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Direct Support Professional *Competency Areas*

The Foundation of Direct Support Practice

National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals, Inc.

1971 Western Avenue, #261

Albany, New York 12203

P 844-44NADSP

www.nadsp.org

Direct Support Professional Competency Areas

The Foundation of Direct Support Practice

The following is a list of fifteen competency areas that have been approved by the NADSP Board of Directors in 2016. They provide the framework by which direct support professionals meet industry demand for quality by setting expectations for job performance and a basis for objective performance evaluation. The competency areas ultimately create the foundation of our national certifications which require the practical demonstration of knowledge, intentional execution of skill, and an opportunity for reflection from the direct support professional.

Developed through extensive research and nationally validated through an external process, these competency areas closely align with the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Home and Community Based Services Settings Rule (2014) and provided the anchor for the CMS Road Map of Core Competencies for the Direct Service Workforce which were developed in 2014 to

identify a common set of core competencies across community-based Long-Term Support and Service (LTSS) sectors for the purpose of informing direct support service delivery and promote best practices in community-based LTSS.

The NADSP competency areas are identified by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration’s Competency Model for Long-Term Care Supports & Services as providing industry sector technical competencies - the first and only set of LTSS competencies to receive such approval by the United States Department of Labor.

In addition to the fifteen general competency areas, which are broad categories that describe effective work performance, each area contains corresponding skill statements which provide highly specific, observable skills that may be demonstrated by a worker.

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Area 1: Participant Empowerment

The Direct Support Professional enhances the ability of the participant to lead a self-determining life by providing the support and information necessary to build self-esteem, and assertiveness; and to make decisions.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP assists and supports the participant to develop strategies, make informed choices, follow through on responsibilities, and take risks.
- The competent DSP promotes participant partnership in the design of support services, consulting the person and involving him or her in the support process.
- The competent DSP provides opportunities for the participant to be a self-advocate by increasing awareness of self-advocacy methods and techniques, encouraging and assisting the participant to speak on his or her own behalf, and providing information on peer support and self-advocacy groups.
- The competent DSP provides information about human, legal, civil rights and other resources, facilitates access to such information and assists the participant to use information for self-advocacy and decision making about living, work, and social relationships.

Area 2: Communication

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about the range of effective communication strategies and skills necessary to establish a collaborative relationship with the participant.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP uses effective, sensitive communication skills to build rapport and channels of communication by recognizing and adapting to the range of participant communication styles.
- The competent DSP has knowledge of and uses modes of communication that are appropriate to the communication needs of participants.
- The skilled DSP learns and uses terminology appropriately, explaining as necessary to ensure participant understanding.

Area 3: Assessment

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about formal and informal assessment practices in order to respond to the needs, desires and interests of the participants.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP initiates or assists in the initiation of an assessment process by gathering information (e.g., participant's self-assessment and history, prior records, test results, additional evaluation) and informing the participant about what to expect throughout the assessment process.



- The competent DSP conducts or arranges for assessments to determine the needs, preferences, and capabilities of the participants using appropriate assessment tools and strategies, reviewing the process for inconsistencies, and making corrections as necessary.
- The competent DSP discusses findings and recommendations with the participant in a clear and understandable manner, following up on results and reevaluating the findings as necessary.

Area 4: Community and Service Networking

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about the formal and informal supports available in his or her community and skilled in assisting the participant to identify and gain access to such supports.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP helps to identify the needs of the participant for community supports, working with the participant's informal support system, and assisting with, or initiating identified community connections.
- The competent DSP researches, develops, and maintains information on community and other resources relevant to the needs of participants.
- The competent DSP ensures participant access to needed and available community resources coordinating supports across agencies.
- The competent DSP participates in outreach to potential participants.

Area 5: Facilitation of Services

The Direct Support Professional is knowledgeable about a range of participatory planning techniques and is skilled in implementing plans in a collaborative and expeditious manner.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP maintains collaborative professional relationships with the participant and all support team members (including family/friends), follows ethical standards of practice (e.g., confidentiality, informed consent, etc.), and recognizes his or her own personal limitations.
- The competent DSP assists and/or facilitates the development of an individualized plan based on participant preferences, needs, and interests.
- The competent DSP assists and/or facilitates the implementation of an individualized plan to achieve specific outcomes derived from participants' preferences, needs and interests.
- The competent DSP assists and/or facilitates the review of the achievement of individual participant outcomes.



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Area 6: Community Living Skills & Supports

The Direct Support Professional has the ability to match specific supports and interventions to the unique needs of individual participants and recognizes the importance of friends, family and community relationships.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP assists the participant to meet his or her physical (e.g., health, grooming, toileting, eating) and personal management needs (e.g., human development, human sexuality), by teaching skills, providing supports, and building on individual strengths and capabilities.
- The competent DSP assists the participant with household management (e.g., meal prep, laundry, cleaning, decorating) and with transportation needs to maximize his or her skills, abilities and independence.
- The competent DSP assists with identifying, securing and using needed equipment (e.g., adaptive equipment) and therapies (e.g., physical, occupational and communication).
- The competent DSP supports the participant in the development of friendships and other relationships.
- The competent community based support worker assists the participant to recruit and train service providers as needed.

