

The Role of the Direct Support Professional and the Coronavirus: Part Three



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Questions from Part Three Webinar

The following questions were asked by registrants on the NADSP Webinar, The Role of the Direct Support Professional and the Coronavirus: Part Three on April 3, 2020. The NADSP Staff have shared recommendations to the following questions to the best of their knowledge. The NADSP acknowledges that any state regulations and organizational policies take precedent over any of the recommendations below. We also acknowledge that the answers to these questions may change after this has been shared (4/10/20). Please note, in the following recommendations, that staff members initials will be used to designate the staff member providing an answer.

1. What questions should I ask any New DSP I might need hire?

This is a great opportunity to show new direct support staff the “ropes”! Introduce them to the people you support first and foremost. Then, share the NADSP Code of Ethics and also help them understand the NADSP Competencies – these are the foundations of the work. Let them do most of the asking. Finally, make sure you make them feel respected, welcomed and be a mentor to them as they learn their new role. – JR

2. What is our role in participating in IPPs during the shutdown?

Your role does not change, other than making sure you are following the guidelines prescribed by your organization regarding social distancing and exposure control. You are an invaluable resource and data library with and for the people you support. – JR

3. Funding RSPs for all of the extras during this difficult time?

We’re not really sure what you’re asking, but states have filed special waivers with the federal government to provide enhanced rates, lessening certain regulatory requirements and other creative ways to address the challenges brought by this health crisis. – JMM

4. What are the responsibilities and best practice expectations of DSPs when providing services to individuals in their homes?

For this question, we would recommend reading Director of Certification and Accreditation, Dan Hermreck’s Latest Blog, “Competency in the time of the Coronavirus” [here](#). - ND

5. I work with a client that likes to go out every day and he doesn’t understand the importance of social distancing. He keeps on saying I'm strong and I'm not sick. we tried to keep him busy at home but after he’s done, he still goes out and bikes around and ride the public transportation. What should I do? He is risking the health of his housemate.

This is an excellent opportunity for teaching and supporting the process known as “informed decision making”. This is where you rely on the competency areas of Participant Empowerment, Assessment, Supporting Health and Wellness and Community Living Skills and Supports. In applying your skills to those areas, with this person, you can assist him in making a more informed and safer decision. – JR



6. Any suggestions for dealing with a hospital to support someone with ASD when the hospitals are NOT letting DSP's or any visitors in with the individual?

As of today, there will be absolutely NO WAY you will be able to accompany anyone who is admitted to the hospital. And that is important. However, you absolutely can inform hospital staff about the likes, dislikes and support needs of the person who is hospitalized. Technology is so important at this time. If this person is somewhat versed at using an I Pad, Smart Phone or device with camera...then this is the time to start using that medium for communicating with those admitted in hospitals. It is being used all over now and should not be different for the people you support (if they can use such tech.) - JR

7. How can DSPs support people with IDD/MI manage anxiety and trauma risk during this time?

*For this question, we would recommend, our Director of Educational Services, John Raffaele's 10 Minute Meditation [here](#).
ND*

8. DSPs are being juggled around the agency filling the needs/openings. Is this increasing new faces to all the people we support. Is this best practice?

First of all, it is concerning about the number of people that go in and out of a person with I/DD's life helping them with their daily routines and frequently providing the most intimate of care. The decades old challenge of workforce shortages has forced this to be the case for a very long time. In most areas of the country it is not that unusual for DSPs to be sent to other residences, or programs to help meet the needs of the people being supported, many times forcing the person with I/DD to accept the support provided without benefit of developing a relationship first. During this time of COVID-19, as the workforce is already stretched, there may be even more cases when DSPs are put into to situations as strangers to provide support. Although this may not be ideal, there may be very few other options. If you are put into the position of supporting people that you have not worked with before, please remember to be respectful of that person by trying to get information about them that will help you provide the support necessary, and by communicating with the person to understand how they want you to work with them. - DLB

9. Advocacy for DSP's: what to do if/when someone questions DSP being a healthcare worker?

10. *The COVID-19 crisis brings many advocacy opportunities for the direct support workforce, foremost would be formally establishing a standard occupational classification with the [US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Our direct support professionals are often anonymous to policy makers and government which is why special consideration is made to include a direct support professional as a "healthcare worker" or deemed "essential". – JMM*

11. Topic - How to keep encouraging clients that you will be returning when this is resolved. As some might not completely understand.

