

# Direct Support Professional Dialogues: *Living the Code of Ethics*

**A Report to the New York  
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Developmental Disabilities  
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Direct Support Professionals



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# Introduction

“Putting People First” is more than a slogan, a catchy tagline. It is the heart and soul of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), its purpose, its yardstick against which all other activities must be measured.

It is also a challenge.

Each day, OPWDD supports scores of thousands of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities whose needs and desires are as multiple and varied as is their number. Central to this effort is a public and private sector direct support workforce whose nearly 100,000 members have diverse ethnic, racial and educational backgrounds and whose different life experiences shape what they bring to the job.

It is critical that these direct support professionals share the same value of “Putting People First.” If not, in the worst case scenario, abuse and neglect may occur; at best, the individuals they support may enjoy a safe and nice day, but miss opportunities for achieving a great and fulfilling life.

As such, in 2012, OPWDD adopted the Direct Support Professional Code of Ethics developed in 2001 by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP).<sup>1</sup> NADSP developed the Code with the input of self-advocates, families, direct support professionals, clinicians and program administrators from across the country. It is intended to offer value-based guidance to direct support professionals as they support and walk in partnership with the individuals they support on their unique journey toward a life of opportunity, well being, freedom and contribution.

The Code of Ethics, presented in its entirety in the Appendix, has nine central principles:

1. ***Person-Centered Supports:*** As a Direct Support Professional (DSP), my first allegiance is to the person I support; all other activities and functions I perform flow from this allegiance.
2. ***Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being:*** As a DSP, I am responsible for supporting the emotional, physical, and personal well-being of the individuals receiving support. I will encourage growth and recognize the autonomy of the individuals receiving support while being attentive and energetic in reducing their risk of harm.
3. ***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.

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<sup>1</sup> NADSP is a national, non-profit organization with Chapters in 26 States and more than 85 supporting organizations which serve individuals with intellectual, developmental and other disabilities. Its mission is to promote the development of a highly competent human services workforce which supports people with disabilities in achieving their life goals. NADSP’s local Chapter is the Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State (DSPANYS). For more information about NADSP visit: [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org).

4. **Confidentiality:** As a DSP, I will safeguard and respect the confidentiality and privacy of the people I support.
5. **Justice, Fairness and Equity:** As a DSP, I will promote and practice justice, fairness, and equity for the people I support and the community as a whole. I will affirm the human rights, civil rights and responsibilities of the people I support.
6. **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 help others understand their value.
7. **Relationships:** As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to develop and maintain relationships.
8. **Self-Determination:** As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to direct the course of their own lives.
9. **Advocacy:** As a DSP, I will advocate with the people I support for justice, inclusion, and full community participation.

OPWDD recognized that simply “adopting” a Code of Ethics as a statewide policy would not be sufficient. The values embodied in the Code must be understood and embraced by the direct support workforce. And, unlike other policy directives, which may be amenable to a “read and sign” training approach, the Code of Ethics required more to assure that it became a part of the workforce culture.

Toward that end, OPWDD partnered with NADSP to engage in one-day Direct Support Professional Dialogues across the state — the centerpiece of which would be the Code of Ethics. OPWDD’s Commissioner, Courtney Burke, also identified questions and issues on which she wanted DSP feedback during the dialogues.

Six regional DSP Dialogues were conducted. This report presents a summary of what was learned. Part I presents an overview of the DSP Dialogues and the results of evaluations by those who participated. Part II presents a summary of the DSPs’ feedback on the questions and issues raised during the dialogues. A brief conclusion follows.

# Part I: Overview of the Direct Support Professional Dialogues and Participant Evaluations

During July through December 2012, six all-day DSP Dialogues were held in various locations in New York:

- Albany, July 26
- Poughkeepsie, August 8
- Canandaigua, August 29
- New York City, September 20
- Syracuse, October 17
- Long Island, December 11

Approximately 180 staff, about 30 per each one-day session, attended the six dialogues. Direct support professionals and frontline supervisors constituted the vast majority of participants. At each dialogue session, about half the participants came from OPWDD-operated programs while the other half came from not-for-profit agencies certified by OPWDD. The mix of state and voluntary DSPs was intentional in order to generate information from both sectors on how to best implement the Code of Ethics throughout the developmental disabilities system. In total, staff from each of OPWDD's six State Operations Offices and from more than 50 not-for-profit agencies attended.

