

# Direct Support Professional (DSP) and DSP Supervisor DD Waiver Orientation and Competencies Protocol

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**Department of Behavioral Health  
and Developmental Services**

## **Introduction**

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and their supervisors who provide services and supports for people with developmental disability (DD) in Virginia are required to complete an orientation training process established by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) per Medicaid Waiver regulations (12VAC30-122-180). This process was initiated in 1997 and has seen various revisions and updates since that time. It is designed with three purposes in mind: so people get quality services, to build skills and confidence, and to enhance the supervisor-DSP relationship.

This protocol serves as a resource to providers in understanding the competency-based training requirements of Virginia's Developmental Disability Waivers (i.e. the Building Independence Waiver, the Family and Individual Supports Waiver, and the Community Living Waiver). This process does not replace the requirements for providers to meet DBHDS training and orientation requirements under the DBHDS Office of Licensing, which are described in the DBHDS Licensing Regulations (12VAC35-105-440,450) or other regulations or accreditation standards.

### **Defining Direct Support Professional (DSP)**

Direct Support Professional (DSP) is defined under the DD waivers as:

"Direct support professional," "direct care staff," or "DSP" means staff members identified by the provider as having the primary role of assisting an individual on a day-to-day basis with routine personal care needs, social support, and physical assistance in a wide range of daily living activities so that the individual can lead a self-directed life in his own community. This term shall exclude consumer-directed staff and services facilitation providers.

Any agency employee, regardless of credentials, who provides Medicaid Waiver reimbursable support as described above, must complete the DBHDS DSP Orientation process. This process also applies to supervisors who oversee the work of DSPs. Providers may elect to employ agency trainers in delivering training content to DSPs and their supervisors, which is acceptable, but the use of a trainer does not supplant conversations between DSPs and supervisors about the content of the training or the application of that content within the provider setting.

This process does not apply to professional staff who provide consultative or specialized medical and behavioral support, such as Therapeutic Consultation, Skilled Nursing, and Private Duty Nursing. Providers of Individual and Group Supported Employment services were previously excluded due to operating within organizations that met Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) standards. Employment Service Organizations are now required to complete orientation training, testing, and to observe and document basic competencies per Settlement Agreement (SA) negotiations with the Department of Justice, which occurred in January of 2020. In addition, DMAS enrolled Home Care Organizations licensed by the Virginia Department of Health who are providing Personal Assistance, Respite, and Companion under any DD Waiver must implement the process of observing and documenting competencies as described in this protocol in addition to completing the training and testing requirements per the same SA negotiations .

There is a set of requirements that affect all providers of specified waiver services and one additional set of advanced competency requirements for DBHDS-licensed providers only, which are dependent upon who is being supported.

### **DSP and DSP Supervisor Orientation Training; Testing; Assurances**

Agencies providing direct support to individuals on the Developmental Disabilities' waivers are required to complete the DSP Orientation training. This includes both non-DBHDS licensed providers (such as Home Care Organizations licensed by the Virginia Department of Health and Employment Services Organizations under the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services) in addition to DBHDS-licensed providers.

These requirements apply to all providers of the following services:

- Agency-Directed Personal Assistance
- Agency-Directed Companion
- Agency-Directed Respite
- Center-based Crisis Services
- Community-based Crisis Services
- Crisis Support Services
- Community Engagement
- Community Coaching
- Group Day Services
- Group Home Residential
- Group Supported Employment
- Independent Living
- In-Home Support Services
- Individual Supported Employment
- Sponsored Residential
- Supported Living Residential
- Workplace Assistance

### **Supervisor-specific Requirements**

DSP supervisors in agencies providing any of the above services must complete online training and testing through the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center (VLC), which is a web-based application that delivers self-study training topics to Virginia employees, Community Services Boards, and community providers.

The VLC provides supervisors with the online supervisor's training and competency test. This online training provides information about the role of a DSP supervisor under these requirements, the expectations for implementing the orientation process, and provides a certificate of completion that must be retained in the personnel file for programmatic review by the DBHDS Office of Licensing and the Department of Medical Assistance Services.

Supervisors can access the required supervisor training and take the test through the Virginia Learning Center (VLC). Access the VLC online by following this guide: [DBHDS External Entities Domain Guide](#). The supervisor training can be located in the VLC by searching with the key word "DSP".

Once a supervisor has completed online training and testing through the VLC, they may request a copy of the DSP test answer key by sending a copy of their VLC certificate to their assigned Community Resource Consultant with DBHDS: [Provider Development Contact Chart](#).

Linked resources are maintained online at:

<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/developmental-services/provider-development>.