Area 7: Education, Training & Self-Development

The Direct Support Professional should be able to identify areas for self improvement, pursue necessary educational/training resources, and share knowledge with others.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP completes required training education/certification, continues professional development, and keeps abreast of relevant resources and information.
- The competent DSP educates participants, co-workers and community members about issues by providing information and support and facilitating training.

Area 8: Advocacy

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about the diverse challenges facing participants (e.g., human rights, legal, administrative and financial) and should be able to identify and use effective advocacy strategies to overcome such challenges.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP and the participant identify advocacy issues by gathering information, reviewing and analyzing all aspects of the issue.
- The competent DSP has current knowledge of laws, services, and community resources to assist and educate participants to secure needed supports.



- The competent DSP facilitates, assists, and/or represents the participant when there are barriers to his or her service needs and lobbies decision-makers when appropriate to overcome barriers to services.
- The competent DSP interacts with and educates community members and organizations (e.g., employer, landlord, civic organization) when relevant to participant's needs or services.

Area 9: Vocational, Educational & Career Support

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about the career and education related concerns of the participant and should be able to mobilize the resources and support necessary to assist the participant to reach his or her goals.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP explores with the participant his/her vocational interests and aptitudes, assists in preparing for job or school entry, and reviews opportunities for continued career growth.
- The competent DSP assists the participant in identifying job/training opportunities and marketing his/her capabilities and services.
- The competent DSP collaborates with employers and school personnel to support the participant, adapting the environment, and providing job retention supports.

Area 10: Crisis Prevention and Intervention

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about crisis prevention, intervention and resolution techniques and should match such techniques to particular circumstances and individuals.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP identifies the crisis, defuses the situation, evaluates and determines an intervention strategy and contacts necessary supports.
- The competent DSP continues to monitor crisis situations, discussing the incident with authorized staff and participant(s), adjusting supports and the environment, and complying with regulations for reporting.

Area 11: Organizational Participation

The Direct Support Professional is familiar with the mission and practices of the support organization and participates in the life of the organization.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP contributes to program evaluations, and helps to set organizational priorities to ensure quality.
- The competent DSP incorporates sensitivity to cultural, religious, racial, disability, and gender issues into daily practices and interactions.



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- The competent DSP provides and accepts co-worker support, participating in supportive supervision, performance evaluation, and contributing to the screening of potential employees.
- The competent DSP provides input into budget priorities, identifying ways to provide services in a more cost-effective manner.

Area 12: Documentation

The Direct Support Professional is aware of the requirements for documentation in his or her organization and is able to manage these requirements efficiently.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP maintains accurate records, collecting, compiling and evaluating data, and submitting records to appropriate sources in a timely fashion.
- The competent DSP maintains standards of confidentiality and ethical practice.
- The competent DSP learns and remains current with appropriate documentation systems, setting priorities and developing a system to manage documentation.

Area 13: Building and Maintaining Friendships & Relationships

The Direct Support Professional supports the participant in the development of friendships and other relationships.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP assists the individual as needed in planning for community activities and events (e.g., making reservation, staff needs, money, materials, accessibility).
- The competent DSP assists the individual as needed in arranging transportation for community events.
- The competent DSP documents community activities and events.
- The competent DSP encourages and assists the individual as needed in facilitating friendships and peer interactions.
- The competent DSP encourages and assists the individual as needed in communication with parents/family (e.g., phone calls, visits, letters).
- The competent DSP implements individual supports regarding community activities.
- The competent DSP provides incentive or motivation for consumer involvement in community outings.
- The competent DSP assists the individual as needed in getting to know and interacting with his/her neighbors.
- The competent DSP encourages and assists the individual as needed in dating.
- The competent DSP encourages and assists the individual as needed in communicating with social workers and financial workers.



Area 14: Provide Person Centered Supports

The Direct Support Professional facilitates what is important to the person, which requires continual listening and learning in alliance with the person, their family and friends.

Skill Statements

- The competent DSP provides support to people using a person centered approach.
- The competent DSP modifies support programs and interventions to ensure they are person centered.
- The competent DSP challenges co-workers and supervisors to use person centered practices.
- The competent DSP is knowledgeable about person centered planning techniques.
- The competent DSP assists individuals in developing person centered plans.

Area 15: Supporting Health and Wellness

The Direct Support Professional promotes the health and wellness of people receiving supports and services.

Skill Statements

- Administers medications accurately and in accordance with agency policy and procedures.
- Observes and implements appropriate actions to promote healthy living and to prevent illness and accidents.
- Uses appropriate first aid/safety procedures when responding to emergencies.
- Assists individuals in scheduling, keeping, and following through on all health appointments.
- Assists individuals in completing personal care (e.g., hygiene and grooming) activities.
- Assists with identifying, securing and using needed adaptive equipment (i.e. adaptive equipment) and therapies (e.g., physical, occupational, speech, respiratory, psychological).
- Assists individuals in implementing health and medical treatments.
- Assists individuals to take an active role in their health care decisions.



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