The dialogues were facilitated by two NADSP representatives: Joseph Macbeth, NADSP's Executive Director, and John Raffaele, NADSP's Ethics Facilitator. Dianne Henk, OPWDD's Director of Culture Initiatives, also participated in the dialogues as Commissioner Burke's representative.

The dialogues had several simple rules:

- Everyone's opinion is valued and welcomed;
- Be courteous, respectful and allow all to express their views;
- Use person-first language when speaking and/or describing situations; and
- Although notes would be taken, all participants would remain anonymous; neither they nor their agencies would be identified.

The latter point started out the dialogue day, which began at 8:30 a.m., with participants adopting pseudonyms, putting their assumed identity on name tags and introducing themselves by their new name and their years of service in supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities — which ranged from less than six months to more than 25 years.

During the morning, participants were provided an overview of the five elements common to all professions, with a special focus on the role a Code of Ethics plays in all professions, from medicine, to law, to social work. The session delved into the Code of Ethics for practitioners of the profession of direct support developed by the NADSP and recently adopted by OPWDD. It also touched on other NADSP initiatives to advance the profession of direct support, including the promulgation of competency skill sets, which OPWDD is adapting for its service network, and training and credentialing opportunities.

Following a break, participants were immersed in an interactive exercise to examine the nine principles of the Direct Support Professional Code of Ethics. Through role plays, they explored typical situations they

encounter every day which raise ethical dilemmas, and they discussed the application of the Code as a guide in reconciling such situations.

After lunch, provided through the courtesy of The College of Direct Support, participants engaged in a facilitated dialogue about the Code of Ethics and issues about which Commissioner Burke sought their input. The dialogue focused on five questions. (Key themes emerging from the dialogue are presented in Part II.) The five questions were:

1. Now that you have been introduced to the Code of Ethics and understand how they can guide your work, what barriers will you face in implementing them when you return to work?
2. What suggestions do you have to address these barriers, or what help is needed to live up to the Code?
3. If you had the opportunity to speak with Commissioner Burke and tell her anything you wanted, what would it be?
4. How would you like to be recognized as a direct support professional?
5. Bringing it Home. What can you do to bring today's lessons home to where you work?

The day ended at 4 p.m. with participants viewing a brief video, *A Credo for Support*,<sup>2</sup> and a public attestation to live and work by the Code of Ethics.

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<sup>2</sup> *A Credo for Support* is a five minute video written and produced by Norman Kunc and Emma Van der Klift and spoken by members of People First of San Luis Obispo. It offers a series of suggestions for people who care about and support someone with a disability. It prompts viewers to question the common perceptions of disability, professionalism, and support. *A Credo for Support* can be viewed at: [www.normemma.com/videos/index.htm](http://www.normemma.com/videos/index.htm).

## Reactions to the DSP Dialogues

The DSP Dialogues received an overwhelmingly positive response from those who attended. Evaluations were completed by 156 individuals, approximately 87% of the participants. As indicated in the table, using a rating scale of 1 to 5 — with 1 indicating “Poor” and 5 indicating “Excellent” — participants gave the dialogues high marks, most above 4.8, on each element of the day.

Asked whether they would recommend the DSP Dialogue program to others, 155 of the 156 respondents indicated they would. (One person completing an evaluation neglected to answer this question.)

<b>DSP Dialogues</b>	
Participant Ratings Based on 133 Evaluations Received <i>(On a Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 Indicating “Poor” and 5 Indicating “Excellent”)</i>	
<b>GENERAL CONTENT</b>	<b>RATING</b>
Quality of Speakers	4.97
Knowledge of Speakers	4.91
Content of Presentations	4.85
Length of Presentations	4.80
Relevance of Job-Related Information	4.80
Acquisition of New Knowledge/Skills	4.81
Quality & Relevance of Workshop Materials	4.88
<b>PRESENTATIONS</b>	<b>RATING</b>
Five Elements of a Profession	4.88
Code of Ethics Encounter – Role Play	4.93
Facilitated Discussion	4.83
Code of Ethics Attestation, <i>A Credo for Support</i>	4.84
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>RATING</b>
Organization and Flow of Workshop	4.88
Sound and Visual Quality of Presentations	4.77
Courteousness/Helpfulness of NADSP Staff	4.96

Putting flesh and blood on these bare bone numerical ratings were the participants' narrative comments in the evaluations, which are highlighted below.

