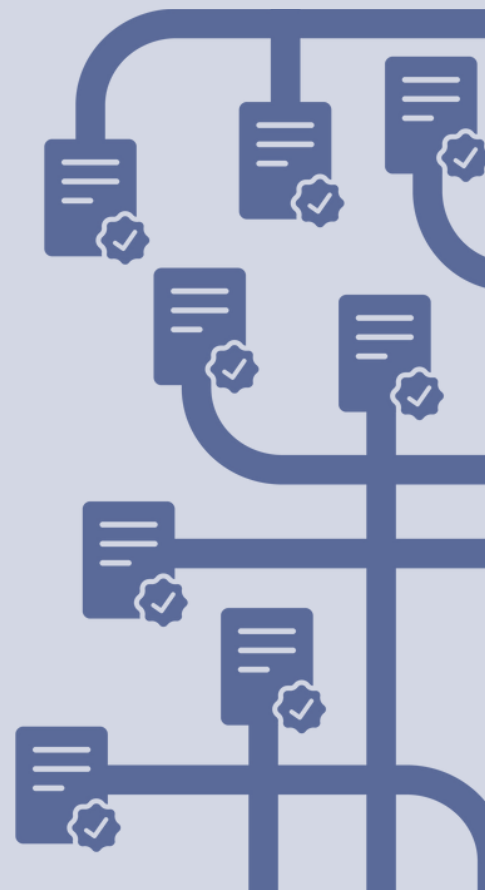




“
*This guide has
given me better
skills when
communicating
with my PAs.*
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Communication with your PAs

Created June 2024

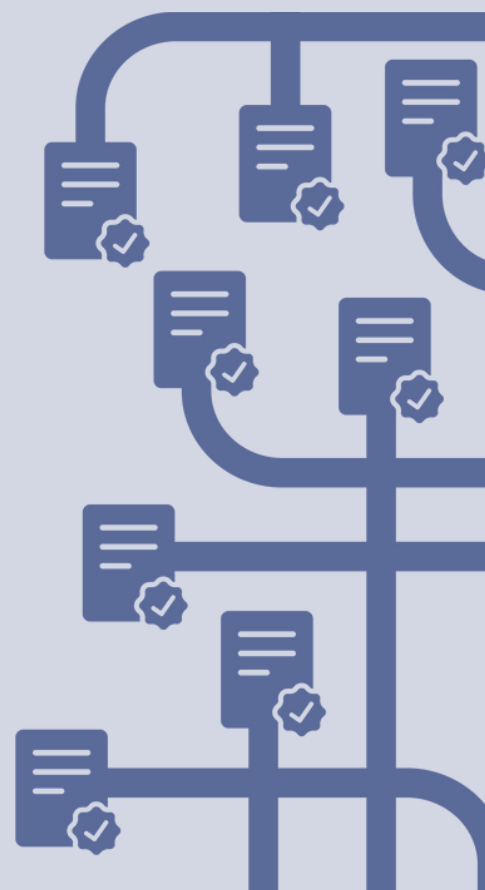


What is this for?

Pathfinders Neuromuscular Alliance has created this guide to strengthen communication between you and your PAs, reducing the pressure sometimes felt by employers. For those with muscle-weakening conditions and high support needs, communicating everything you need with your PAs can be daunting. This guide provides some strategies to reduce feeling overwhelmed and show you how best to communicate with your PAs.

This is a unique job, and there are no quick fixes or easy ways to employ PAs. Strong communication is one of the most important strategies. Unfortunately, it takes time to build communication between you and your PAs. This guide contains a variety of strategies that you may find helpful when handling the running of your care package. It can be possible to resolve conflict before dismissing your PA. That is when you need to have a strong backup plan in place. Tips on creating a backup plan are on our Employer Information sheet, which can be downloaded from our website. [CLICK HERE](#)

"This guide contains strategies for good communication between you and your PAs."



