

Conversations for Effective Support Planning with Older People

Nikki Haswell, Disability Wessex and Alison Short, Helen Sanderson Associates with Helen Sanderson

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Introduction

Why are we asking you to do this and who is this guide aimed at?

This guide offers the starting point for Support Planning. It describes an approach to supporting older people to gain greater control of the money that they receive from the council, as a Personal Budget, to meet their support needs. It is particularly concerned with helping people who assist people with Support Planning (including care managers and social workers) to have more fruitful conversations with people who are planning how to use their Personal Budget.

The belief underlying this guide is that better conversations will lead to better thinking, and that this in turn will help people to produce good Support Plans.

A Support Plan is the document that councils require for people to be able to have a Personal Budget. It describes how the Personal Budget will be spent, and needs to answer a set of questions in order to be accepted by the council. It focuses on the specific outcomes that a person wishes to achieve, in ways that make sense to them whilst addressing their unique needs.

Although this guide has a particular focus on the Support Plans produced by, and for, older people, the same approach can be used when helping someone of any age to think and plan.

What are we learning?

People who have been supporting older people with Support Planning have been finding that many older people are anxious about this new approach (Ibsen summary report).

In Bournemouth, 75-80% of the social care population are older people. Disability Wessex, as a provider of assistance for Support Planning for individuals and training to care managers/social workers has been exploring different ways to assist older people to produce Support Plans.

This guide has been informed by conversations with older people, and with the social care staff who have been helping them with Support Planning. These conversations have involved people who are not yet using the social care system, as well as those who are already recipients of social care.

This is what we have been learning from older people and people assisting with Support Planning, about key issues to consider:

How the conversation with the person has started

Have they had previous experience of the social care system? Have they come suddenly into the social care system through a crisis or major change in their lives? Are they tired and at a very low ebb? Many older people will have struggled on in their own way fearing involvement of services and this will affect how they can take part in conversations about their lives.

The language used in conversations with older people when you are supporting them with planning

Here are some examples of how older people have answered questions that we may think are totally reasonable to ask and make sense to us when helping people to plan.

How did you get where you are today? "I came on a bus, dear."

Where do you want to be in 12 months time? "Let's put it like this...I am no longer buying green bananas!"

This quote shows the immediacy of planning and this is not necessarily within the times scales indicated by the criteria set by councils for Personal Budgets. This is usually helping people to think about planning over a year.

Our language needs to be jargon free and relevant to the expectations and experiences of the people we are talking to.

Beware of the form!

Many councils are developing Support Planning forms. The intention is that the forms are there to help people think about how to set about the task of Support Planning. Additionally the Support Planning form ensures that data is collected for analysis and monitoring purposes by the council. These are real practical and legitimate considerations. However, in the former situation, the forms are being used by practitioners used to a structured approach like care management. Some care managers and others are starting to use the Support Planning forms by going through question by question and only asking what is contained on the form.

We know this doesn't work for people, and many older people are nervous of this approach.

"Don't come and fill in a form about us - without telling us what the questions are and giving us a copy of the form to look at beforehand."

The form is driving the conversations and subsequently potentially curtailing the potential discussion that leads to people designing support that is meaningful and sustainable in their lives. One older person illustrates this point well.

“It isn’t what she asked - it is what I said that helped our lives to change.”

Filling in a form, if the council requires it, is the end point of the process and not the start point.

Time

“It just takes a bit longer for us to get our heads around this - we still have a brain and we had lives and jobs.”