The following chart illustrates supervisor-specific requirements:

### DSP Supervisor Responsibilities

1. Maintain a training certificate obtained through the Virginia Learning Center (VLC) to confirm completed training and test
2. Sign and maintain a DSP Supervisor's Assurance Document
3. Complete an maintain a copy of the basic DSP competencies signed by the agency director or designee
4. Meet with each DSP supervised to discuss training content and answer questions
5. <b>In DBHDS-licensed services only:</b> Complete an maintain a copy of the required Advanced Competencies documents signed by the agency director or designee

### Orientation Manual and Training Slides

Direct Support Professionals follow a different process from supervisors in completing orientation training and competency testing. DSPs receive training from their agency supervisor or designated agency trainer. They may also access the training materials through a public facing website, which includes a manual, training slides for agency use, and the various forms and checklists related to these requirements. Use of the materials is encouraged as they contain content that is freely available to providers and align with Virginia's principles, values, and expectations for providing support under the DD waivers. The Orientation Manual and training slides that may be used in equipping DSPs with necessary knowledge, skills and abilities are available online at:

[https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP\\_orientation/index.html](https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP_orientation/index.html)

The Orientation Manual Test is divided across the six areas contained in the DSP Orientation Manual:

- Section I: The Values that Support Life in the Community
- Section II: Introduction to Developmental Disabilities
- Section III: Waivers for People with Developmental Disabilities
- Section IV: Communication
- Section V: Positive Behavioral Support
- Section VI: Health and Safety

The Orientation Manual was designed:

- To outline the current values and best practices associated with providing Developmental Disability Waiver services and supports
- To provide DSPs and supervisors with practical tips on how to apply these values and better support individuals with intellectual and other disabilities

- To prepare DSPs and supervisors who come with varying degrees of experience, for the work ahead of them
- To promote person-centered service delivery

**Assurances**

DSPs (and DSP supervisors) must also confirm through a signed assurance that they have met the competency-based training requirements and passed the “Orientation Manual Test” with at least 80% success prior to providing reimbursable supports in the absence of other staff who have successfully completed requirements.

The signed assurance confirms the receipt of instruction in the characteristics of developmental disabilities and Virginia’s DD Waivers, person-centeredness, positive behavioral supports, effective communication, DBHDS-identified health risks and the appropriate interventions, and best practices in the support of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Assurance documents are specific to agency role. There are two versions and DSPs and DSP supervisors complete the version that matches their role within the organization. A copy of the Orientation Manual test and these assurance documents are available online at:

[https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP\\_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html](https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html).

The assurances include confirmation of the use of observational competency checklists, which will be covered in the next sections of this protocol.

**DSP Responsibilities**

1. Maintain a copy of the completed DSP test scored with a score of at least 80% success
2. Sign and maintain a DSP Assurance Document
3. Complete an maintain a copy of the basic DSP competencies signed by the DSP Supervisor
4. Meet with the DSP supervisor to discuss training content and ask any questions
5. <b>In DBHDS-licensed services only:</b> Complete an maintain a copy of the required Advanced Competencies documents signed by the DSP supervisor

## DSP & DSP Supervisor Basic Competency Checklist

All DSPs and DSP Supervisors providing the services described in this document (see page 2) must complete an observed competency checklist that records DSP and DSP supervisors' ability to be proficient in three established competencies. Each competency has a set of skills that are observed and documented during the 180 day orientation period for new DSPs and DSP Supervisors. **The skills under the third competency, must be confirmed at a "competent" level of ability prior to providing these supports in the absence of staff who have been deemed proficient with these skills.** The three competencies are:

1. Demonstrates person-centered skills, values and attitudes,
2. Understands and follows service requirements, and
3. Demonstrates abilities that improve or maintain the health and wellness of those they support.

These competencies and the type (i.e. 1:1, group, and/or formal education) of any related training (such as reviewing the DBHDS provider DSP training manual and slides) are documented on a standard checklist (DMAS #P241a). Observation of DSPs applying their knowledge and skills is documented by DSP Supervisors. DSP supervisors' observation and documentation is completed by the agency Director or designee. This checklist is introduced with two pages of instruction to assist in consistent application across DSPs and DSP Supervisors. Levels of ability recorded on the checklist are defined as follows:

- **Basic understanding:** The individual is able to communicate a fundamental knowledge of the skill or action; high level of supervision needed.
- **Developing:** The individual is in the process of establishing the ability or is showing some, but not all, aspects of the skill or action in practice; moderate level of supervision needed.
- **Competent:** The individual demonstrates all applicable skills or actions in column two, but not on a routine basis as appropriate to the skill or action; low level of supervision needed. Competency refers to the minimum required for acceptability.
- **Proficiency:** The individual demonstrates all aspects of the skill or action on a routine basis in practice as appropriate to the skill or action; minimal supervision needed. Proficiency establishes an ongoing level of ability that is above the minimum.

