

### Dignity of Risk

**Dignity of Risk** refers to the concept of affording a person the right (or dignity) to take reasonable risks, and that the impeding of this right can suffocate personal growth, self-esteem and the overall quality of life (Ibrahim & Davis 2013).

The term, dignity of risk, first coined in 1972 by Robert Perske in relation to people living with disabilities, (and further

expanded in Wolpert’s 1980 *The Dignity of Risk* paper) was a reaction to over-protective safeguards and a paternalistic nature witnessed in care giving, which, they argued, was patronizing and diminished a person’s freedoms and self esteem.



*Perske describes risk as “the space between opportunity and reality” and argues that “no responsibility means no real life.”*

### Our Interactions:

*Our interactions* with the individuals we support should never be patronizing. We don’t have to figure it all out before we move. If at all possible, we try to get to “yes” with the individuals we support. Putting people first and allowing them the very real possibility to fail is so important to us at TVS. If we always do for, or are always informing our folks, it can become manipulative and controlling. Plus, we lose out on a very valuable possibility – the ability to learn from the people we support, and expand our ideas and challenge our mindsets.

Perske continues by challenging us to think about this: What if the only risky thing people can do is to act out? Often, we say that someone is “having a behavior,” but in reality, they may be just trying to communicate.



**In our world as Direct Support Professionals, moving from “fixer” to “facilitator” and becoming co-producers and co-designers is imperative.**

**Finally, Perske reminds us of this:** “The world in which we live is not always safe, secure and predictable. It does not always say “please” or “excuse me.” Everyday there is a possibility of being thrown up against a situation where we may have to risk everything, even our lives. This is the real world. We must work to develop every human resource within us in order to prepare for these days.”

To deny any individual, regardless of their challenges, their fair share of risk experiences is to further cripple them for healthy living. All persons we support may, can, will and should respond to risk with full human dignity and courage.

### How do DSPs support a person's dignity?

#### 1. Always provide person-centered supports

Everything we do is guided by the person-centered plan that the individual and their team establishes as meaningful to them. Individuals are supported in managing risks and advocating for outcomes that go hand in hand with their decisions and personal choices.

#### 2. Consider what is a ‘reasonable’ risk

Such as food choices, daily walks or refusal of recommended care.

#### 3. Keep sufficient documentation

Ensure that every facet of the decision-making process is documented. From who has been consulted, to the information provided to the resident regarding potential risks, and their subsequent acknowledgement of these risks.

#### 4. Familiarize with company policies

Make sure you are only working within the scope of your role and what processes must be followed to fulfill a resident's request.