**Typical of comments about what they liked best about the day were:**

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*"The ability to speak freely and good information."*

*"The role playing. It brought people together to problem solve."*

*"The role play. The Code of Ethics. Being able to speak on how we felt."*

*"It made me think differently about being a DSP."*

*"The role playing allowed us to see and analyze situations thinking as a professional."*

*"It made me more aware of my abilities to advocate for the people I care for."*

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**Examples of what evaluators recommended were:**

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*"Every employee of a DD agency should see this."*

*"I would like it to be longer."*

*"Make it accessible to all DSPs."*

*"Every staff person needs to participate in this workshop."*

*"Find a way to allow more time. Have more sessions available."*

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**Asked to describe the day in ten words or less, evaluators said things like:**

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*"Finally, the beginning of the wind of good change."*

*"Refreshing, powerful, rejuvenating, informative and the way forward."*

*"Awesome, inspiring, funny...I don't know how to describe this in ten words or less"*

*"Out of sight!"*

*"Uplifting, informational and about me as a professional!"*

*"Awesome. Eye opening."*

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## Part II: What Direct Support Professionals Said About Living the Code of Ethics and Other Matters

A significant portion of the DSP dialogues was devoted to discussions of questions about living the Code of Ethics in the workplace and other issues about which OPWDD sought DSP input. The following reflects the major themes which emerged during the discussions.

### 1. Now that you have been introduced to the Code of Ethics and understand how they can guide your work, what barriers will you face in implementing them when you return to work?

#### *Fellow Staff and Supervisors*

The first response to this question at nearly all the dialogues was: the people DSPs work alongside of or for: their peers, supervisors and even administrators. Participants indicated that the people who surround them — colleagues, supervisors and agency administrators — are largely unaware of the Code and have not received this type of training on or exposure to the Code. The concept of “My first allegiance is to the person I support” is foreign to them. As one person said, “People will think I’m a joke...I would like for my colleagues to receive this training.” Participants also indicated that immediate supervisors, who haven’t been through the training, might feel threatened if they voiced new ways of approaching issues.

They indicated that there is also a resistance to change on the part of some staff, particularly “old-timers” and the Code represents a change in how one thinks and carries out one’s work. Change requires work, as one person said, and some longer-term employees have been through many changes and have the attitude, “I’ve seen it all, I’m not even going to try something new or different,” or “I’ve seen people come and go. I’ve been here forever. We’ll do it my way.”

Separate and distinct from the general resistance to change was the issue of marginal staff, staff who really don’t care— an issue that was cited by many participants. These employees were characterized variously by participants at the sessions as “underachievers,” “slugs,” “incompetents” or “paycheck people.” Their hearts are not in the work, they cut corners, such as not faithfully following service plans, and have the attitude “They’re going to pay me next week no matter what.” They can poison the whole atmosphere of a small program, like a group home, particularly if they are more senior in tenure and begin to shape the values and conduct of newer employees. One person cited an example:

*An individual’s service plan calls for the individual to have only two hot dogs, but he wants a third or fourth. A marginal employee will let the individual have four because he doesn’t want to deal with the ensuing behavior and perhaps an intervention which will require paperwork, and he’ll get mad at you if you try to stick with the plan.*

Some participants indicated that it appears that administrators tolerate such marginal employees because it’s better or easier to have a “lukewarm body” to meet minimal staffing standards than to have an empty slot or pay overtime.

### ***My Own Mindset***

One participant indicated that her own mindset might get in the way of implementing the Code, a view echoed by others. She said, “I’ve been doing things this way for 23 years. With the exposure to the Code, I’ll have to stop and think about what I’m doing, why I’m doing it and how I’m doing it. Basically, I’ll have to think about my own habits more.” Another said, “People get set in their ways. In order to implement the Code, we need to break out of our mindsets and really get to know the people we support.” Along these lines, one participant in her evaluation indicated that as empowering as the training was, a refresher course would be needed to make her a better DSP.

