

It Starts with Being Person-Centered

Being person-centered is the heart and soul of the support that Direct Support Professionals (DSP) provide for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As stated in the Code of Ethics from the National Alliance for DSPs (NADSP) Code of Ethics, "the first allegiance of a DSP is to the person they support; all other activities and functions flow from this allegiance."

One of the responsibilities of DSPs and the families or guardians of people with disabilities is to protect them from harm. However, the desire to protect can sometimes impose personal values, judgments and decisions upon the person being supported.



Overprotection is counterproductive to allowing the person the dignity of risk and the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

Empowering Informed Decision-Making

The great news is that DSPs and families or guardians can empower the people they support by preparing them to understand the choice-making process, as well as the risks and responsibilities of making their own decisions. We can help the people we support with informed decision-making by following a 5-step process outlined by the NADSP.

5 Step process

1. Identify the decision or issue

- Is the person's choice clear and voluntary?
- Does the person have experience/knowledge/understand to support their choice?
- How much risk is involved?
- Can the person be accountable for the consequence?

2. Gather information and resources

3. List options and weigh them

- Narrow the list to best fit the individual's values, goals, and desires.
- What is realistic and possible?
- Options should lower the risk of the choice, reflect the experiences of the person, and clarify what they want.

4. Make a decision and a plan of action

- Empower the person to act on their choice and provide support throughout the process to make the decision a reality.

5. Evaluate the decision

- What are the positives and negatives?
- What did the person learn?



In all regions of the world, people with disabilities report that having control in their lives is essential to being seen and treated equally in the community.

In the "Global Report on the Right to Decide" (2014), self-advocates from Inclusion International eloquently state, "Making choices and decisions for ourselves is an important part of who we are. It is fundamental to having control over our own lives and important for securing all other rights: if we are not allowed to make our own decisions, how can we have a choice in anything else that is important to us?"