Strategies for Good Communication

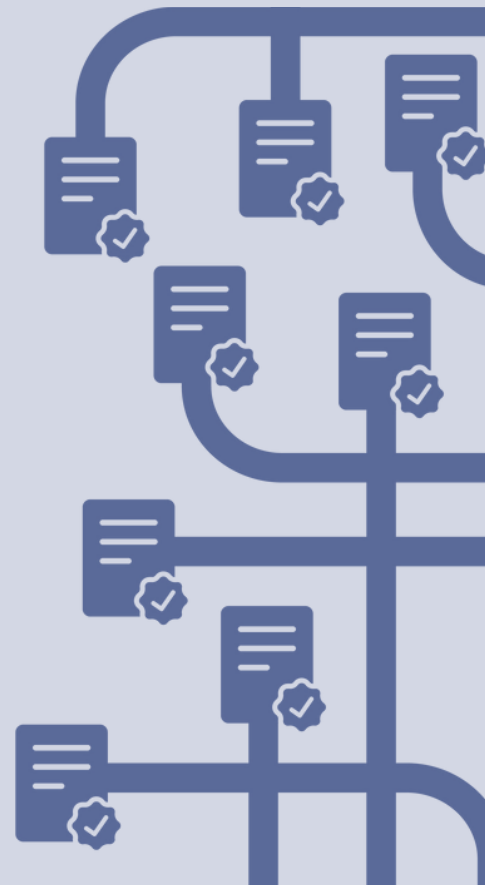
Below is a range of strategies to help you and your PA communicate effectively. Breaking down strategies for good communication makes the tasks much more manageable.

The techniques we will cover in this guide include:

1. Providing your PAs with documents and guides.
2. Regular communication via email
3. Sending reminder emails to your team
4. Directly emailing specific PAs with feedback.
5. Sending via email motivational Monday quotes
6. Sending positive emails or letting your PAs know you appreciate their hard work
7. Strong disciplinary procedure
8. Meetings
9. Supervision meetings (sometimes called appraisals)
10. Informal conversations
11. Disciplinary procedures
12. WhatsApp group for your team of PAs
13. Team bonding activities
14. Something Fun

In the next section, I will break down the techniques into 7 strategies plus something fun.

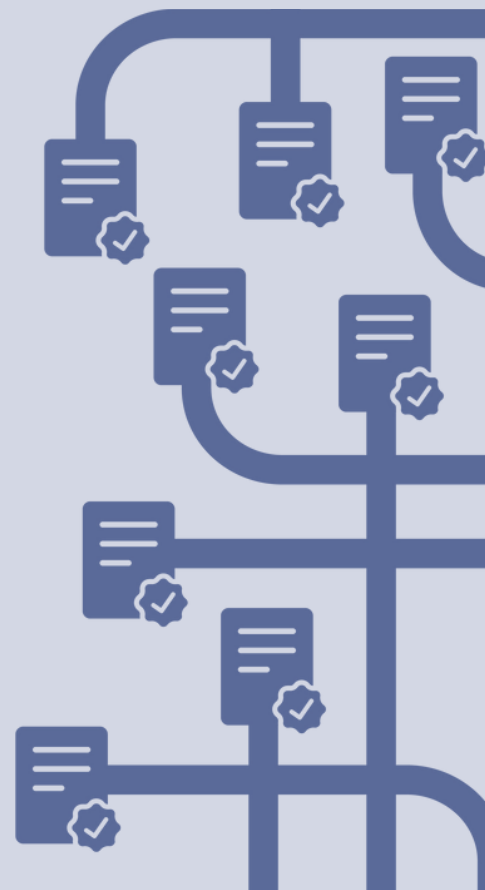
“ Having strategies in place can be very useful when employing PAs ”