### ***Staffing Levels***

In all the dialogues, the issue of staffing levels was voiced as a barrier to implementing the Code. Participants indicated that at times, and increasingly so, they are required to operate on minimum staffing levels that are insufficient to meet the needs of individuals as expressed in service plans.

Staff also expressed concern that staffing levels are often set by counting employees who are not engaged full time in direct support, such as supervisors, who, in addition to providing hands-on support, must attend to other more administrative tasks, e.g., scheduling, assuring adequate coverage, conducting performance evaluations, etc. Frontline supervisors present during the dialogues spoke of finding themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place in trying to provide direct support but at the same time completing their administrative duties.

Participants agreed that minimum staffing levels are necessary to assure basic safety, but they are not conducive to helping individuals achieve a high quality of life, which is at the heart of the Code of Ethics.

### ***Documentation Issues***

Whereas quality is found at the point and in the nature of the interaction between DSPs and the people they support, it appears that in searching for evidence of quality, administrators, surveyors or auditors focus primarily, if not exclusively, on paperwork. Participants indicated that demands for documentation have increased, and that paperwork takes time away from truly providing direct support services. Many indicated that while the Code states that their first allegiance is to the people they support, the message they receive from supervisors is that their first allegiance should be to the paperwork they are required to complete.

Related to documentation issues, during the dialogues a number of DSPs indicated that records they receive on individuals are not truly representative of the individuals’ needs and desires, which makes it difficult to provide the supports truly needed and desired.

### ***Families***

Participants also indicated that families can at times pose barriers to implementing the Code. Acknowledging that families often have their loved one’s best interest at heart, participants also reported that sometimes the family’s wishes and what the individual wants are in conflict. The issues of conflict may range from the mundane, such as what style of clothing to wear, to the profound, such as relationships and marriage. And DSPs often find themselves caught in the middle, particularly if they receive no support from superiors.

## 2. What suggestions do you have to address these barriers, or what help is needed to live up to the Code?

### *Training*

The universal response to this question was TRAINING!...Training on the Code of Ethics for all involved in service delivery: for all DSPs, including new hires, old-timers, and even those marginal employees; for frontline supervisors who must support DSPs in their daily activities; for administrators, as a culture of adherence to the Code must be a message that flows from the top down; and for families, as they are vital partners in the support their loved ones receive.

Some participants cautioned, however, that the training must lead to competency and be experiential, and not of the “read and sign” approach/method which may work for some subject matters amenable to rote memorization (e.g., recognizing signs and symptoms of illness, fire evacuation plans, etc.). It must assure a value-based understanding and buy-in. Some also opined it should not be one-time only training, but should offer opportunities for refresher courses.

### *Recruitment and Retention*

Participants indicated that much more should be done to hire people who really want to work in this field and really know what the work entails. They recommended that prospective employees receive more realistic job previews during the interview process. As one person put bluntly, “Interviews should include frank discussions of real life duties, like wiping butts, seeing people naked, preparing meals, doing clean up.” Pre-employment interviews should also include discussion of the Code of Ethics, the basic values underpinning the work.

At the same time, participants reported that more must be done through probationary periods and the disciplinary process to weed out “dead wood,” i.e., the people who just don’t get it or buy into the values expressed in the Code. As one person said, “There is too much complacency and cowardice. There is a need to have tough conversations: if you are unhappy, leave.”

### *Staffing Levels*

At every dialogue, DSPs spoke of the need to address staff levels. As one DSP said, “Don’t make us run at minimums all the time. Minimum staffing patterns are essential for life and safety. They are the bottom line, the floor. But they don’t help people have a ‘great life.’” Also, it was recommended that in calculating minimums, as such are at times needed, only include people who are solely performing direct support; do not include staff whose time on the job is spent in administrative or other non-direct support activities.

### *Listen to DSPs*

Administrators, supervisors and clinicians should invite DSP input, and listen to it. Involve them in decision making. From matters as important as “what an individual desires” to those as commonplace as “what paperwork is really needed,” DSPs are an often untapped wealth of information.