It is important to continue your relationship with the people you support. If you are apart from the people you are supporting you can do this with phone calls, FaceTime/Skype/Zoom and ongoing types of communication. Furthermore, this is a time for you to help the people you support understand what your relationship is all about and help them learn more about your role with them. Often times it is paid staff who are the most important people in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. This is good time to help the people you are paid to support understand the importance of finding "non-paid" friends and relationships. - JR

12. How do we help our DSPs understand that there are risks, but we still need them to support someone who may have COVID-19?

These are indeed challenging times that will require direct support professionals to clearly understand the health risks associated with this pandemic, use proper procedures, have access to the appropriate equipment, follow CDC guidelines and effectively communicate with your colleagues, management team, people who receive your support and their families. We created a toolkit for provider agencies to make sure that proper onboarding and professional development continues (<https://nadsp.org/onboarding-in-crisis/>) - JMM

13. DSP role and overall support during shelter-in-place.

For this question, we would recommend reading Director of Certification and Accreditation, Dan Hermreck's Latest Blog, "Competency in the time of the Coronavirus" [here](#). – ND

14. The corona virus and its effect on the DSP community?

The effect that this crisis has on the direct support community will be immense. More is being asked from the workforce than ever before and they will be under a microscope throughout the crisis. If something bad happens, they may be described as unprofessional and uncaring. As with previous crises like natural disasters, the frontline workforce will be challenged, and once again they will rise to this challenge in unspectacular fashion. We must stop the empty rhetoric about how valuable this frontline workforce is to the disabled community and begin serious discussions to secure a livable wage that is commensurate with the noble work they've shown during this horrible crisis and be recognized for their collective skills and devotion while caring for our most vulnerable citizens. - JMM

15. I'm a community-based day program and can no longer be in the community with my clients. What are some alternatives to continue?

Community is more than just the environment beyond the day program or residence where the person lives. Community is people and organizations that support people. At this time of social isolating, please look to local organizations that may be seeking volunteers who can work on projects from their homes, such as packing backpacks of food for children needing food, crafting cat beds or dog toys/treats for local animal shelters, making check-in calls or sending letters/cards to people who live alone and are self-isolating. Help people explore new interests by participating in virtual tours of museums, zoos and national parks. Support those who may be missing participating in their religious congregations in tuning into recordings of religious services offered by their church or synagogue. And help people stay connected with friends and loved ones that they may not be able to see by scheduling Skype or Zoom calls and virtual group events. -DLB

16. How do you recommend supporting individuals with disabilities who are still working essential jobs amid this pandemic?

Communication is the primary skill set required at times like this. Start by becoming familiar with the policies and procedures of the company where the person works to fully understand their protocols for social distancing, personal protection, sanitation, or work responsibilities for this time. Once you have a good understanding, work with the person you support to fully understand any changes that may be in place regarding work standards and help that person to apply these changes as required. Be certain to offer reassurance and support to the person to help ease fear or concerns brought about by these changes and the current situation. Document your support as required. - DLB

17. How to help DSP's manage their feelings of panic?



This is clearly a time of uncertainty and anxiety. First, you are allowed to feel anxious, depressed, frightened and even panic. However, you also have the professional obligation of providing direct support in a professional delivery. If you are immobilized by your fears and mental health status you need to seek professional assistance. See your Human Resources department or Supervisor for guidance. If you can, try and take a look at some of the Self Care resources that the NADSP has gathered for you. Always seek out help. – JR