Strategy 1: Documents

1. Using a get-to-know-me file and household manual can help PAs understand your needs and lifestyle. Regularly updating them will also help your team be aware of any changes.
 - a. Pathfinders Neuromuscular Alliance have created templates for both of these guides and a video tutorial on how to keep your documents on Google Drive and accessible at all times.
2. Ask your employer's insurance for a template employee handbook.
 - a. This can be very useful in explaining all policies and procedures that you have in place.
 - b. ACAS offers a variety of helpful employment templates for dealing with conflict. [CLICK HERE](#)
 - c. Always go to your employer's insurance whenever you have an issue with your PA. Even the small things are worth discussing with them.
 - d. Skills for Care offers an employer toolkit and other helpful information. [CLICK HERE](#)

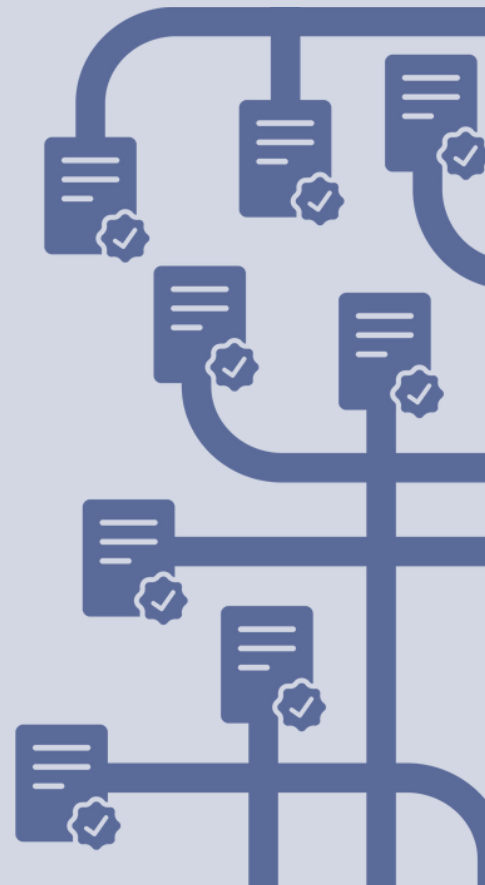
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Documents can either be printed or online. Whichever is best for you and your team.
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Strategy 2: Emails

1. Reminder emails encourage your team to stay on top of their jobs. They also remind them of your expectations and what is part of their job role.
 - a. Start the email by thanking them for their hard work. It always softens the blow before you start with constructive criticism.
2. Feedback emails are a way of directly giving PAs feedback one-to-one instead of a group reminder email.
 - a. If your general group reminder emails don't fix specific problems, you can try to email each PA directly.
 - b. This helps them realise what is going wrong and allows them to resolve the issue before dealing with it more formally.
3. You can schedule emails so you do not need to remember to do them weekly. You can set up a few weeks at once.
4. Sending motivational Monday quotes.
 - a. Going on Google and finding positive quotes can be a silly but positive way of encouraging your team.
5. Send feedback emails to new PAs throughout the onboarding period.
 - a. Sending an email now and then can boost morale and create a relaxed and happy work environment for you and your PAs.

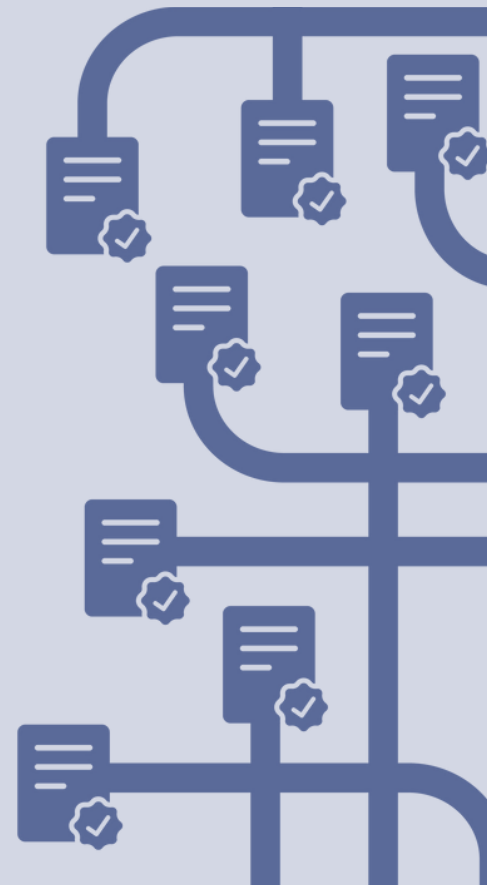
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Emails are a great tool to promote good communication between you and your PAs
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Strategy 3: Meetings

