

# THE LITTLE BOOK OF ACTIVE SUPPORT

by Orbis  
Education  
& Care



Active  
Support

**“MY  
ABILITY  
IS STRONGER  
THAN MY  
DISABILITY”**

‘Theresa Sheridan, 49 Leicestershire’

‘Theresa has a learning disability and is a self-employed artist. Theresa has 10 children, 10 grandchildren and 10 pets.’

## ACTIVE SUPPORT. WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Imagine you had a day off work and you planned on doing nothing all day. What would doing nothing look like?

- Get up
- Shower
- Dress
- Make your bed
- Make breakfast
- Eat your breakfast
- Clear away the dishes
- Wash the dishes
- Wipe down the work tops
- Vacuum through the house
- Mop the kitchen floors
- Go shopping
- Pay the bills
- ...the list would go on!

As you can see 'doing nothing' is actually doing lots of things. If you didn't do these things you would get up and wait to go to bed again. That would be doing nothing.

The model of support for people with a learning disability has changed dramatically over the years. Previously 'providing care' meant that everything was done for the person.

Active Support is very different as it allows the individual to grow, build their own independence and develop their own skills. It also makes everyone's day far more meaningful and enjoyable!



# WHAT IS ACTIVE SUPPORT?

Active Support is a way of supporting people to be fully involved in their own daily tasks and activities, so all the things that we do and take for granted, such as personal care, domestic skills, social activities and household tasks. In fact, all the things we might do on a day off doing nothing!

## WHY IS ACTIVE SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

- It provides people with structure, routine, positive engagement and opportunities to learn new skills
- It improves self-worth, ability, self-confidence and reduces boredom and incidents
- It shows how far someone has come with their independence skills
- It shows the person you are supporting that they are valued, they are respected and they can do things for themselves
- It creates opportunities to learn new skills
- It evidences all the excellent work that is done by support staff
- It provides us with an excellent opportunity to interact with people who live in our homes



# HOW DO I DO ACTIVE SUPPORT?

**Active Support is not a thing to do, it's a model of support.**

It is not something you do some days and not on others. It is the way we all work, all day every day. It should be as naturally occurring as possible to make sure we see and grasp every opportunity to engage positively and promote new skills and maintain existing ones. The emphasis is on the person having as much of an active role as possible in their day.

## HOW DO I PROVIDE ACTIVE SUPPORT?

**The first part is matching the support you provide to the level of support that is needed.**

This varies from individual to individual and from task to task. The aim is to encourage the individual to do as much as they can with the least amount of support. However this will take time, and the support can be reduced as the individual becomes more familiar with the task. It is really important that we record the level of support we provide so that we can track progress. We do this using Daily Participation Plans.



# LEVELS OF SUPPORT

In all of these steps the individual is actively involved.

**ASK:** the lowest level of support

**Example:** Shall we start to make your toast now?

**INSTRUCT:** more support than asking. It breaks the task down into steps but it is still purely verbal

**Example:** Get one slice of bread out. Put it into the toaster. Push down the button.

**PROMPT:** signs or gestures. This can be used with INSTRUCT

**Example:** Points to bread. Opens bread and partially brings a slice out and INSTRUCT get slice of bread.

**SHOW:** or demonstrating

**Example:** You get a slice of bread out of the bag and put it in the toaster. The individual copies. This can be used with ASK and INSTRUCT too.

**GUIDE:** this is hand-on-hand support

**Example:** Putting your hand on their hand to reach for the bread.

It is important when using these levels of support that you are always thinking about reducing the levels to increase independence. To help with this it is useful to use either ask or instruct with higher level of prompts, this will help to fade out the higher levels of support you are providing.



# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO SUPPORT PEOPLE THIS WAY?

You need to know:

- The individual's support needs
- The individual's preferred communication methods
- How to break tasks down into steps
- How to vary the level of support provided. Some tasks may require a different level of support, or the levels may need to vary depending on the step
- How to be positive and give positive feedback for engagement

# WE DO THIS ANYWAY!

**Why do we need to make it formal and write it down?**

If we don't write things down there is no way of tracking progress and sharing the success that we have with people. It is also important for setting targets and teaching goals, so that we all know what to aim for.