The checklist instructions contain **critical** information about the process including:

DSPs and supervisors are deemed proficient once all related skills and behaviors have been observed and documented on the checklist, including noting as not applicable (NA) if an action related to any skill does not apply in the current role in any of the skills included on the checklist. Proficiency is established when the skills are observed over time and each area must be confirmed as proficient within 180 days of hire.

To ensure the health and wellness of people receiving services, Competency 3 and all related skills must be confirmed as *competent* **prior** to providing support in the absence of paid staff who has demonstrated proficiency with this competency. Competency refers to the bare minimum required for acceptability where proficiency establishes an ongoing level of ability that is above the minimum.

If at any time a DSP or DSP Supervisor is found to be deficient in any competency area, billing by the agency must cease related to those services rendered by that person. The provider must document actions taken and the date that restoration of ability is confirmed. Once proficiency has been demonstrated, the provider may resume billing for services provided by the DSP or supervisor from that date forward. DMAS shall not reimburse for those services provided by DSPs or DSP supervisors who have failed to pass the orientation test or demonstrate competencies as required.

The initial completion of the checklist and annual updates, as well as confirmation of training, must be maintained and available for review by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, and other reviewers as required.

*Virginia's Competencies for Direct Support Professionals and Supervisors who support individuals with Developmental Disabilities* checklist is available online at:

[https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP\\_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html](https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html)

## **DSP & DSP Supervisor Advanced Competency Checklists and Training for DBHDS-licensed Agencies Only**

While *Virginia's Competencies for Direct Support Professionals and Supervisors who support individuals with Developmental Disabilities* checklist applies to DBDHS-licensed agencies supporting people from Supports Intensity Scale SIS© tiers one through four, there are additional training requirements and competency checklists when providers support people most at risk and identified as having support needs defined through the SIS© at tier four.

DBHDS established training and competency requirements as described in the 2016 DMAS Medicaid Memo to include a higher level of skill when providers offer services and supports to people with tier four support needs. Included in DD Waiver regulations (12VAC30-122-180) and the [Medicaid Memo 9.1.16](#), are the requirements that providers supporting individuals at SIS© tier four complete training in the areas of autism, complex health supports, and complex behavioral supports.

Training in these areas can be developed or reviewed and approved by a qualified professional in each area as described in the *DBHDS Advanced Competencies Training Topics 9.25.17* document available online here: [https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP\\_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html](https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html).

**Training may be accessed through a variety of means as long as it is nationally recognized or developed or approved by a qualified professional in each competency area.**

**Health professionals include:** a physician, nurse practitioner, psychiatric nurse practitioner, or registered nurse (RN).

**Autism professionals include:** a psychiatrist; a psychologist; psychiatric nurse practitioner; a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC); a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW); a Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialist, or a Certified Autism Specialist (CAS), a Licensed Behavior Analyst (LBA), or a Licensed Assistant Behavior Analyst (LABA).

**Behavioral professionals include:** a psychiatrist; a psychologist; psychiatric nurse practitioner; a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC); a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW); a Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialist, Positive Behavioral Support Facilitator (PBSF), a Licensed Behavior Analyst (LBA), or a Licensed Assistant Behavior Analyst (LABA).

**The following topics must be included in training provided to DSPs and their supervisors when supporting individuals at SIS© tier four:**

**Health:** Confidentiality; Professional collaboration; Communicating health information; Documenting health information; Relationship between physical and mental health; Common risk factors for DD-related health conditions; Universal precaution procedures; Performing delegated tasks; Supporting Virginia's identified risks for people with DD including: skin care (pressure sores; skin breakdown), aspiration pneumonia, falls, urinary tract infections, dehydration, constipation & bowel obstruction, sepsis, and seizures; Providing direct care to individuals with complex health care needs (e.g. ADL's, positioning, care of Durable Medical Equipment, and specialized supervision with appropriate responses to health parameters set by the health professional).

**Behavior:** Ethical Practices (practicing within scope); Function and Purpose of Behavior; Replacement Behavior Training; Positive Behavior Supports; Behavioral Prevention; Dual Diagnosis; Data Collection (goal and purpose); Ruling out medical concerns for behavior.

**Autism:** General Characteristics of Autism; Dual Diagnosis; Environmental Modifications/Assessments; Communication Supports and Strategies; Social skills, Peer Interactions, and Friendship; Sensory Integration; Life Span Supports.

