

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP)

# The NADSP Code of Ethics



Making a world of difference  
**in people's lives**



# Introduction

## Vision

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who support people in their communities are called upon to make independent judgments on a frequent basis that involve both practical and ethical reasoning. The people who assume this complex role must examine their own values and beliefs while honoring those of the people they support.

## Purpose

A primary purpose of the DSP is to assist people who need support to lead self-directed lives and to participate fully in our nation's communities. This emphasis on empowerment and participation is critical. There are numerous pressures coming from organizations, government, social policy and societal prejudice that can shift focus and allegiance away from the people who are being supported. DSPs face ethical decisions on a daily basis and consistently feel the tension between the ideals of the profession and its practice.

In order to maintain the promise of partnership and respect that must exist in a supportive relationship, a strong ethical foundation is critical to help DSPs navigate the maze of influences that bombard them. The prejudices of society form powerful barriers, yet too often, the very social policies and service systems designed to help can create additional barriers that prevent many people with intellectual, developmental or physical disabilities from enjoying a rich and fulfilling life.

## Mission

It must be the mission of the DSP to honor the individual path suggested by the unique gifts, preferences, and needs of each person they support. DSPs will walk in partnership with the person, and those who are significant to them, toward a life of opportunity, well-being, freedom and contribution. While other professional groups (such as doctors, nurses, service coordinators and social workers) are directed by clearly defined criteria, the DSP is directed by the person they support.

Therefore, the direct support professional must exemplify ethical practice, high standards and creative vision as they partner with those they support in order to engage community and make everyday choices about their personal finances, physical well-being, social and intimate relationships and employment. The entire landscape of a person's life can change through ethical and intentional direct support services.

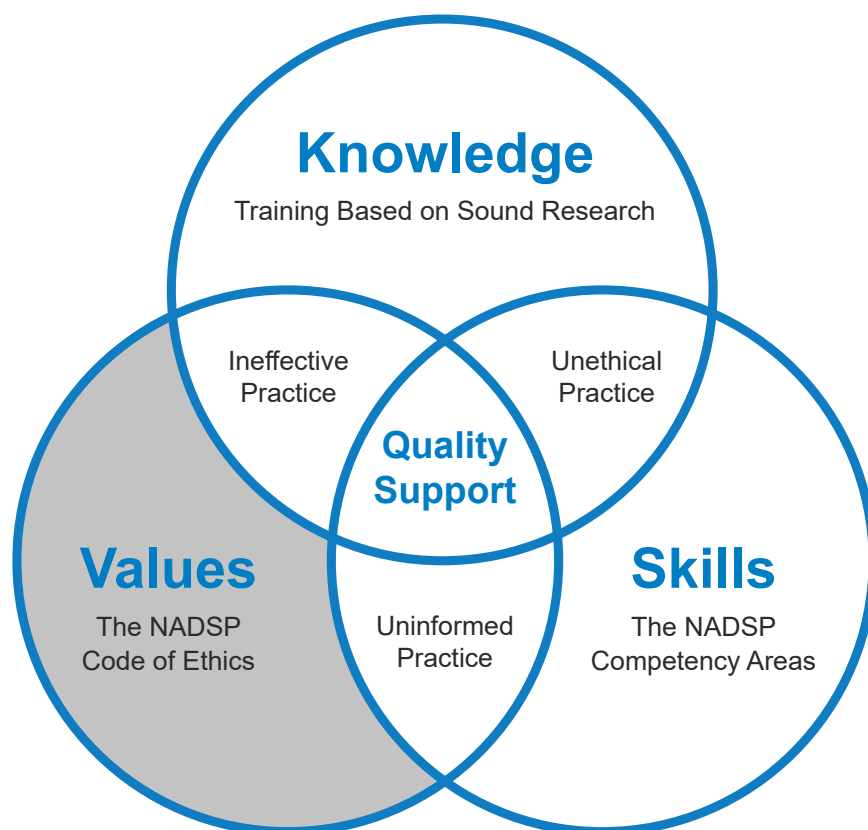
## Values, Skills and Knowledge

The knowledge and skills of community support practice must be joined with the ethical principles to create the environment needed to fully support people in making life choices. To do so effectively, we must all recognize DSPs as professionals who have values, skills and knowledge that constitute a unique and important profession, and who can infuse these beliefs into practice. Furthermore, there must be a commitment to hiring, developing and supporting DSPs to create a healthy sense of their own worth and potential. Direct Support Professionals must embrace their role to foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual responsibility with other DSPs regarding ethical practice.

# Why The NADSP Code of Ethics

In 2000, these issues led the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) to bring together a national panel that included direct support professionals, self-advocates, family members, human service professionals and researchers to identify the kinds of ethical situations that direct support professionals face and to develop a set of ethical guidelines to address them. In 2016, the NADSP reconvened a new and diverse stakeholder group to review the language of our original document. The revised Code of Ethics has not changed in content, it remains to serve as a straightforward and relevant ethical guide, shedding light on the shared path to a self-directed life. It is intended to guide direct support professionals in resolving ethical dilemmas they face every day and to encourage them to achieve the highest ideals of the profession.

## How Quality Happens



## The NADSP Code of Ethics Challenge

Direct support professionals, agency leaders, policymakers and people receiving support are urged to read the Code of Ethics and to consider ways that these ethical statements can be incorporated into daily practice. The beliefs and attitudes expressed in the Code of Ethics are a cornerstone of the profession. This Code of Ethics is not the handbook of the profession, but rather a roadmap to assist us in staying the course of securing freedom, justice, and equality for all.

# The Nine Tenets of the Code of Ethics

## Person-Centered Supports

As a DSP, my first allegiance is to the person I support; all other activities and functions I perform flow from this allegiance.

### Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Commit to person-centered supports as best practice.
- Focus first on the person and understand that my role in direct supports will require flexibility, creativity and commitment.
- Recognize that each person is capable of directing their own life.
- Honor those who cannot speak by seeking other ways of understanding them.
- Recognize that the unique culture, social network, circumstances, personality, preferences, needs and gifts of each person I support must be the primary guides for the selection, structure and use of supports for that person.
- Advocate with the person I support and others when the demands of the system override the needs of those I support, or when individual preferences, needs or gifts are neglected for any reason.

## Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being

As a DSP, I will commit to promote the emotional, physical and personal well-being of the people I support. I will encourage growth and recognize the autonomy of those receiving support while being attentive and energetic in reducing the risk of harm.

### Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Develop a respectful relationship with the people I support that is based on mutual trust and maintains professional boundaries.
- Understand and respect the values of the people I support and facilitate their expression of choices related to those values.
- Assist the people I support to prevent illness, avoid unnecessary risk and understand their options and possible consequences that relate to their physical health, safety and emotional well-being.
- Partner with each person and their support network to identify areas of risk and create safeguards specific to these concerns.
- Challenge other support team members, such as doctors, nurses, therapists, coworkers and family members, to recognize and support the rights of people to make informed decisions even when these decisions involve personal risk.
- Be vigilant in identifying and reporting any situation in which the people I support are at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or harm.
- Address challenging behaviors proactively and respectfully. If aversive or deprivation intervention techniques are included in an approved support plan, I will work diligently to find alternatives and pursue the elimination of these techniques from the person's plan.

## Integrity and Responsibility

As a DSP, I will support the mission and vitality of my profession to assist people in leading self-directed lives and to foster a spirit of partnership with the people I support, other professionals and the community.

### Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Be aware of my own values and how they influence my professional decisions.
- Maintain competency in my profession through learning and ongoing collaboration with others.
- Assume responsibility and accountability for my decisions and actions.
- Advance my knowledge and skills through ongoing professional development and lifelong learning.
- Seek advice and guidance on ethical issues from others as needed to inform decision-making.
- Recognize the importance of modeling valued behaviors to co-workers, people I support and the community at-large.
- Practice responsible work habits.

## Confidentiality

As a DSP, I will safeguard and respect the confidentiality and privacy of the people I support.

### Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Seek information directly from those I support regarding their wishes in how, when and with whom privileged information should be shared.
- Recognize that confidentiality agreements are subject to federal and state laws and regulations, as well as agency policies.
- Recognize that it may be necessary to disclose confidential information in order to prevent serious or imminent harm to the person I support or others.
- Seek out qualified guidance to help clarify situations where the correct course of action is unclear to me.

## Justice, Fairness and Equity

As a DSP, I will affirm the human rights as well as the civil rights and responsibilities of the people I support. I will promote and practice justice, fairness and equity for the people I support and the community as a whole.

### Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Assist the people I support to access opportunities and resources in the community that are available to everyone.
- Facilitate the expression and understanding of rights and responsibilities with the people I support.
- Understand the guardianship or other legal representation of the people I support, and work in partnership with legal representatives to assure that the person's preferences and interests are honored.

# Respect

As a DSP, I will respect the human dignity and uniqueness of the people I support. I will recognize each person I support as valuable and promote their value within communities.

## Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Seek to understand the people I support today in the context of their personal history, their social and family networks and their hopes and dreams for the future.
- Recognize and respect the cultural context (such as gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class) of the person supported and their social network.
- Honor the choices, preferences, abilities and opinions of the people I support.
- Protect the privacy of the people I support.
- Interact with the people I support in a manner that is respectful to them.
- Provide opportunities for the people I support to be viewed and treated with respect and embraced as integral, contributing members of their communities.
- Promote the use of language that is respectful, sensitive and contemporary.
- Practice positive intention and transparency in my interactions.

# Relationships

As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to develop and maintain relationships.

## Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Advocate with the people I support when they do not have opportunities to build and maintain relationships.
- Recognize the importance of maintaining reciprocal relationships and proactively facilitate relationships between the people I support, their family and friends.
- Assure that people have the opportunity to make informed choices in safely expressing their sexuality.
- Separate my personal beliefs and expectations regarding relationships (including sexual relationships) from those of the people I support. If I am unable to separate my own beliefs and preferences in a given situation, I will remove myself from the situation and seek the assistance of a qualified coworker.
- Refrain from expressing negative views, harsh judgments and stereotyping of people.

# Self-Determination

As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to direct the course of their own lives.

## Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Support the rights of individuals to lead self-directed lives, working in partnership with other members of the person's support network.
- Promote self-determination in physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual pursuits.
- Honor a person's right to assume risk in an informed manner.
- Recognize that each individual has potential for lifelong learning and growth.
- Celebrate, accept and learn from life's rich experiences with people through triumphs and failures.

# Advocacy

As a DSP, I will advocate with the people I support for justice, inclusion and full community participation.

## Furthermore, as a DSP, I will:

- Support people to speak for themselves in all matters, and offer my assistance when needed.
- Represent the best interests of people who cannot speak for themselves by partnering with the individual and their support team to gather information and find alternative means of expression.
- Advocate for laws, regulations, policies and procedures that promote justice and inclusion for all people with disabilities.
- Promote human, legal and civil rights for all people and help those I encounter to understand these rights.
- Seek additional advocacy services when those that I provide are not sufficient.
- Seek out qualified guidance when I am unsure of the appropriate course of action in my advocacy efforts.
- Recognize that those who victimize people with disabilities must be held accountable.

*Formally adopted by the NADSP Board of Directors • April 12, 2016*



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