There is an increased emphasis and pressure on workers to be task focused due to the targets that need to be achieved to create Support Plans and have them agreed. Time is a real issue. This is due to the larger numbers of people whom councils need to support in this way. To get the most effective longer term outcomes from the Support Planning process, practitioners will need to spend time planning and preparing how they will approach the discussions that they will have with each person carefully. Investing time at this stage will be more effective in the longer term than resorting to the expedient task of filling in a standard form with each person. The importance of developing relationships and encouraging talking and chatting over a cup of tea needs to be stressed. A balance needs to be found between learning about a person and addressing urgent issues due to the particular needs of the individual. People who are helping older people with their Support Plans need however to resist the lure of the quick fix and make sure that solutions that are found are what people really want. The need to explore with older people what is possible, so that they can make decisions from an informed stance is greater, as they may not have up to date information about what is available.

Additionally workers need to be prepared to take immediate action on some points related to the Support Plan and time needs to be made available to do this. By working on immediate actions that concern older people this leads to the development of trust and could affect the content of subsequent conversations about their future support. They will become more confident in seeing that things happen and can change.

This guide is in 2 parts and can be cross-referenced with the other resources made available for Supporting Planning. See the websites - www.supportplanning.org and www.shop4support.com and a set of printed cards - ‘Support Planning - tools to help you with your support plan’ (HSA Press, 2009), that will help you think through your approach.

Part 1 covers preparing to talk to the older person about their Support Plan.

Part 2 suggests questions that could be useful.

The Guide

Part 1: Getting ready to have a conversation that helps people to develop their Support Plan

There is no single way of doing this. Here are some considerations.

1. Keeping it real

What would you or your family members, who are older, wish to talk about in order to describe their lives to someone who did not know them? This is a good place to start when you are thinking about Support Planning with older people.

2. Mapping out the conversation

After you have had the initial contact with the older person who you will be helping to develop their Support Plan, it may be useful to use the 'mapping out conversation' sheet to help you think about where you will start the conversation and where you want it to end up.

You can draw on the suggested questions in the 2nd part of the guide. This is derived from an approach for running focus groups called a Topic Guide. A Topic Guide is always used before focus group discussion, and this approach can be helpful in Support Planning. A Topic Guide is a list of topics /questions to be covered. In Support Planning we call this a 'conversation map'.

A conversation map can help to ensure that all subject areas are covered but not necessarily in that order, so that the conversation can flow more naturally which allows for a freer discussion. It is not a rigid list of questions to be read out in strict succession.

The Topic Guide gives you the main areas that need to be covered but it is then up to you, depending on the person you are supporting, to think about which questions may be relevant to ask, as you help them to think.

You can jot your thoughts down in the bubbles provided. Remember you do not have to stick to the plan but it helps to have some idea of where you are going with a conversation to ensure you support the person to think well.

3. Conversational style

To gather information, you need to think about how you are going to have a conversation with the person and think about what you want to learn; you need to be prepared to learn things that you did not anticipate.

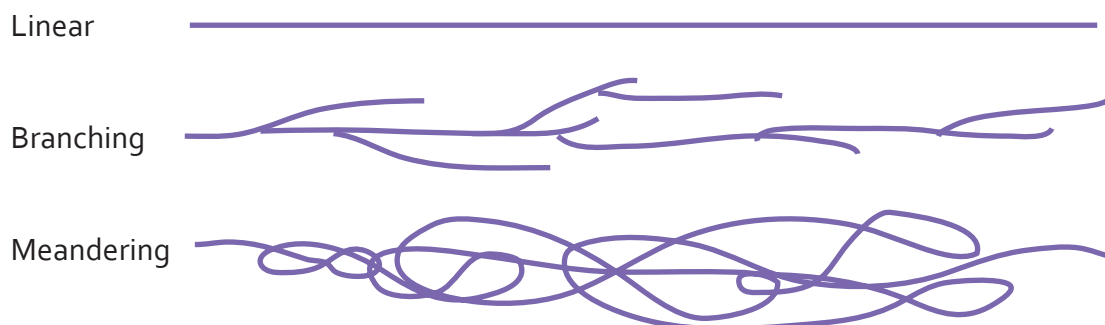
If you just have an interview (by asking a set of prepared questions) you will learn only what you expect to learn. If you have conversation (and listen carefully) you will learn things that are important that no one suggested in advance.