18. Will this presentation be available after the webinar?

All of our COVID-19 Webinars are available [here](#) on our YouTube Page. -ND

19. How best can DSPs support people who live at home with families?

Things have changed and you may not be able to continue your face to face support for those you work with who live at home with their families. Though you may not be able to meet in-person, your continued contact and support will be important. Work with the person, and their family if necessary, to schedule regular contact with the person to check in and engage in conversation. If technology allows, try to meet using video access, such as through Skype, Zoom or Facetime. Structure the conversation to help give and get information to promote sharing and discussion when possible. And always be prepared to give words of encouragement and a look to the future when you may be able to meet in person again. – DLB

20. Will DSPs lose their jobs?

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is certainly going to have long-term economic implications and you can expect very high rates of unemployment across all industries. As is often the case, during bad economic times, the disability support system has available jobs and people who are otherwise out of work will begin filling them. When the economy recovers, many of these people will leave direct support for better paying jobs in other industries, or return to their original jobs. In the short-term, the pandemic may require that employers who only operate day, respite, community-based services (non-residential) to temporarily lay-off some direct support professionals. It is likely that these workers could find direct support jobs in residential settings that are desperate to find well-trained/experienced direct support professionals. – JMM

21. How to deal with fear, ethics of continuing to support the clients?

First, I think we should acknowledge that this is a scary time, for DSPs, for the people they support, for everyone. Self-care and stress management will look different for each person, but here are some things that may be helpful.

- *Try to focus on the things you can control rather than those that you cannot control.*
- *Understand that everyone is dealing with this differently, but we are all doing the best we can in a very difficult situation.*
- *Acknowledge the emotions you are feeling. They are a normal response to this very unusual situation we find ourselves in.*

The Code of Ethics still applies, even in these challenging times. As always, DSPs will be promoting wellbeing, advocating, and supporting relationships. How these things are accomplished will look different right now, but the ethics underlying the work remain the same. – DH

22. Can you 1) provide a link to the directive that a DSP can be reimbursed for providing direct support in a hospital setting?

Our friends at ANCOR have a great resource [here](#). - JMM

23. Can you clarify whether a DSP is permitted by hospital to be there presently under current COVID-19 conditions?

That would be determined by the hospital and/or your local/state health department. - JMM

24. I am providing job development services to an individual who wants to continue pursuing new employment despite his own and his parents' elevated risk for complications with COVID-19. I want to provide him with the services he has a right to, but I also want him to stay safe. What should I do?

Job exploration involves many steps that may not necessarily include community access. Depending where you are in the job seeking process, this time may be used in discovering more about the person's interests, skills and job expectations. Should you be past the discovery process, consider working with the person on creating a resume, exploring job sites where potential employment may be posted, and completing applications online. Most companies at this time are not hiring, and many that are will be practicing social distancing. Should there be an opportunity for a job interview, explore the option of doing a virtual interview using Zoom, Skype or some other online format. Most importantly continue active communication with the person about the job process under any circumstance takes time, and that there may be more opportunities for the right type of job when things are safer. – DLB

25. I have a person at home with major health issues. Am I eligible for Paid Leave under these circumstances?

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced a temporary rule regarding how American workers and employers will benefit from the protections and relief offered by two components of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA): the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act and the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act. FFCRA became law in early March; the regulations issued in the DOL rule took effect immediately on April 1, 2020. One provision particularly relevant to people with disabilities and those who support them is the definition of health care providers who may be exempted from the rule. Supports and services essential to the well-being of people with disabilities are having to balance the health of DSPs who are on the frontlines of the outbreak with keeping individuals who need daily assistance healthy. – JMM