1. Staff meetings with all your PAs every few months can improve communication and provide an opportunity to problem-solve as a group.
 - a. It is also an excellent chance for your PAs to express any changes they have noticed with your disability and health condition.
2. If you have a team leader or head PA, they can mediate any meetings with your team or each PA.
 - a. Having someone with you can help with any anxiety you may feel surrounding confrontation.
3. You can also go ahead and hold meetings online via video call.
 - a. This can be helpful if your team live further away from your home.
4. Supervision meetings with individual PAs every 1–3 months can improve communication.
 - a. Your employers' insurance can explain how to hold a supervision meeting.
 - b. If you or your PAs find group conversations challenging, this is another option for dealing with them.

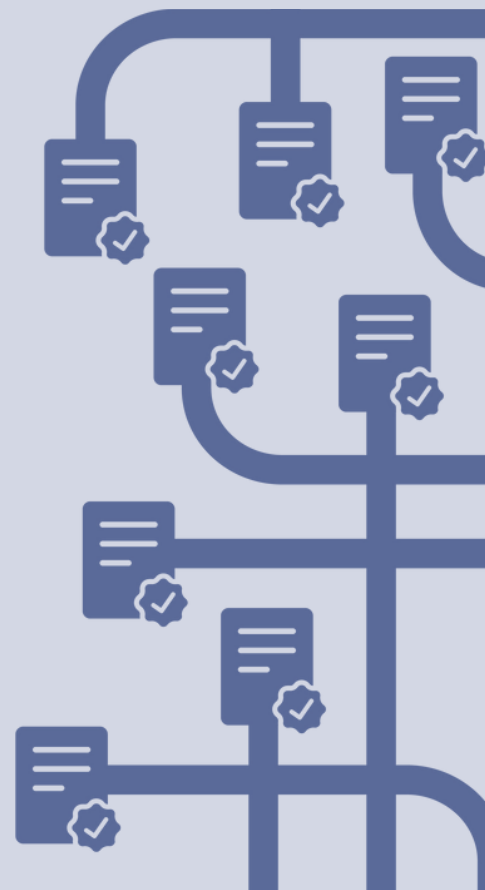
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*Remember
you can have
meetings
online via
video.*
”



Strategy 4: Informal Conversations

1. During training, there are many opportunities for informal conversations.
 - a. Learning the role from another PA can be beneficial.
 - b. Talk through the role when onboarding new PAs.
2. Assigning the team leader or head PA role can help mediate conflict and help support you when handling conflict.
 - a. Explaining the team leader role to new PAs can help them understand your policies and procedures.
 - b. PAs can also find it sometimes helpful to share their concerns with someone who isn't directly their employer.
3. Informal conversations with PAs can address issues and resolve minor conflicts before disciplinary procedures are needed.
 - a. If you have a verbal conversation with your PAs, it is essential to note when and what the outcome was.