In a conversation you want to avoid:

- Questions that are closed. Questions whose answer is 'yes' or 'no' (e.g. Do you like bowling?) and questions whose answer is one or the other (e.g. Would you like to live in a house or flat?).
- Questions that have a built in answer (e.g. Wouldn't you like to live with us? Keep in mind that some of the built in answers are a bit more subtle; they come with a head nod, a change of voice tone etc.
- Questions where people who are eager to please and simply look to you for the answer.

There are three ways that you can have a conversation and this is described by Smull, Sanderson et al (2001) and being confident in using all of these approaches as part of helping people to think about their lives will help older people to think about their Support Plan. These approaches are described in more detail below, with an older person who attends a day centre. The care manager was having a conversation about what makes good days and bad days, to learn what is important to the person, as part of their Support Plan

Three ways to have a conversation



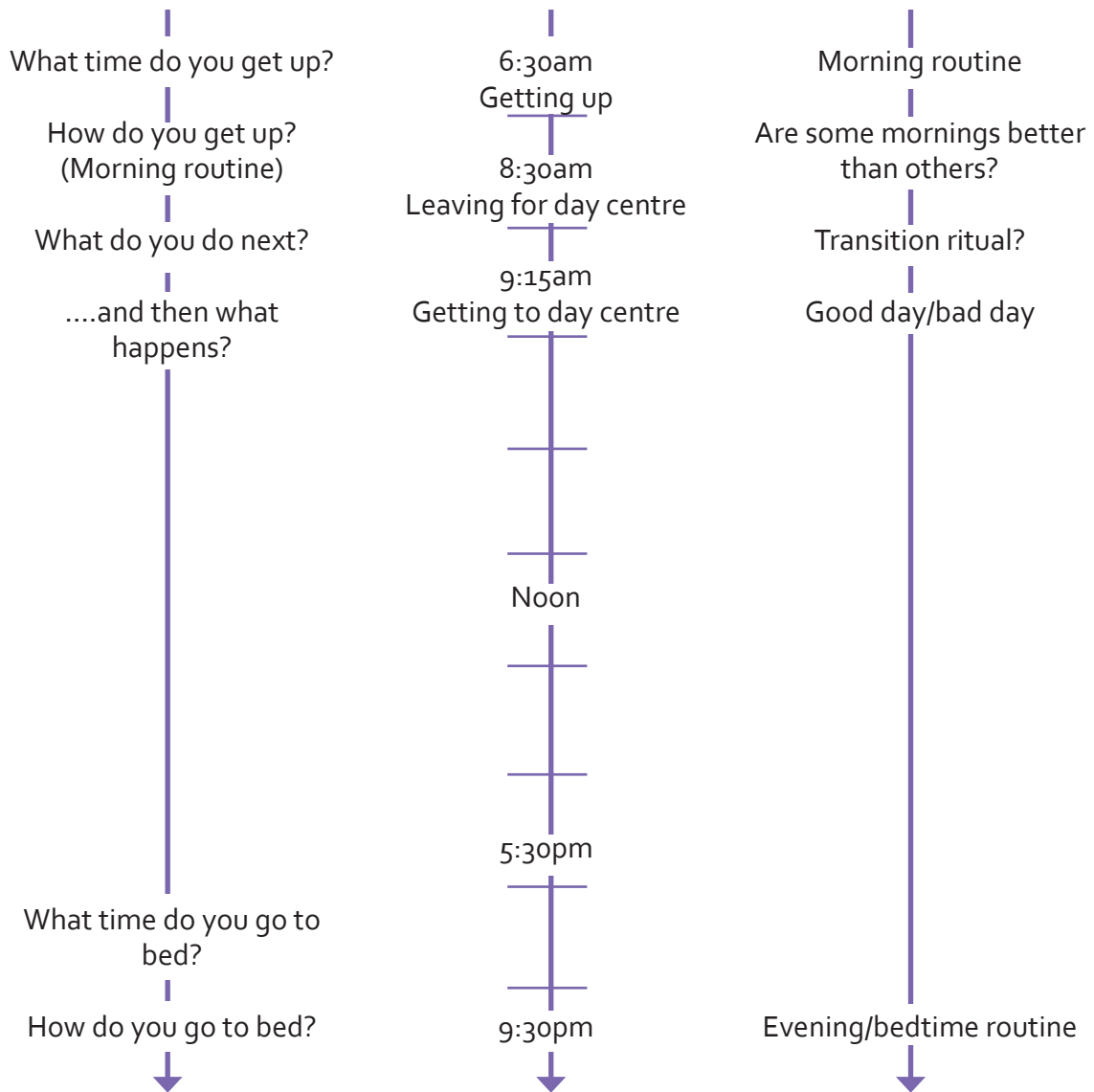
Linear

A linear approach is the easiest way to have a conversation without asking leading questions. If you are talking with the individual with whom you are planning, you simply start with getting up and then walk through the day with the person. You ask what a

'typical' morning is like and then ask if some are better than others and what is a good one like and what is a bad one like. You move through the day in pieces asking for what usually happens and then asking for good and bad versions of that part of the day. Try to get the person you are talking with to tell you stories that illustrate what they mean. Be prepared to adapt this approach to the circumstances and capacities of the person. One man could not tell us what a good or bad day was like but he could describe his last week, day by day, in great detail. Another man had not had any good days in some time but could tell us about good days from his past. When talking with someone simply start at the beginning of that time and walk through it asking questions about typical good and bad versions of each part of the day.

