



RI DSP Competencies Workgroup

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**CORE**  
**COMPETENCIES**  
**GUIDE**

# Introduction

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The Rhode Island Direct Support Professional (DSP) Competencies Workgroup has endorsed and adopted the DSP Competency Areas as published by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals in 2016, with minor revisions. The fifteen NADSP competency areas are themselves based on and informed by the Direct Service Worker (DSW) competencies issued by the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) in 2014.

**These competencies are not mandatory nor required by any individual state agency.** Rather, they are offered as guidance to help inform and elevate the DSP occupation. Parties are invited and encouraged to use this document as a resource to support and enhance the work of individuals and programs that work directly with people who have intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Each Competency area has corresponding skill statements which describe the knowledge and skills DSPs must have to demonstrate competency in each area. Through each competency area, DSPs have the opportunity to address challenges, work on issues identified by the person they support, or assist a person in achieving a particular goal. The competencies are accompanied by a list of additional skill and knowledge requirements that the Workgroup has determined essential for success in the DSP profession. This document provides a framework by which DSPs can effectively meet industry and community demand for quality by setting expectations for job performance and a basis for objective performance evaluation.

If you work directly with individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the Core Competencies can assist you in planning and tracking your own professional development activities as you build your portfolio of training and experience. The document can guide you in deciding what knowledge and skills you want to focus on for your next training activity or area of study.

If you are a program administrator who supervises DSP staff, you can use the competencies as a resource to assist in staff evaluation, recognition and support for ongoing learning and continuous program improvement.

If you are provider of training for the DSP profession, whether youth or adult occupational training, 2-year or 4-year institution of higher education, or in-service training provider, this document identifies the broad range of competencies that should be integrated into curriculum, coursework, and experiential learning. You can use the Core Competencies document to assist you in highlighting the knowledge and skills to be addressed in training or preparatory programs.

The DSP Competencies Workgroup extends our deepest gratitude to the stakeholders and representatives who participated in the development of these competencies and looks forward to our continued efforts together to build a most just, inclusive, and prosperous Rhode Island.



# CORE COMPETENCIES GUIDE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	3
Area 1: Participant Empowerment.....	4
Area 2: Communication .....	5
Area 3: Assessment .....	5
Area 4: Community and Service Networking.....	6
Area 5: Facilitation of Service .....	6
Area 6: Community Living Skills and Support .....	7
Area 7: Education, Training, And Self-Development.....	7
Area 8: Advocacy .....	8
Area 9: Vocational, Educational, and Career Support .....	8
Area 10: Crisis Prevention and Intervention.....	9
Area 11: Organizational Participation.....	9
Area 12: Documentation .....	10
Area 13: Building and Maintaining Friendships .....	10
Area 14: Provide Person-centered Supports.....	11
Area 15: Support Health and Wellness.....	11
Area 16: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion .....	12
Rhode Island: Additional Priorities and Areas .....	13



## *Background*

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### **Rhode Island Direct Support Professional (DSP) Competencies Workgroup**

The RI DSP Competencies Workgroup was formed in January 2022 with the responsibility to identify and develop core occupational competencies to help guide, inform, and prepare the state's DSP workforce. The workgroup was comprised of representatives from state agencies, service providers, higher education, advocacy, and customers.

#### **Why were the NADSP Competencies Endorsed?**

The Workgroup determined there were a number of strengths to the NADSP Core Competencies.

The NADSP are a recognized national standard.

The NADSP Competencies were developed from and informed by the CMS Core Competency areas.

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.

The NADSP Core Competencies provide a more substantial foundation for Retention and Career Ladder initiatives, and more robust professional benchmark for DSPs to be able quantify/portfolio their prior training or job experience within Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) models and pipelines to degree programs.

## AREA 1:

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### **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:

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### **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 and methods of communication that are appropriate to the communication needs of participants, including appropriate assistive technologies.
- The skilled DSP learns and uses terminology appropriately, explaining as necessary to ensure participant understanding

## AREA 3:

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### **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:

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### **COMMUNITY AND SERVICE NETWORKING**

The Direct Support Professional should be knowledgeable about the formal and informal natural supports available in his or her community of choice 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 natural 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:

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### **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.

## AREA 6:

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### **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 DSP assists the participant to recruit and train service providers as needed.

## AREA 7:

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### **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:

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### **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:

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### **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:

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### **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:

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### **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 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 and methods of communication that are appropriate to the communication needs of participants, including appropriate assistive technologies.
- The skilled DSP learns and uses terminology appropriately, explaining as necessary to ensure participant understanding.

## AREA 12:

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### **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:

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### **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:

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### **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:

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### **SUPPORTING HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

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

#### Skill Statements

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

## AREA 16:

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### **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

The Direct Support Professional has the ability to work with a variety of individuals and groups in a constructive and respectful manner while appreciating the unique contribution of an inclusive workforce that brings together the talents of people across multiple identities, including: race, creed, color, religion, national origins, age, sex, pregnancy, disability, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or associational preferences.

#### Skill Statements

- The competent DSP administers medications accurately and in accordance with agency policy and procedures.
- The competent DSP provides or accesses services that fit with the individuals' culture or associational preferences.
- The competent DSP seeks to learn about different cultures and associational preferences to provide better support and services.
- The competent DSP recognizes their own biases and doesn't let them interfere in work relationships.
- The competent DSP respects the cultural needs and unique preferences of each individual.
- The competent DSP engages in on-going self-reflection and continues to advance their knowledge and skills related to diversity, equity and inclusion
- The competent DSP assists the individual to find social, learning and recreational opportunities valued in his or her culture.

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### **ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES AND AREAS**

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

#### Skill Statements

- The competent DSP is trained in CPR, First Aid, and AED use
- The competent DSP has knowledge of applicable state and federal laws and regulations regarding abuse and mistreatment
- The competent DSP is aware of all proper and required communication vehicles in state for reporting abuse, neglect, and mistreatment
- The Competent DSP is aware of and abides by their organization's Code of Ethics or related document. In the absence of an organizational Code of Ethics, the Competent DSP is aware of and abides by the [National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics](#)