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The role of team leader can be so helpful
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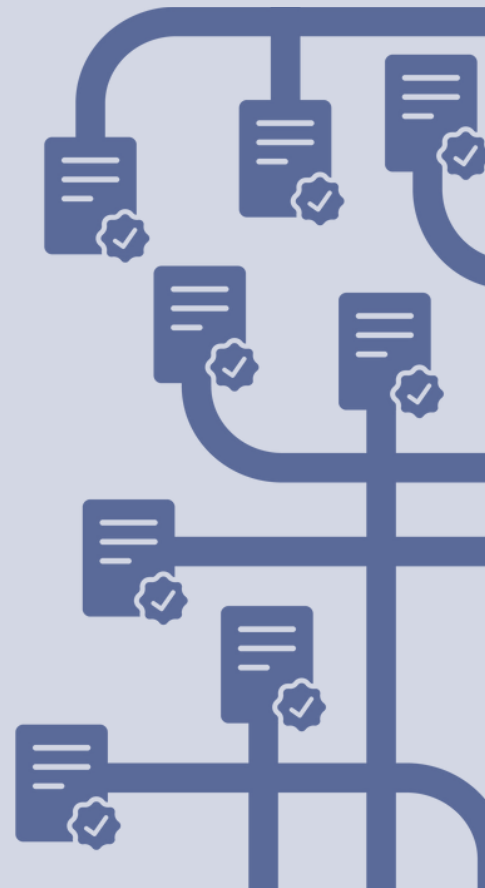


Strategy 5: Disciplinary Procedures

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Always speak
to your
employers
insurance
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1. Your employers' insurance can provide you with a contract of employment that includes your disciplinary procedure.
2. A standard disciplinary procedure is the 3-strike system: verbal warning, written warning, final warning, and dismissal.
3. Trying an informal warning before starting the disciplinary procedure may be something your insurance company recommends.
4. Confirming what was discussed via email is helpful if you have an informal conversation.

This strategy is one your employer's insurance will explain. Ensure any conversations, texts, and emails are recorded in case you need further action later. Your team leader can help with disciplinary procedures or informal conversations. This is useful if you find conflict challenging to navigate. Even if the issues are small, it is always helpful to discuss them with your employer's insurance and ask them how to handle things best.

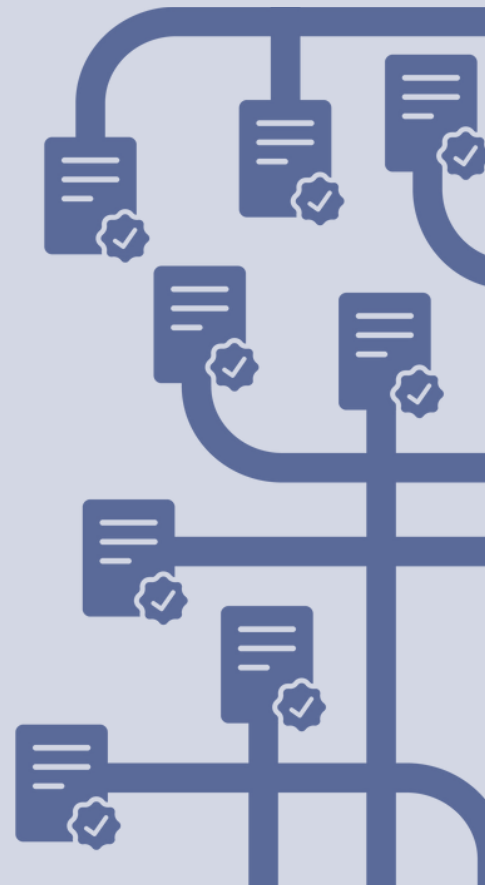


Strategy 6: WhatsApp

1. Creating a group WhatsApp for your team can be helpful.
 - a. Including your family, friends, and bank PAs means they can see when emergency cover is needed.
2. The group is also a valuable tool for updating your team on any changes to your needs, such as a course of antibiotics.
 - a. The group is another way you can share reminders and celebrate milestones.
 - b. You can also send motivational Monday quotes.
3. You can use WhatsApp as a great 'clock-in and clock-out' system.
 - a. If you do not have a camera at your door, ask staff to photograph your front door and send you the image showing them arriving and leaving.

These strategies are suggestions, and you can pick and choose which parts, if any, suit your lifestyle and care team. A useful tip is to set a time that messages can't be sent later (unless there is an emergency) because other people may be in bed, etc. This group can reduce the amount of messages you have to send. This is useful if you cannot access a device very easily.