### **3. If you had the opportunity to speak with Commissioner Burke and tell her anything you wanted, what would it be?**

#### ***Thank You***

During the dialogues, participants indicated that they wanted to say thank you to the Commissioner for what she is doing for DSPs, for initiating dialogues such as this and for listening. One DSP said, “It’s about time someone asked us/listened to us.”

#### ***Catch Us Doing Something Good***

Attendees wanted the Commissioner to know that most DSPs are not of the type featured in the recent negative press. And, in fact, they are sick of the negative portrayals. They wanted the Commissioner, senior OPWDD and even their own Executive Directors (whom some DSPs indicated they had never met) to come and visit them at their work sites, to “Catch us doing something good.” Some even suggested that senior officials not just visit, but that they spend a day working side-by-side with DSPs to better understand what the job entails. One young woman stated, “We are surrogate parents, plumbers, chauffeurs, cooks, housekeepers, role models and vital supports for the people we serve.”

#### ***A Living Wage***

The young woman mentioned above who gave a thumbnail description of all that DSPs do ended her comments by saying, “Yet I can’t live on what I make. Pay us a living wage.” Salary levels and the disparity between the public and private sector workforce pay scales were mentioned a number of times, particularly in the context of staff turnover and the inability to maintain stable, consistent staffing patterns above what the minimums require. People leave jobs they love because they can’t make ends meet. It also has a horrible impact on the people being supported. As one DSP rhetorically asked, “Who would you want to provide a level of intimate care you require (i.e., assistance with bathing, toileting, dressing, etc.)? Someone you’ve gotten to know over time? Or a parade of strangers?”

Some staff suggested that increased salary levels could be linked with credentialing or proof of competency, thus promoting a professional workforce.

#### ***Staffing Levels and Documentation Requirements***

Consonant with their concerns about reliance on, and the composition of, minimum staffing levels, as well as overwhelming paperwork requirements, these items were high on the list of things DSPs at each dialogue wanted to express to Commissioner Burke as problems which warrant her attention.

#### ***Training***

Not surprisingly, DSPs wanted to tell the Commissioner that training in the Code of Ethics should be offered if not mandated for all staff within the system. They also identified other topics on which training is needed. These included, among other things: autism, aging issues, and death and dying.

#### 4. How would you like to be recognized as a direct support professional?

Being paid a living wage was a form of recognition that DSPs at all the dialogues raised. Some suggested that salary increases be tied to credentials or career ladders which recognize experience or proficiency in the field. But aside from monetary recognition, the DSPs suggested a variety of other ways in which the value of their work can be acknowledged: simple, but heartfelt thank-yous from supervisors and administrators; visits to work sites by agency administrators and senior OPWDD staff, not for the purpose of “inspecting,” but to “connect” with the people receiving supports and the DSPs who are providing those vital supports; more positive press coverage of the good work of DSPs; asking for and listening to DSP input; and small recognition events or gestures, such as a luncheons, picnics or even thank-you cards.

#### 5. Bringing it Home: What can you do to bring today’s lessons home to where you work?

Participants in the dialogues committed to a variety of actions upon return to their workplaces. These generally fell in one of two overarching themes: how I will conduct myself, and what I will tell others. Below are some examples of what people said they would do:

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**I will tell others support is coming; there is a Code of Ethics and skill standards.**

**I will tell my fellow workers that we have a Commissioner who is serious about listening to and supporting DSPs.**

**I’m going to be a personal example, act like the professional I am.**

**I’m not going to settle for giving the people I support a “good afternoon,” I’m going to work on giving them a “great life.”**

**I’m going to stand on the Code of Ethics, be an example.**

**I’m going to stop, think, slow down...get back to the basics.**

**I’m going to tell my peers about the Code and today’s activities.**

**I’m going to start attending meetings (which were optional) and begin talking about the Code of Ethics.**

**I’m going to begin advocating for two individuals whose desires have been down played by the team.**

**I’m going to tell my coworkers that there are people supporting us.**

**I’m going to examine myself to make sure I am *really* being person-centered**

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# Conclusion

*Three simple conclusions can be drawn from the DSP Dialogues. First, the DSP participants were grateful to OPWDD for this opportunity to learn more about the Code of Ethics and for the opportunity to share their thinking on a number of issues with the Commissioner. Secondly, based on their evaluations, they thoroughly enjoyed the program, learned a great deal about how to use the Code in their work, gave it high marks and would recommend it to others. Finally, and most importantly, they believe that all staff, from DSPs and frontline supervisors to administrators, and family members as well, should learn about and subscribe to the Code of Ethics; promoting a culture of “Putting People First,” requires that all parties in the system believe, as the Code directs, that their first allegiance is to the people being supported.*

## Appendix

# National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics

### Preamble

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who support people in their communities are called upon to make independent judgments on a daily basis that involve both practical and ethical reasoning. The people who assume the support role must examine and call upon values and beliefs, as well as creative vision, to assist them in the complex work they perform.

