drills lately. Is there anything we can do differently to make participation easier?"

Example of what good support looks like

Alex joins your club with their support worker, Priya. During practice, Priya stays on the sidelines and only steps in to help Alex with reminders or when Alex asks for help. You chat with Alex about training plans and only check in with Priya when relevant.

Over time, Alex builds confidence and feels part of the team, and Priya takes an even smaller role.



5 quick tips

- 1 Get to know both the person and their support worker.**
- 2 Focus on inclusion and natural relationships.**
- 3 Communicate openly and early about roles, expectations, and contact points.**
- 4 Respect professional boundaries. Support workers are not family or friends, even if they seem close.**
- 5 Encourage independence and confidence at every opportunity.**