

# Your Path to Independent Living: A Guide to Your Support Options

Forest Way School

## Your Future, Your Way

Thinking about moving out of the family home is an exciting step towards more independence. It's a chance to have your own space and make more of your own choices.

We know that this big step can also feel like a huge challenge, both for you and your family.

The good news is that you are not on this journey alone.

This guide will walk you through your options and show you that with the right plan, an independent future is within your reach.



**LET'S EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS TOGETHER**



## What Does "Independent Living" Really Mean?

"Independent living" doesn't mean you have to do everything by yourself or be completely alone. It's about having choice and control over your own life, including the support you receive, your accommodation, and your living arrangements. It means you get to decide where you live and what help you need to live the life you want.

This is a key part of a bigger idea called "Preparing for Adulthood," which focuses on four main goals:

**Further education and/or employment:** This involves exploring your options for college, training, volunteering, or finding a job you enjoy.

**Being independent:** This means having as much choice and control as possible over your life, your support, and where you live.

**Being part of society:** This is all about building friendships, having supportive relationships, and feeling connected to your local community.

**Being as healthy as possible:** This includes learning how to look after your physical and mental health as you move into adult life.

***TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THESE GOALS, YOU CAN BUILD A TEAM OF PEOPLE TO SUPPORT YOU. LET'S LOOK AT WHO CAN BE ON THAT TEAM...***

## Who Can Be on Your Support Team?

There are many different people and groups who can provide the support you need for daily life. You can even combine different options to create a plan that's perfect for you.

### Support Workers

Support workers are paid professionals who work for a support provider. They are trained to help with different aspects of daily living, such as personal care, cooking meals, managing money, and getting out and about. The key benefit is having access to professionally trained staff from an established and regulated organisation.



### Personal Assistants (PA's)

A Personal Assistant, or PA, is someone you employ directly to support you. This is funded through **direct payments** from your personal budget. The main benefit is that it gives you much more control and flexibility over who helps you, what they do, and when they do it.

### Circles of Support

This is an informal group made up of people you know and trust, like family, friends, and other supporters. This "circle" meets regularly to help you think

about your goals and solve problems. Its core benefit is creating a strong, informal network of trusted relationships to provide guidance and prevent isolation.

## **Community Networks**

This is a support model where a few people with learning disabilities live in their own homes but are located close to each other. A volunteer also lives nearby and provides some practical support. The primary benefit is building friendships with peers and having a light-touch, neighbourly support system to rely on.

***WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT TEAM IN PLACE, THE NEXT STEP IS TO THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU'D LIKE TO LIVE.***

## **Finding a Place to Call Your Own**

There are several different housing options available, and the right choice depends on what you want and the level of support you need. The key is finding a place that feels like home and helps you live as independently as possible.

Here is a comparison of the three main options:

Option	What it is	Key Feature
<b>Supported Living</b>	You have your own home - either by yourself or with housemates - and receive support from a separate provider.	Your housing and your support are separate. This gives you more control over both.
<b>Shared Lives</b>	You live with a specially chosen and trained carer or family in their home.	It provides support within a family and community setting, not an institution.
<b>Residential Care</b>	You live in a home where housing and care are provided together as one package.	It's a combined service that often includes personal care like help with eating, washing, and dressing.

Other options also exist, such as 'Intentional Communities' where groups of disabled people live together and share resources, or arranging for more formal support to be provided in your family home.

No matter which home you choose, the most important thing is that your voice is heard and you are in charge of the decisions that affect you.

## You're in Charge: Making Your Voice Heard

**Self-Advocacy** is about speaking up for yourself, taking control, and making your own decisions. It's a powerful idea built on a simple fact:

***YOU ARE THE EXPERT IN YOUR OWN LIFE***

Learning to be a good self-advocate helps you get what you need and ensures that others respect your wishes.

**The journey to becoming a strong self-advocate is built on three core principles...**

**Knowledge:** This is about knowing your rights and finding the information you need to understand your situation and your options.

**Skills:** This involves learning how to communicate what you want clearly and calmly, whether you're in a meeting or just talking to a support worker.

**Confidence:** This is about believing in yourself and your ability to make good choices for your own life. Remember, your confidence will grow each time you practice.

This knowledge, skill, and confidence is backed up by an important law designed to protect your right to make your own decisions.



A very important law, the Mental Capacity Act, supports your right to make your own choices. It states that everyone aged 16 or over must be assumed to be able to make their own decisions unless it is proven that they cannot.

This means that people must listen to you and respect your decisions first.

Now, let's look at the first practical steps you can take on your path to independence.

## **Your First Steps on the Path**

Getting started is a step-by-step process, and there's no need to rush. It all begins with a conversation about what you want for your future.

Here are the first steps you can take to get the process moving.

### **Talk About Your Goals**

The first and most important step is to talk with people you trust—like your family, friends, teachers or a social worker—about what you want for your future.

What are your dreams for where you'll live, what you'll do during the day, and who you'll spend time with?

### **Ask for a Needs Assessment**

You have the right to ask the adult social care department at your local council for an "Adult Needs Assessment." This is simply a conversation to figure out what help you might need. When you have this conversation, it's important that

it focuses on the support you would need to live independently, as if your family wasn't there to help. This ensures all your needs are properly understood.

### **Create Your Care Plan**

After the assessment, you will work with your social worker to create your Care Plan. This is a detailed document that writes down all the support you will get to meet your needs. You should be fully involved in creating this plan to make sure it matches what you want.

### **Understand Your Personal Budget**

Every person who is eligible for support from the council will have a Personal Budget. This is the amount of money that is set aside for your care and support. You can use this money in different ways, including getting it as a direct payment to hire your own Personal Assistant.

Moving towards independent living is a journey, not a race. It might feel like a big step, but remember that many people are there to help guide and support you along the way.

**Your future is in your hands, and with the right support, you can build a life that's right for you.**

**REMEMBER...**

**THIS IS YOUR LIFE AND YOUR JOURNEY  
YOU ARE IN CHARGE.**