

The Relationship between DSPs & Supported Individuals

The relationship between the Direct Support Professional and the people they support is a complicated one. While DSPs are not therapists, the nature of the relationship is a therapeutic one, as well as one that is much more involved and integrated into the lives of both the DSP and the person supported.



Important tips & things to know:

- While friendly in scope, the DSP is not a “friend” to the person supported. Friendships are balanced and non-transactional; however, the person supported may not wish to have their DSP identified as their “worker” or “aid”, as this can bring focus to the person’s disability.



So, what do you call yourself if you are the DSP working with a person, and someone inquires?

A good place to start is by simply calling yourself by your name. “I’m Bob, and this is Jim.”

The Nature of a DSP

The nature of Direct Support work means that the DSP gains intimate details about the people they support, such as their personal history, goals, needs, and vulnerabilities. The people supported in turn rely on the DSP in ways that they would not rely on a therapist or other support system that is limited in time, location, and scope. There is a lot of trust that has to go into the DSP-person supported relationship, and a lot of boundaries that can seem gray.



- The DSP’s **social role** in assisting the person they support is to help the person learn the skills needed to develop and maintain their own friendships.
- The DSP should be aware that because of the nature of their therapeutic relationship:
 - A person supported may unknowingly transfer feelings about others from their past onto the DSP. This is called **transference**.
 - Likewise, the DSP may unknowingly project their past feelings about others onto the person supported. This is called **countertransference**.



Transference and Countertransference can be positive or negative feelings and emotions.

- DSP’s should be mindful about how their feelings and the feelings of the people they support can be built on past lived experiences, traumas, and perceptions. They should be aware to not peg themselves or the people they support into an archetype such as “mother,” “brother,” “friend”.
- The proficient DSP is always working to maintain and improve the therapeutic relationship, and honor its boundaries.