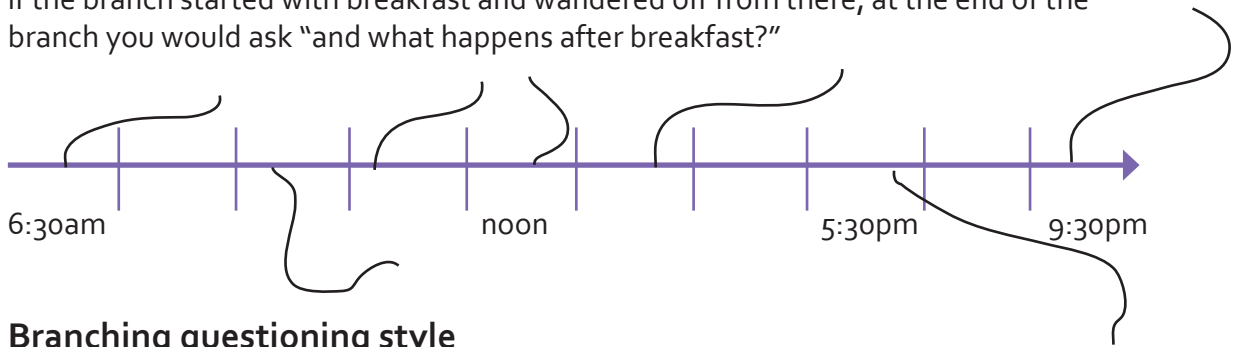


Linear questioning style

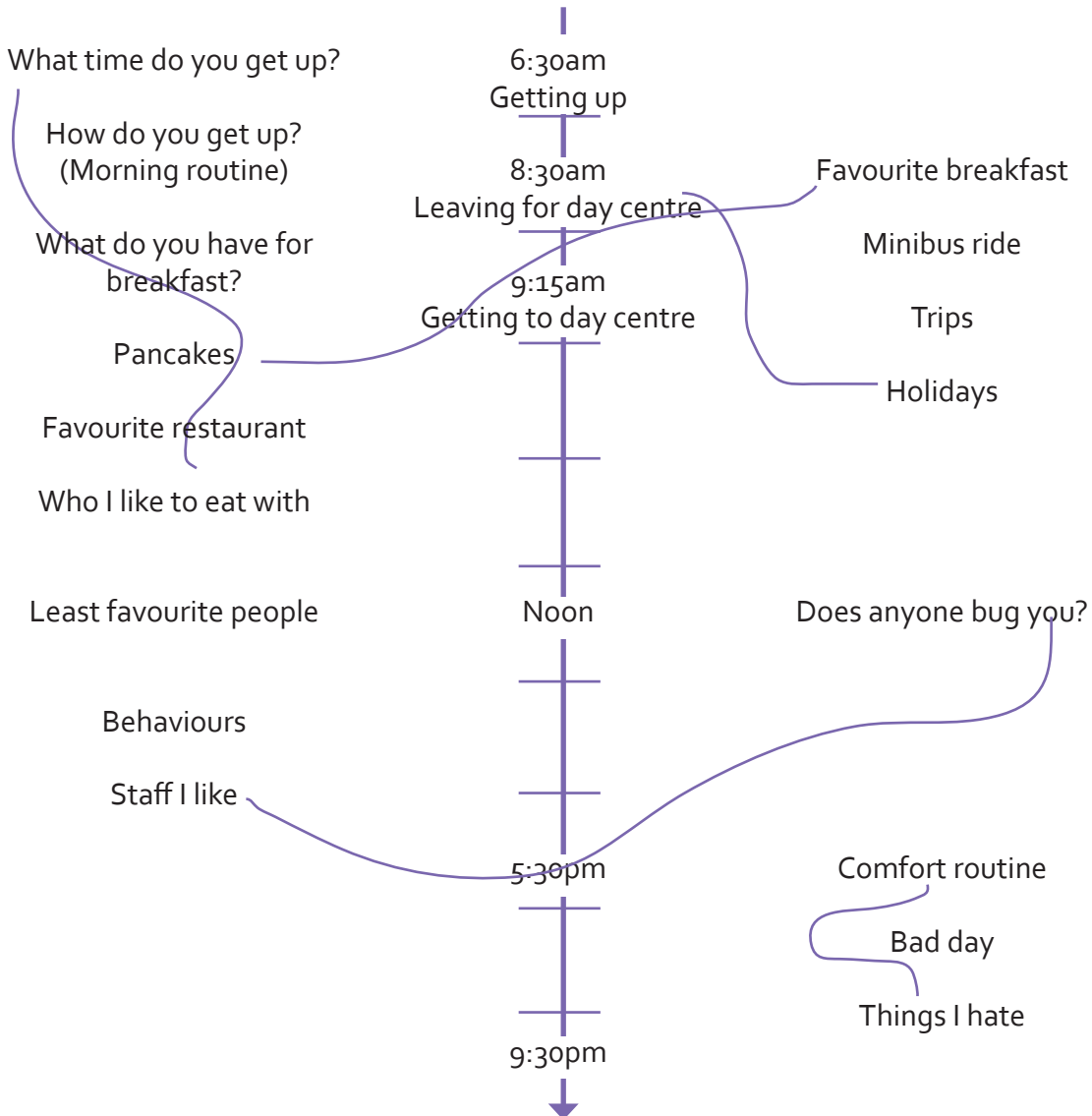


Branching

A branching approach starts in the same way, walking through time with the person, encouraging stories that illustrate the good day and the bad day. However, in a branching approach you look for opportunities for the person to tell related stories about other parts of a person's life. The result is a conversation that branches from one point in time and then meanders a bit until that line of conversation ends. At that point you go back to where you were in time when the branch started. For example, if the branch started with breakfast and wandered off from there, at the end of the branch you would ask "and what happens after breakfast?"

