

# Things to be Aware of When Supporting a Person with Disability in Their Own Home

A fact sheet for students completing vocational placements



Homes are places of rest, relaxation and comfort; they are a place to express your personality, a place to spend time by yourself or with loved ones. Homes are private, safe and intimate spaces that we use for socialising, recharging or a place to pursue our interests.

When homes also become workplaces because people with disability are being supported there, the boundaries of home can become blurred. This fact sheet seeks to provide some tips about maintaining the sanctity of home while support is taking place. There is no one right answer so it will be important to be guided by the person with disability.

Potential issues may arise when there is excess formality in the home. On the flipside, there can also be a problem when workers become over-familiar.

Each person with disability will have their own preferences about how formal they would like the relationship to be between workers and themselves. There is likely to be a fine balance – increasing formality could lead to sterile interactions. Too informal and the interactions may become overfamiliar and intrusive.



## Over-Familiarity

When work takes place in the home of a person with disability, it can sometimes create dynamics where a support worker oversteps the usual boundaries of a paid worker. This may occur because homes do not have the same cues as a workplace (which is a good thing!) The informal nature of the home may lead to over-familiar interactions between workers and the people they support.

As a support worker, you could make a difference by:

- Being aware of these dynamics
- Be willing to be guided by the person with disability or their family
- Have open conversations about how the support should be provided and how you should conduct yourself in the person's home
- Keeping private information you have learnt about people confidential
- Remembering that you are at work!
  - Don't take personal phone calls or check your social media
  - Be mindful of your standard of dress to reflect you are there in a paid role
  - Don't do your own shopping when shopping with the person
  - During down times, ask if there is anything else that needs to be done rather than moving into relaxation mode
  - Bring your own meals for break times

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### Excess Formality in the Home

Support provided in the home of people with disability should be provided in the least invasive way possible. There is a risk that service provision can take away from the usual activities that occur in a home. Service may also seep into the way that a home looks and feels, which takes away from the unique expression of the person who lives there.

As a support worker, you could make a difference by:

- Remembering this is the person's home first and your workplace second.
- Monitoring your involvement as the support worker in the setting
  - Consider when you need to have an active role or when you might move into the background. For example, if the person with disability is hosting guests, consider how you provide support to allow the person to stay in the host role.
  - Maintain awareness of being in a paid worker role. You are not the person's friend, guest or visitor.
- Be willing to be flexible – people's lives change and therefore what's needed from the support worker on any given day can also change.
- Consider who needs to be present. Having more workers than necessary shifts the balance towards 'workplace' and away from 'home'.
- Keep administrative practices out of the home. For example;
  - Supervision meetings might take place elsewhere or in a designated location in the home.
  - Consider the 'right time' to raise conversations about your needs as the support worker. For example, if you need to make a change to your hours, asking about this while providing support is probably not the right time.
  - Minimise workplace signs (like rosters, notices & communication) being posted publicly.