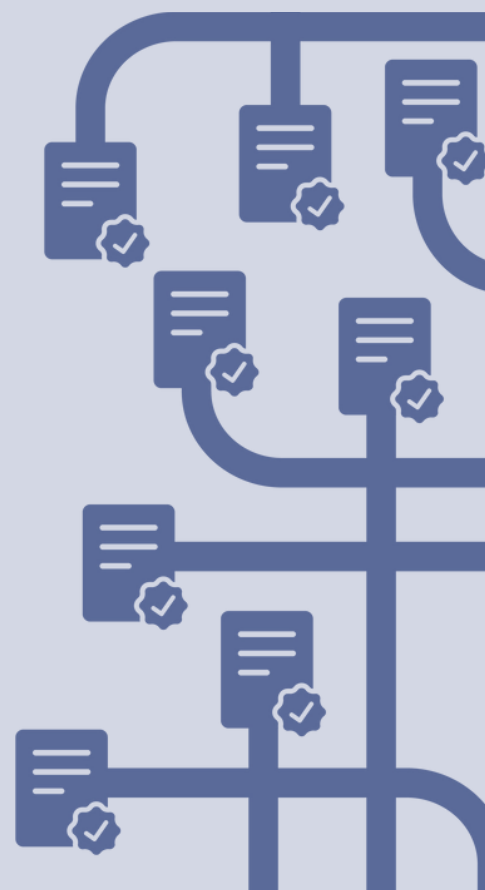
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WhatsApp is a great tool both in everyday situations and emergencies.
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Strategy 7: Appreciation

1. Holding activities can create a fun, happy team and offer the chance to bond and support each other.
 - a. These don't have to be expensive. You could arrange a movie night, cook dinner for everyone, host a sports day, have a Christmas/end-of-year party, etc.
2. Birthday and anniversary celebrations can be fun for you both to show appreciation.
 - a. Remember, this is a two-way street; you deserve appreciation for everything you do for your team.
 - b. Sending an email to acknowledge that the special date is perfect and still upholds a professional relationship.
3. Individual activities with each PA can promote positive, constructive feedback.
 - a. This can be simple, like a TV show or movie every few weeks/months.
 - b. Keeping communication open and flowing allows for issues to be addressed informally before they become massive problems.
4. Appreciation can boost staff retention. It acknowledges that your PAs are in every single area of your life, and they are there for the good, the bad, and the ugly. You appreciate their help, and they respect you as their employer.

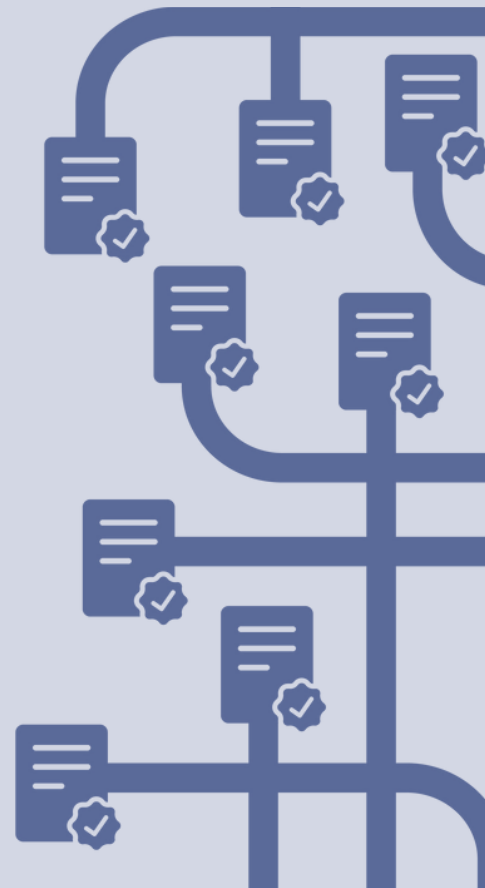
“Appreciation and professionalism are both possible for your team”