26. If DSPs are asked to care for COVID positive clients, can DSPs refuse?

You always have a choice about where you work. Just recognize that your refusal to work under certain conditions may result in your termination from your current position. With that said, if you have extenuating circumstances that may put you or a family member at increased risk, or if you feel you do not have the skills or the ability to perform the skills of the job being asked of you, you must communicate this with your human resources department. This communication should occur as soon as possible to give your employer the opportunity to transfer you to another job if possible, or to remove you from the position if necessary. – DLB

27. I have a deaf staff on shift watching the webinar. How do you accommodate her in future webinars?

In the future, we will be having closed captions on all of our webinars moving forward through Gotowebinar. Also, we will provide transcripts. - ND

28. How can I best support staff and individuals that are experiencing loss of the people supported or co-workers due to COVID19)

The NADSP would recommend sharing the grief webinars listed in our DSP Toolkit [here](#) - ND

29. Can the Residential homes bill for consumers who are 1:1 while at home from day programs?

Again, states are submitting plans to the federal government for waivers during the pandemic. You should check with your state's disability services office. - JMM

30. Can you share resources or links to ideas of fun, engaging activities to do with those we will be supporting at home for weeks?

There are many sources of such ideas out there, but the best source of ideas would be the people you support. What is fun and engaging for one person might be boring and irritating to another, and we don't want to add stress to an already stressful situation. Asking each person what they would like to do with their extra time at home would be the ideal approach. For some, that sort of open-ended question may be overwhelming, so it might be more effective to offer some options and see what sort of response you get. Your existing knowledge of the people you support and their interests will likely be helpful in anticipating which activities would be well-received. Our advice would be to get creative, be flexible, and always plan in partnership with those you support. - DH

31. Should we be taking older clients to the grocery store during a stay at home order?

Everyone should be following the social distancing or shelter in place guidelines that have been put in place by their state/provincial/local governments. In addition to that, DSPs should be following the protocols that have been put in place by their organizations. If there is any uncertainty about any of those guidelines, DSPs should contact their supervisors to get clarification. If none of the above would prevent it, then a trip to the store may be possible, but even in that case, such a trip should only be undertaken if the person being supported wishes to go to the store after being provided information about the risks involved and the other options available to them. Certainly no one receiving supports from a DSP should be required to go to the store. - DH

32. How can we support the DSP during this difficult time, knowing that they are the most important people in our service delivery?

With strong, clear, transparent and ongoing communication. By creating a supportive, empathetic, caring and respectful work environment. Make sure that you have the adequate resources, equipment, programming supplies that are necessary. Breakdown any "Us vs. Them" barriers between frontline workers and other employees who are working remotely. Provide constant recognition (enhanced wages, bonuses and other financial incentives), meal deliveries, thank you notes, regular check-ins. Share your stories with local media, and finally, just be there for your dedicated direct support professionals. - JMM

33. How do you attract employees during this time?

In our Providers Toolkit, we provide resources for onboarding new staff, [here](#). - JMM

34. How can we Realistically utilize telehealth in residential settings with low staff?

Many states have waived the regulations for the use of telehealth at this time. Please work with your organization's medical staff and the physicians for the people you support to explore whether telehealth may be an option at this time for routine and non-emergency appointments. – DLB

35. How do we explain this to the people we care for?

The NADSP would recommend sharing the plain language document listed in our DSP Toolkit [here](#):

36. What guidelines can a public health department put in place to ensure equitable access to healthcare and service professionals?

We would recommend you check with your State Public Health Department. – ND

Looking for additional support during this time? Please note the resources below:

Self-Care Resource Page for Direct Support Professionals : <https://nadsp.org/covid-19resources/>

On-Boarding New Direct Support Professionals in A Crisis (Code of ethics Webinar Series, Competency Webinar Series, Additional Resources): <https://nadsp.org/onboarding-in-crisis/>

Want to Share Your Story? - <https://bit.ly/DSPCovid-19Stories>

NADSP recognizes the invaluable work that Direct Support Professionals all over the world are doing during this unprecedented time. We appreciate you. We hope you remain safe and well.

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