



Independent Living Centre Kingston
Disability Resources and Support

Support Persons' Roles: What Do They Do and Who Needs One

Support Persons' Roles

What do support persons do?

Providers know that support persons help people with disabilities maintain their independence, but might still wonder what, exactly, support persons do. Support persons' roles vary depending on the type of disability an individual has. Some of the things support persons can assist with are:

- Communication
- Mobility
- Accessibility
- Daily living needs
- Medical care

Service providers should always look at and speak directly to the individual with a disability, not their support person, even if the customer is communicating through the support person.

Training for Support Persons

A support person can be a paid personal support worker (PSW), a volunteer, a family member, or a friend. PSWs are trained professionals. Family or friends usually do not have formal training, but they often have years of experience. People often have different support persons at different times. For instance, a person may have a PSW present at their workplace and then go out in the evening with their partner acting as their support person.

Who Needs a Support Person?

Individuals with disabilities

Individuals with disabilities may need support persons with them for certain events or activities but not others. Some individuals may need support for many tasks throughout the day, while others may need support only once in a while. For instance, someone may need a support person to travel to an appointment with a lawyer. However, this client may not need support during the appointment itself. In this situation, the support person may enter the lawyer's office with the client. The support person can then return to the waiting room during the appointment.

In another example, a individual needing support with daily-living activities may require a support person at an overnight workshop. The customer might attend conference sessions alone but need the support person present at breaks or overnight. This person could not attend the whole workshop without their support person. Therefore, a best practice would be for the hosting organization to reduce or waive the support person's fee.

Similarly, a person who is blind or deaf may not need a support person most of the time. However, they may need one whenever they go to the movies to describe the action or dialogue. While technology has improved [media access for viewers with visual and hearing disabilities](#), it is not available for all movies. In addition, staff do not always know how to troubleshoot technical difficulties. As a result, viewers may find out after the movie has already started that they need support.

Proof of disability

Venues offering reduced rates for support persons sometimes request proof of customers' disabilities or their needs for support persons. For example, venues may decrease support-person rates for customers using wheelchairs, [Access 2 cards](#), or CNIB cards.

Support Person vs. Companion

Individuals who do not need support persons go out alone or with companions, such as friends, family, or colleagues. A companion sometimes chooses to do one or two of the things that a support person might do, such as pushing a wheelchair or reading a menu. The same person may be a companion in one situation and a support person in another. Only a person with a disability can decide whether someone is a support person or a companion.

If service providers understand support persons' roles, they can truly welcome all customers.