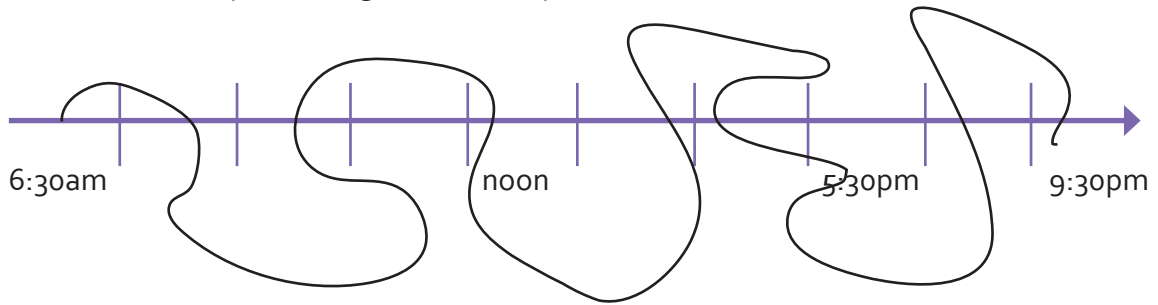


Branching questioning style



Meandering

A meandering conversation is the most natural and also the most difficult. In a meandering conversation, instead of walking through time with someone, you start wherever your initial questions lead you and then shape the conversation so that you hear stories about what is important to the individual's life across all of the areas that the person you are talking with knows about. Having a meandering conversation requires that you keep the conversation moving and cover all the areas in the time that you have. You must be skilled and have a conversation map of what you want to learn, while always listening for the unexpected.