**Example:** *In 12 weeks, Jock will be able to make his own toast for breakfast with only ASK being used as the support level.*

By breaking the task down and recording the levels of support that are given during the 12 weeks we will know if Jock is making progress or if he needs more support or more time to achieve. The other advantage of writing it down is to help make sure that our colleagues do the same thing consistently with Jock to stop him getting confused.



# ACTIVITY PLANS

We all have activity plans in our lives but we refer to them as our normal routines. We do not have to write things down and tick them off as we go because:

- We don't need that level of support
- We can manage and maintain things without lists and schedules, mostly
- We are creatures of habit! We have been doing the same tasks in the same order for many years without much thought.
- We do not have difficulty processing information.

The people we support have not always had structure and routine in their lives and a learning disability may make it harder to learn and retain information and skills unless it is repeated and is consistent.

Activity plans should be person-centred. They are not there to tell the individual what to do but to show staff the individual's preferred routine. The plan should be based on what works best for the individual not what works best for the staff.

## OPPORTUNITY PLAN

An opportunity plan is our way of taking advantage of any naturally occurring opportunity to complete a task and develop a skill.

The plan is put in place to ensure that the individual gets chances to practice a skill and become good at it. Once they have acquired the skill this is transferred to the Daily Participation Plan.

## DAILY PARTICIPATION PLANS

This is a record of what tasks the individual has done and this is used to show progress. The plan is made up of a list of tasks that they can do with a tick record that shows whether they have done it. It doesn't matter how they have achieved it: whether at a level of ask, instruct, guide and so on, as long as they have participated.

The Opportunity and Participation Plans ensure that tasks are identified as learning opportunities, recorded and reinforced.

## TEACHING PLANS

The final piece of the puzzle is the Teaching Plan.

Teaching plans break tasks down to identify the component skills that build together to achieve a complex task. They are either taught by starting at the first step and working forward in a linear fashion, or with the last step, working backwards. In most cases working backward is the most effective way of teaching skills as the reinforcement of the reward can be imminent.

For example, making toast from scratch means that step one would be to get the bread from the cupboard and then several minutes later toast is made whereas by working backwards the first step would be to put the buttered toast onto a plate and eat.

A teaching plan will normally have multiple steps. The number of steps that we break the task down into depends on the person and how much of the task they can do, as well as how much they can understand what we are communicating to them.



## EXAMPLE: Making toast

**Step 1** – get out the bread

**Step 2** – put the bread in the toaster and turn it on

**Step 3** – when the toast pops up, remove and butter it

**Step 4** – cut the toast and put it on the plate

For some individuals these steps may be broken down further.  
For example, for

**Step 1:**

**1a** – Get the bread out of the cupboard

**1b** – Open the bread bag

**1c** – Take out one slice

This is where Active Support is person-centred. Plans need to reflect the individual's skills and abilities to ensure tasks are meaningful and the individual is learning.

A teaching progress log breaks the task down into individual steps and each step is an individual Teaching Plan. Once complete, the next step is introduced, either working forward or backward.



## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE HAS WORKED THROUGH ALL THE STEPS ON A TEACHING PLAN?

Once the individual can perform the skill it is moved over to the Opportunity Plan, and from here we create and seek opportunities to practice and reinforce this newly learned skill. After an agreed time scale it will go onto the Participation Plan as a skill that has been completed.

## WHAT IF OVER TIME THE PERSON STILL ISN'T ABLE TO COMPLETE THE TEACHING PLAN?

This means we have got something wrong in either the level of support we are providing or the number of steps. It can also mean that we have not been consistent with our support to the person and they have become confused or stuck as a result.

It does not mean that the person cannot learn. They can and will, as long as we get the support right and we make sure we are consistent in what we are doing.



Orbis Education and Care use Active Support every day to support children and adults with complex needs associated with autism and learning disability. This Little Book of Active Support is a brief introduction to a model of care that enables and empowers individuals to live a life that is as socially-valued and as fulfilling as anyone else's.



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