Something Fun: Team Name

1. Team names can bring the team together and unite them as one working partnership.
 - a. A team name gives a sense of identity and belonging.
2. Team names can be a way to show affection and appreciation whilst staying professional.
3. Team names can give a sense of belonging and equality (within reason).
4. Naming my team and arranging activities to do together can be a really easy and positive way to improve morale, retention, and gratitude.
5. My team have stated they feel pride when discussing their employment with others because very few people have an identity.
6. You may choose the term PA instead of carer because you feel that the term 'carer' has many negative connotations and does not represent the all-encompassing role of a PA.

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Team
names can
be anything
you want
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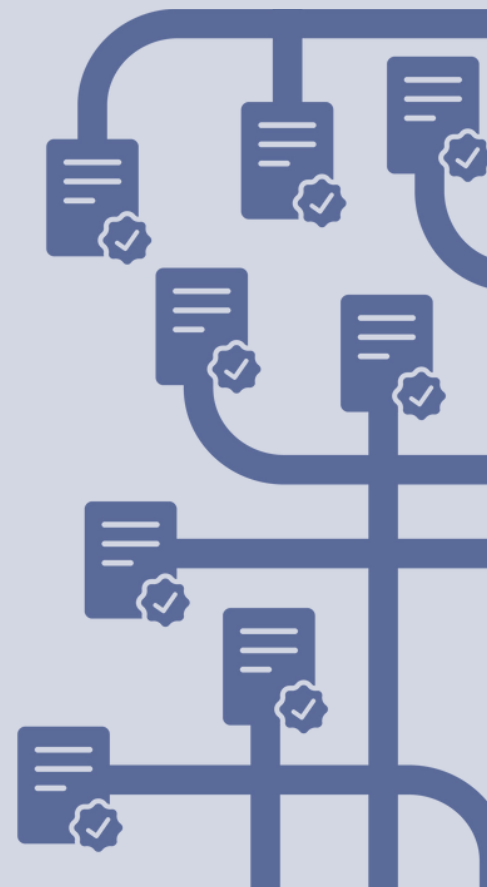


Communicating with your PA

Providing clear instructions about the expectations you have of your PAs may reduce the amount of confusion and conflict. I think it would be helpful to confirm discussions in person via email. Many disputes and issues can be resolved quickly with a conversation or email. Different PAs may prefer for problems to be addressed in a different format (verbal or written). You can have your documents online or printed. I would also remind your PAs of these documents and update them, which will help maintain positive communication with your team.

Gmail (and other email applications) allow you to send your emails immediately or schedule them later. This means you can sit, set up a load of emails to send and then carry on your daily life without the added pressure of yet another thing on your daily to-do list. It may seem silly to send your team motivational Monday emails or quotes, but this can create a positive working environment. A bit of work now can make a happier and more sustainable team in the long run. Pick and choose what works for you, your team, and your lifestyle. Addressing issues early on can reduce the need for formal disciplinary proceedings.