A primary purpose of the DSP is to assist people who need support to lead self-directed lives and to participate fully in our communities and nation. This emphasis on empowerment and participation is critical because the prejudices of society form powerful barriers that prevent many people with mental or physical disabilities from enjoying a high quality of life. And, too often, the very social policies and service systems designed to help can create other barriers.

Therefore, it must be the mission of the DSP to follow the individual path suggested by the unique gifts, preferences, and needs of each person they support, and to walk in partnership with the person, and those who love him or her, toward a life of opportunity, well-being, freedom, and contribution. Unfortunately, there have been no set criteria to guide these journeys as there are for other professional groups (such as doctors, nurses, service coordinators, and social workers) who have intimate knowledge of and responsibility for another person's emotional, financial, or physical being. There is no other position today in which ethical practice and standards are more important than direct support. DSPs are often asked to serve as gatekeepers between people needing support and almost every aspect of their lives, including access to community, personal finances, physical well-being, relationships, employment, and everyday choices. The whole landscape of a person's life can change with the coming and going of these critical supports for people.

As a result of these work duties, DSPs face ethical decisions on a daily basis and consistently feel the tension between the ideals of the profession and its practice. There are numerous pressures coming from organizations, government, social policy, and societal prejudice that can shift focus and allegiance away from those supported. In order to maintain the promise of partnership and respect that must exist in a helping relationship, a strong ethical foundation is critical to help DSPs navigate through the maze of influences that bombard them.

This issue has led to the efforts on the part of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) to identify the kinds of ethical situations that DSPs face and to develop a set of ethical guidelines. The NADSP convened a national panel of DSPs, advocates, families, professionals, and researchers who constructed this code of ethics. Focus groups and surveys regarding the draft language were conducted throughout the country and were integrated to create the final code. This Code of Ethics is intended to serve as a straightforward and relevant

ethical guide, shedding some light on the shared path to a self-directed life. It is intended to guide DSPs in resolving ethical dilemmas they face every day and to encourage DSPs to achieve the highest ideals of the profession.

The skills and knowledge of community support practice must be joined with the ethical principles to create the environment needed to fully support people. To do so effectively, we must all work toward recognizing DSPs as professionals who have skills, knowledge, and values that constitute a unique and important profession. There must be a commitment to hiring, developing, and supporting DSPs who have a healthy sense of their own worth and potential, and the worth and potential of the people they support, and who can infuse these beliefs into practice. DSPs themselves must know that it is part of their role to foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual responsibility with other DSPs regarding ethical practice.

Direct Support Professionals, agency leaders, policymakers, and people receiving services are urged to read the Code and to consider ways that these ethical statements can be incorporated into daily practice. The beliefs and attitudes that are associated with being an effective human service professional are the cornerstones of this code. This code 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.

## **Ethical Principles**

### **1. 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.

As a DSP, I will:

- Recognize that each person must direct his or her own life and support and that the unique social network, circumstances, personality, preferences, needs and gifts of each person I support must be the primary for guide the selection, structure, and use of supports for that individual.
- Commit to person-centered supports as best practice.
- Provide advocacy when the needs of the system override those of the individual(s) I support, or when individual preferences, needs or gifts are neglected for other reasons.
- Honor the personality, preferences, culture and gifts of people who cannot speak by seeking other ways of understanding them.
- Focus first on the person, and understand that my role in direct supports will require flexibility, creativity and commitment.

## **2. Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being:**

As a DSP, I am responsible for supporting the emotional, physical, and personal well-being of the individuals receiving support. I will encourage growth and recognize the autonomy of the individuals receiving support while being attentive and energetic in reducing their risk of harm.