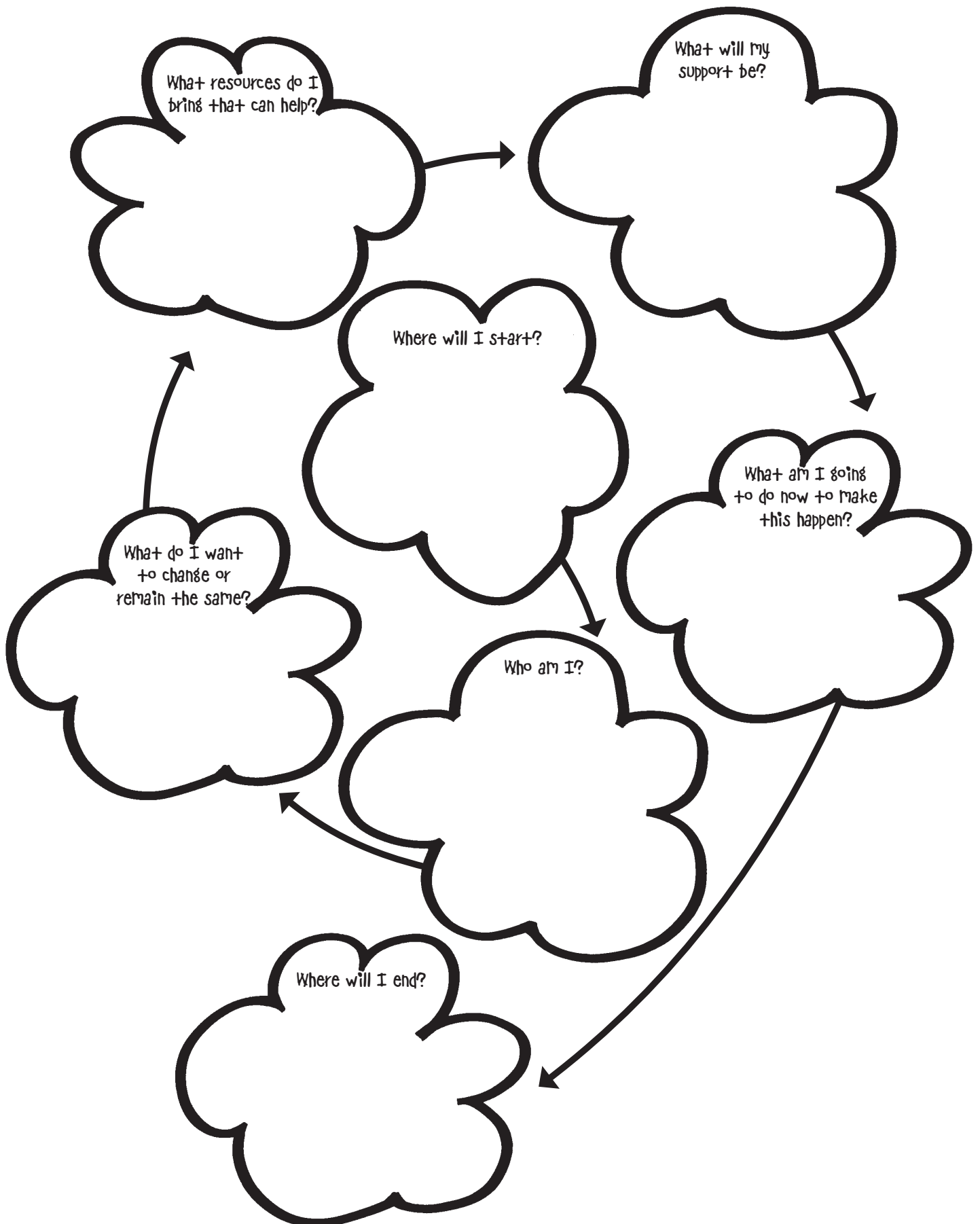


While you are listening to the person and others, it is useful to note down any questions that emerge, conflicts or contradictions in what you are hearing.

Meandering questioning style



A conversation for Support Planning with (add name)



4. Helping older people to see what is possible and encouraging people to have aspirations.

In preparing to help an older person with their Support Plan it is useful to have some ideas that you can share to help them to see what is possible. Examples are contained in 'Older People's Services and Individual Budgets. Good Practice Examples and Ideas', (CSIP, 2007) found on www.supportplanning.org. Here are some other ideas for you to be able to share, which reflect the aspirations of some older people.

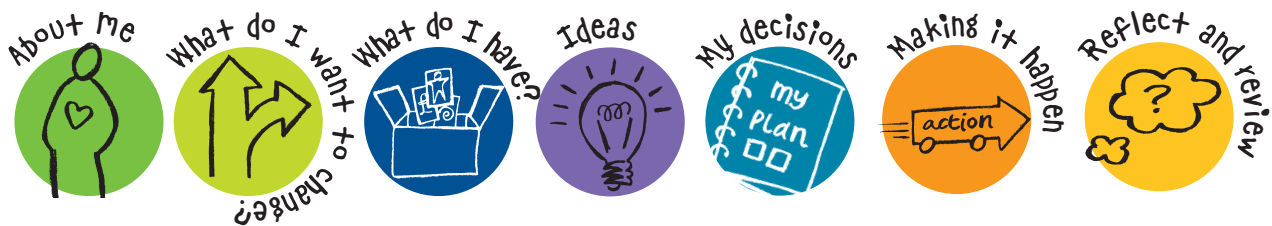
- Keeping well enough to be able to keep out of hospital or residential care.
- Getting to see children or grandchildren who live some distance away more often.
- Getting to see any friend, old comrades or colleagues who are still alive more often.
- Having a visitor more often, if unable to leave the home.
- Getting back to being able to attend church/ place of worship, or a social group or club which they can no longer get to on their own or by public transport.
- Being able to get out of their house/flat more often - to get fresh air, sees different things etc.
- Being able to get into the garden if they have one.
- Being able to do things that they can still do for themselves, and not having everything done for them in a rush by a domiciliary care agency worker.
- Being able to go out and do their own shopping with support or selecting their own shopping online.
- Worry less about falling and not being able to call for help - using assistive technology.
- Being able to keep their home and garden as they would like to keep it.
- Being able to have the occasional treat to look forward to and then have this to talk about to others.
- Being able to look tidy and smart again e.g. having make up on, or neatly ironed trousers and a trimmed moustache.