Communication is something that needs consistent work



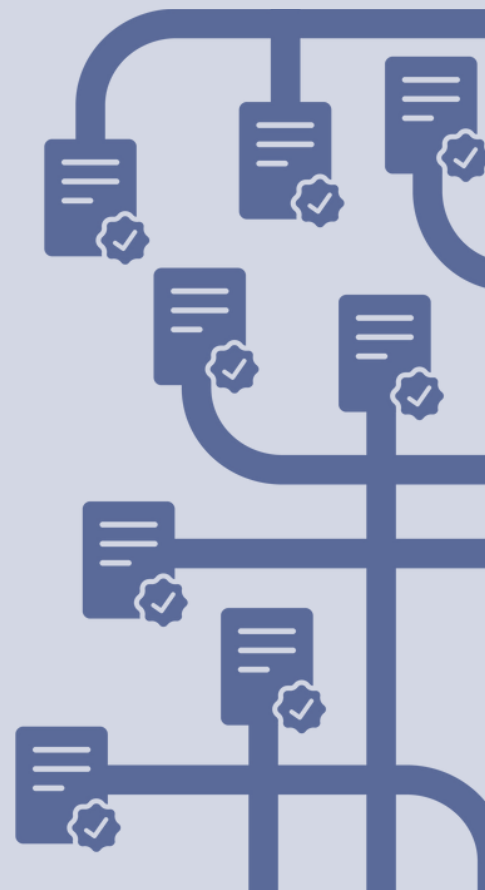
Communicating explained further

Meetings may be daunting, but once you have gotten advice from your insurance company, you will become more confident and comfortable. Another way of handling meetings is by designating someone close to you as 'team leader' or 'head PA'. They can mediate and hold meetings on your behalf. Your PAs can also share if they feel your needs have increased, and you get the opportunity to express your needs. Remember, you can hold meetings via video or in person.

When used correctly, informal conversations can be a helpful tool for calming situations.

Your employers' insurance can give you some great tips if you feel your PAs need to complete all tasks. The team leader role can be helpful and take the load off you when juggling your needs and life. Sometimes, mentioning something is enough to help your team get back on track. If this doesn't work, emailing and handling things more formally may be needed. Your employer's insurance can also help with this.

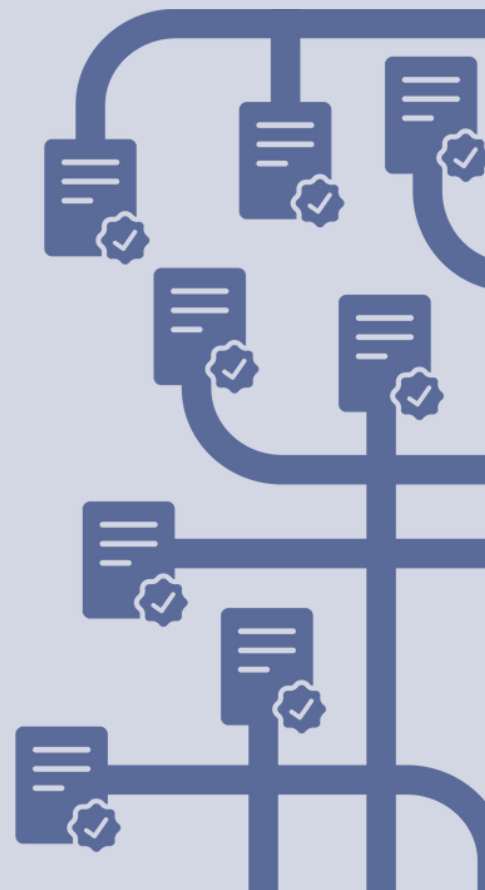
Communication can always change and evolve over time



Other Useful Information

Saying thank you or sending an appreciation email is a great way of being polite but without blurring the lines. Whatever works for you is best; this is your life and your care. Whatever makes you feel more comfortable is the root of all the suggestions. Sometimes things are hard, your PAs don't listen, or you feel like being an employer is too much. This is when you must talk about your frustrations with loved ones and ask for help. There is no shame in asking for help. It is also crucial for you to know that you don't have to beg for help. You are employing your PAs and paying them to meet your needs. You do not need to feel lucky that they are being kind or helping you. You are offering your PAs a great work package and you also deserve gratitude and respect for all you do for your team.

“Appreciation is key to a happy team of PAs and good staff retention”



Summary

"We hope you found this guide helpful"

Pathfinders Neuromuscular Alliance have created this template to help people who employ PAs share their care needs and lifestyle. This should not be taken as legal advice. We are not responsible for any liability for your use or misuse of information in this template. Please ensure you have checked any actions you wish to take with your employer's liability insurance, funding body, or an organisation such as ACAS.

This guide was created in collaboration with Charley-Louise Walker.

Please let us know if you use any other methods for communication between you and your PAs. We would love your input on this guide.

