Screening, Interviewing and Selecting Personal Care Attendants

Selecting and interviewing a personal care attendant (PCA) is both a science and an art. Some aspects of the process include the formalized screening of candidates to ensure your health and safety, while other aspects of the process are focused on ensuring that you and your caregiver will be personally compatible and able to establish a good working relationship.

The suggestions below were provided by members of the MDA community — some of whom are adults who live independently and have personal care attendants who serve as their primary care support, and others who are adults who live with multiple family members and have personal care attendants who are integrated into their care teams. These resources are provided as a starting point for you. Please note that individual situations vary based on the level of skilled nursing support required, the PCA funding sources and the number of people in your household.

What to look for when interviewing

- **What experience does the individual have?**
  - Does the applicant have experience as a personal caregiver? If the applicant's experience is working in a nursing home or hospital setting, ask questions to learn whether he/she has a good understanding of what's involved in serving as a personal care attendant.
  - Does he/she have a clear understanding of the disease that affects you or your loved one?
  - Does he/she have a clear understanding of what will be needed in order to provide proper care?
    - Be sure to explain that caregiving needs may change as the disease progresses.
  - What is their educational or training background?
    - This is of particular relevance if you have specific skilled nursing needs such as those that are related to caring for ventilatory or feeding equipment.
  - Does the person have CPR and/or first aid training?

- **Qualities of the aide**
  - Is he/she physically capable of providing the type of direct care needed?
  - Is he/she someone who takes initiative to assist with household duties, if that is one of your expectations.
  - Is he/she someone who has demonstrated the ability to remain patient when faced with difficult or time-sensitive circumstances.
  - In order to learn more about the applicant’s character and ability to demonstrate initiative and patience, ask the applicant to describe a time or circumstance in which he/she needed to take the initiative to provide care when faced with an unexpected obstacle.

- **Questions to ask the applicant**
  - Ask for his/her name, address, phone number, cell phone and preferred time of day to be contacted regarding the interview process.
    - Be sure that you have permission to conduct a criminal background check.
  - Does the applicant smoke?
  - What is the applicant's home life?
    - Does he/she have a reliable means of transportation in order to get to your home promptly each day?
      - If you will require that the applicant be able to transport you as a part of their job duties, you should conduct a check of his/her driving record with the Motor Vehicle Division and ask for a copy of his/her valid driver's license.
- Is he/she married? (If providing private funding for the PCA, you have more latitude in the types of interview questions that you are able to ask than if you are interviewing someone through an agency.)
- Does he/she have kids?
- Is he/she comfortable with pets, if there are any in the home?
  - If assisting with the care of your pet is a part of the job description, then questions related to his/her comfort and experience in caring for animals should be included in the interview.
- Is his/her schedule flexible enough to adjust to changes if needed?
  - What is his/her vacation needs?
  - Is he/she willing to work extra hours if needed?
- Where were they last employed? How long were they employed? Why did they leave? Can we contact the employer?
  - Ask for multiple references and be sure to contact those references.
  - Require both personal and professional references.
  - Consider contacting some references by phone, as well as in writing. Many people will be much more honest and candid over the phone than they will in writing.
- What is his/her available start date? How long is he/she available to work for you?
- If household duties are needed to be done, does he/she feel comfortable doing them? Duties may include:
  - Light house cleaning
  - Meal preparation — what is his/her cooking experience, and what does he/she like to cook?
  - Caring/preparing food for service animal (if applicable)
- What experience does he/she have with people who have similar disabilities?
- Is there anything he/she feels uncomfortable doing?
- Ask why you should hire him/her.
- Conduct criminal background checks in all states where the applicant has lived.
- Be sure to thoroughly review all references.
- If you determine that you would like to hire the applicant, clearly outline your expectations for the applicant in writing.
- Contact your local center for independent living for resources, sample contracts and guidelines for employing personal care attendants.
- Keep copies of all application forms, references, payment records and all other information needed for tax purposes.

*Note: It is important to be very clear about what you expect, and be sure to leave no room for confusion.*

**What to tell the caregiver or aide you are interviewing**

- Provide information about medication, daily routine, and an explanation of what his/her role will be within the family and household (if you live with other family members).
- During the interview, be clear of what you expect out of him/her, and confirm that he/she is willing to complete those duties.
- Provide examples of past situations that you have encountered with caregivers, and determine whether they feel comfortable performing such duties.
- Inform them of the time commitment, and make sure he/she will be able to meet your request.
- Discuss salary requirements.

**What to remember while interviewing and training the personal care assistant**

- Be respectful of your time and his/her time.
- It may take a few training sessions to see if he/she is a good fit for the job.
- While communicating with your aide or caregiver, make sure that you are polite.
  - You want to develop a trusting relationship.
  - Keep boundaries, but also get to know him/her in a friendly manner.
- Understand that it may take time to comprehend each other’s needs and get to know each other’s personalities.
• Be specific and honest about your expectations.
• It is a good idea to have multiple caregivers.
  - This prevents overworking and causing a caregiver to get burned out.
  - It also provides backup if one can't get to work when you need him/her to be there.

Include the family in the process
• During the interview
  - Include other family members or a close friend so you have another set of eyes and ears, which will help
    when making your final decision.
  - Having another person there helps to include items about the person’s care he/she may have forgotten.
  - In some families, the caregiver maybe responsible for helping with child care:
    - Car pool
    - Afternoon activities
    - Dinner preparation
    - Grocery shopping

• For adults who are living on their own:
  - the family is a necessary contact in case of an emergency; and
  - they should have a friend or family member help during the interview.

• Consider including caregivers in medical appointment so they can gain a better understanding of your or
  your loved one’s diagnosis.

• For emergencies:
  - Have a plan in place and ensure that all caregivers and household members understand their roles.
  - Make sure that the caregiver has important phone numbers.
    - For a child — contact information for parents
    - Adult with family — spouse, children, close friends
    - Adult living on his/her own — family member, close friend
    - Doctor’s information is important in all cases
      - MDA national headquarters (800-572-1717) — directs you to the local MDA office based on the area code from
        which you are calling
  - Make the caregiver aware of the closest hospital location.
  - It might be helpful to create a folder or binder with all of the information your caregiver(s) may need.

For more references visit us online at mda.org/Tips_for_Success