- Not having to worry so much about money.
- Feeling safer at home (security check and a safety chain, better locks, window locks fitted, maybe an emergency alarm system).
- Being able to continue to keep a pet with them now, or consider how their pet will be safe and well cared for if they cannot keep it, or going to visit them if they need to be rehomed.
- Help to give their dog exercise.
- Having interesting things to do and more variety during the day than just watching TV all day (e.g. supplies for a craft hobby or work done in the garden to make a raised flower bed).

Part 2 . Useful questions to ask older people to help them to think about their lives in order to develop a Support Plan

These questions are designed to give practitioners who are helping people with their Support Plans ideas and prompts. You can draw on these when you are preparing your conversation map. They do not, and indeed should not, be asked using the exact same phrasing, parrot fashion, but in the style and phrasing which comes naturally to you. Nor do they necessarily need to be asked in this order, or necessarily all asked.

There are also other tools and graphics which may be equally or more helpful than these questions. Do not stick rigidly to using these questions just because you are working with an older person: if the Wheel of Life exercise might be helpful to get someone thinking about different aspects of their life, then use it instead or as well as these questions. The Wheel of Life can be found in the 'Life and Support Planning Guide' on www.supportplanning.org.uk and was designed for working with people with use mental health services.



1. About me

The following questions can help you to find out about who the older person is and what is important to them.

- Tell me a little about your life history?
- What made you the person you are today?



2. What do I want to change ?

- What are your current circumstances?
- What aspects of your life at the moment give you happiness or pleasure?
- What things about your life are causing you difficulties, worries or concerns?
- Have you got any ideas on how life could be more fulfilling, easier or better for you?

- What happens on a good day? What happens on a bad day?
- What are the basics, or essentials you need to make life manageable again?
- Have you ever thought about your safety and how to keep safe and well? Can you tell me about aspects of your safety or wellbeing that worry you, or that you feel needs to change?
- What would help you to make sure that you could continue to do the things you are doing now?
- What would be the icing on the cake, so that you could do more than just existing and struggle on? What would be a treat or something really special?
- How far ahead would you like to plan for?



3. What do I have ?

- What knowledge, skills or abilities do you still have, which could be useful in developing your own plan for your own support?
- Do you have any family, friends, neighbours or other people who you could ask to help you do any of these things?
- Who are they? And what might they help you with?



4. Ideas

- Do you know other people who have a Personal Budget. Is there anything that they are doing that you are interested in trying?
- Have you heard stories and examples from other people? Are you interested in anything they have done?



5. My Decisions

You can help people by talking through some steps which may help them to work out how much control and involvement they want.

- Are you running your own bank account and doing all your bill paying yourself? Do you feel willing and able to continue to do this?
- Do you think you know anybody who might be able to work for you? Who you like and trust?
- How comfortable are you with giving people instructions and telling them what you want them to do for you?
- Do you think you could gain or regain the confidence to tell people what to do, if you had support to do so?
- Have you got enough spare energy to take on these additional tasks?

So, after thinking about all that, how much do you want to be involved in organising your help and activities ?

- Do you have someone you both like and trust, whom you could ask to take on organising your support for you?
- What sort of help or support would you like? (For example, would you want someone to do your shopping for you or to go shopping yourself, with someone to support you?).
- Do you know whom you might like to do it for you? (Perhaps you already know of an organisation which could do it for you, as a friend or neighbour already uses them? Perhaps a friend or neighbour's home help might like some additional hours work from you?).
- What steps we need to go through, to put your plan into action, and work out which of us is going to do which steps?
- What needs to be done? Who will do it? When will they do it by?

Refs

Smull, M. Sanderson, H. Allen, B (2001) Essential Lifestyle Planning, A Handbook for Facilitators HSA Press.