As a DSP, I will:

- Develop a relationship with the people I support that is respectful, based on mutual trust, and that maintains professional boundaries.
- Assist the individuals I support to understand their options and the possible consequences of these options as they relate to their physical health and emotional well-being.
- Promote and protect the health, safety, and emotional well-being of an individual by assisting the person in preventing illness and avoiding unsafe activity. I will work with the individual and his or her support network to identify areas of risk and to create safeguards specific to these concerns.
- Know and respect the values of the people I support and facilitate their expression of choices related to those values.
- Challenge others, including support team members (e.g., doctors, nurses, therapists, co-workers, family members) to recognize and support the rights of individuals to make informed decisions even when these decisions involve personal risk.
- Be vigilant in identifying, discussing with others, and reporting any situation in which the individuals I support are at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or harm.
- Consistently address challenging behaviors proactively, respectfully, and by avoiding the use of aversive or deprivation intervention techniques. If these techniques are included in an approved support plan I will work diligently to find alternatives and will advocate for the eventual elimination of these techniques from the person's plan.

## **3. 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.

As a DSP, I will:

- Be conscious of my own values and how they influence my professional decisions.
- Maintain competency in my profession through learning and ongoing communication with others.
- Assume responsibility and accountability for my decisions and actions.
- Actively seek advice and guidance on ethical issues from others as needed when making decisions.

- Recognize the importance of modeling valued behaviors to co-workers, persons receiving support, and the community at-large.
- Practice responsible work habits.

#### **4. Confidentiality:**

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

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.
- Seek out a qualified individual who can help me clarify situations where the correct course of action is not clear.
- Recognize that confidentiality agreements with individuals are subject to state and agency regulations.
- Recognize that confidentiality agreements with individuals should be broken if there is imminent harm to others or to the person I support.

#### **5. Justice, Fairness and Equity:**

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

As a DSP, I will:

- Help the people I support use the opportunities and the resources of the community available to everyone.
- Help the individuals I support understand and express their rights and responsibilities.
- Understand the guardianship or other legal representation of individuals I support, and work in partnership with legal representatives to assure that the individual's preferences and interests are honored.

#### **6. 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 help others understand their value.

As a DSP, I will:

- Seek to understand the individuals I support today in the context of their personal history, their social and family networks, and their hopes and dreams for the future.
- Honor the choices and preferences of the people I support.

- Protect the privacy of the people I support.
- Uphold the human rights of the people I support.
- Interact with the people I support in a respectful manner.
- Recognize and respect the cultural context (e.g., religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class) of the person supported and his/her social network.
- Provide opportunities and supports that help the individuals I support be viewed with respect and as integral members of their communities.

## **7. Relationships:**

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

As a DSP, I will:

- Advocate for the people I support when they do not have access to opportunities and education to facilitate building and maintaining relationships.
- Assure that people have the opportunity to make informed choices in safely expressing their sexuality.
- Recognize the importance of relationships and proactively facilitate relationships between the people I support, their family and friends.
- Separate my own personal beliefs and expectations regarding relationships (including sexual relationships) from those desired by the people I support based on their personal preferences. If I am unable to separate my own beliefs/preferences in a given situation, I will actively remove myself from the situation.
- Refrain from expressing negative views, harsh judgments, and stereotyping of people close to the individuals I support.

## **8. Self-Determination:**

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

As a DSP, I will:

- Work in partnership with others to support individuals leading self-directed lives.
- Honor the individual's right to assume risk in an informed manner.
- Recognize that each individual has potential for lifelong learning and growth.

## **9. Advocacy:**

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

As a DSP, I will:

- Support individuals to speak for themselves in all matters where my assistance is needed.
- Represent the best interests of people who cannot speak for themselves by finding alternative ways of understanding their needs, including gathering information from others who represent their best interests.
- Advocate for laws, policies, and supports that promote justice and inclusion for people with disabilities and other groups who have been disempowered.
- Promote human, legal, and civil rights of all people and assist others to understand these rights.
- Recognize that those who victimize people with disabilities either criminally or civilly must be held accountable for their actions.
- Find additional advocacy services when those that I provide are not sufficient.
- Consult with people I trust when I am unsure of the appropriate course of action in my advocacy efforts.



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