There are three corresponding advanced competency checklists that must be completed in DBHDS-licensed programs (see page 2 for included services) where individuals with SIS® tier four support needs receive services and supports from DSPs and DSP supervisors based on individual needs. These include:

Virginia’s Autism Competencies for Direct Support Professionals and Supervisors who support individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DMAS #P201)

Virginia’s Health Competencies for Direct Support Professionals and Supervisors who support individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DMAS #P244a)

Virginia’s Behavioral Competencies for Direct Support Professionals and Supervisors who support individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DMAS #P240a)

Criteria for Requiring Advanced Competencies at SIS® Tier Four	
Health	The presence of a complex health condition that necessitates specific supports and instructions indicates that Health Competencies (DMAS P244a) must be met.
Autism	A diagnosis of autism indicates that Autism Competencies (DMAS P201a) must be met.
Behavioral	The need for behavioral supports either in the ISP or in a formal behavioral plan indicates that Behavioral Supports Competencies (DMAS P240a) must be met.

These advanced competency checklists are available online at:  
[https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP\\_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html](https://partnership.vcu.edu/DSP_orientation/Competencies-Assurances-Tests.html)

These checklists must be initiated by DBHDS-licensed providers and DSPs and DSP supervisors confirmed as proficient within 180 days of hire or within 180 days of assisting a person with related SIS© tier four support needs whether that person is new to the program or receives an updated SIS© confirming Tier Four, which corresponds with SIS© levels 5, 6, and 7. The checklists would be limited to those that are relevant to the needs of the individual(s) supported. DBHDS Licensing regulations require that providers admit only those individuals whose service needs are consistent with the service description, for whom services are available, and for which staffing levels and types meet the needs of the individuals served receiving services (12VAC35-105-580). These advanced competencies build on these requirements and are designed to increase consistency in the support offered through these programs.

Advanced DSP and Supervisor Requirements (DBHDS-licensed agencies)		
Maintain documentation that applicable training was completed by each DSP and DSP supervisor and that the training was developed or approved by a qualified professional.	Complete and maintain DSP and DSP Supervisor Assurance Documents (DMAS #P242a and DMAS 245a for DBHDS-licensed agencies) <i>Completed at Level 1</i>	Complete and maintain applicable advanced competency checklists with annual updates (DMAS #P201; DMAS #P244a; and/or DMAS #P240a)
DBHDS-Licensed Agencies supporting levels 5, 6, or 7 with autism, behavioral or complex health needs		
		

### Compliance, Data, and Provider Remediation

Provider agencies are reviewed by DMAS Quality Management Review (QMR) for compliance with DSP and DSP Supervisor competency training requirements. If upon review a provider does not have documentation to demonstrate that DSPs and DSP Supervisors have met the requirements set forth in this protocol per DD Waiver regulations, the provider will be cited for a lack of compliance with waiver requirements. Providers must respond through a corrective action plan when deficiencies are identified by DMAS that details the methods that will be employed to ensure ongoing, sustained implementation of these requirements. A provider’s inability to demonstrate compliance can result in a provider having its DMAS participation agreement or DBHDS license suspended or revoked.

DBHDS and DMAS collect data around compliance and remediation activities related to this process, which is part of Virginia’s overall approach to compliance under the waivers per approval by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at the federal level.

The established measures included in DD Waiver Quality Assurance Reporting for these requirements and that are currently tracked for compliance are stated as:

*Number and percent of provider agency staff meeting provider orientation training requirements.*

*Number and percent of provider agency direct support professionals (DSPs) meeting competency training requirements.*

Through these measures DBHDS and DMAS report to CMS the number of providers who meet and do not meet provider orientation training requirements. This is one means of determining Virginia’s success with operating the Building Independence, Family & Individual Supports, and Community Living Waivers.

**Portability**

DSPs who move employment from one agency to another and have documentation of having completed training and passed the 2016 Orientation Manual Test there do not have to be retrained, although the new agency would still discuss the values and concepts as they pertain to their agency’s policies with the new employee. The new provider would ensure that receipt of a copy of the DSP’s scored test or supervisor’s VLC certificate and assurance and keep it on file. Competencies where required must be confirmed at each agency within 180 days of hire and reconfirmed at least annually.

**Documentation Requirements Overview**

<i>Agencies providing services listed on page 3</i>	<b>Supervisor’s Certificate from COVLC</b>	<b>DSP Test with 80%+ score</b>	<b>DSP Supervisor Assurance</b>	<b>DSP Assurance</b>	<b>Basic competency Checklist</b>	<b>Autism Competency Checklist</b>	<b>Behavioral Competency Checklist</b>	<b>Health Competency Checklist</b>
<b>Employment Service Organizations</b>								
<b>Home Care Organizations</b>								
<b>DBHDS-Licensed Agencies</b>						As applicable to people supported		
Related form numbers	N/A	N/A	DMAS P245a	DMAS P242a	DMAS P241a	DMAS P201	DMAS P240a	DMAS P244a

Questions about these requirements can be directed to your assigned Community Resource Consultant. A contact list and linked documents are available online at the DBHDS Provider Development Webpage: <http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/developmental-services/provider-development>.