Part 1. Job description

Fill in the blanks; everything in grey italics is a prompt to replace. Pay, schedule, requirements and every item your state or funders require are yours to write in.

Job title	*For example: Direct Support Professional, or the title your organization uses*
Program, service or site	*For example: residential, day program, in-home or employment supports*
Reports to	*Title of the supervisor*
Full-time, part-time or on call	
Hours, shifts and schedule	*Days, shifts, weekends, holidays, overnight, and how schedules are set*
Pay	*Starting pay or range, and how it grows*
Benefits	
Where the work happens	*Homes, community locations, travel between sites*
Date written or last reviewed	

About us and the people we support

Who we are and who we support: what matters to the people we support and what they look for in a DSP, written with them, in their words where they wish.

Summary

A direct support professional (DSP) supports people we serve to live the lives they choose: at home, at work and in the community. The DSP gets to know each person, supports them with daily life in the way they prefer, helps them build skills and relationships, and speaks up for them and with them. They work as part of a team, follow each person's plan, and keep accurate records.

Ours, built on the summary in the New Jersey sample DSP job description: "A Direct Support Professional (DSP) supports individuals with developmental disabilities so that they can live as independent a life as possible." Edit it to fit the role.

Essential duties

Keep	Duty	NADSP competency area
☐	Get to know each person you support: what matters to them, how they communicate, and what they want from each day.	2 Communication, 14 Provide Person Centered Supports
☐	Provide person-centered supports that respect each person's rights and choices and help them live the life they choose.	1 Participant Empowerment, 14 Provide Person Centered Supports
☐	Support personal care, such as bathing, toileting, dressing and grooming, as each person needs and prefers, with dignity and privacy.	6 Community Living Skills & Supports, 15 Supporting Health and Wellness
☐	Support household tasks such as meals, shopping, laundry and cleaning, and teach skills where the person wants to learn them.	6 Community Living Skills & Supports
☐	Support each person's health: help plan and get to appointments, follow health plans, and, with the training your organization requires, support medications as each person's plan and your policy set out.	15 Supporting Health and Wellness
☐	Help each person take part in community life: work, school, faith, recreation, friendships and family, based on their preferences.	4 Community and Service Networking, 9 Vocational, Educational & Career Support, 13 Building and Maintaining Friendships and Relationships
☐	Follow each person's support plan, and help the team review whether it is working.	5 Facilitation of Services
☐	Notice early signs that someone is upset, help prevent and calm a crisis, keep people safe, and get help as your policy sets out.	10 Crisis Prevention and Intervention
☐	Speak up for the people you support, and help them speak up for themselves.	1 Participant Empowerment, 8 Advocacy

Keep	Duty	NADSP competency area
☐	Write accurate, respectful daily notes and incident reports on time, and keep information confidential.	12 Documentation
☐	Work as part of a team: share information at shift change, give and accept support from coworkers, and take part in supervision.	11 Organizational Participation
☐	Complete the training your role requires, and keep learning.	7 Education, Training & Self-Development
☐	*A duty specific to this role (write in)*	
☐	*A duty specific to this role (write in)*	
☐	*A duty specific to this role (write in)*	

Free tools for these duties: crisis plan template, DSP daily notes template, DSP annual training plan template, DSP incident report template

Where this comes from: New Jersey sample DSP job description; NADSP Competency Areas. Our wording, built on the essential duties in the New Jersey sample DSP job description and mapped to the 15 NADSP competency areas. The New Jersey sample advises that "Ideally, job descriptions should be tailored to the tasks the DSP will be performing based on who they are supporting." Keep, change or remove each duty to fit the role, and add your own.

What we look for

Respect	Treats each person with dignity and respects their privacy and choices.
Reliability	Arrives on time, gives notice of a shift conflict, and follows through.
Communication	Listens, adapts to how each person communicates, and writes clearly.
Teamwork	Gives and accepts support from coworkers and supervisors.
Willingness to learn	Asks for feedback and keeps learning on the job.
	A quality you look for (write in)
	A quality you look for (write in)

Where this comes from: CMS DSW Core Competencies, 2014; NADSP Competency Areas; Larson and Hewitt, ch. 4 (RTC). Ours, built on these. CMS lists "Shows professionalism by being on time, dressing appropriately for the job, and being responsible in all work tasks" among its skill statements; NADSP expects that the competent DSP "provides and accepts co-worker support." Larson and Hewitt add: "Remember that skills can be developed but that attitudes rarely change."

Requirements, demands and support (yours to write in)

Requirements	*Write in what your state, your funders and your organization require for this role: for example age, education, driver's license and insurance, background checks, certifications and training to complete before or after hire.*
Physical demands	*Write in what this job actually asks: lifting, standing, driving and so on.*
Work environment	*Where the work happens and what a shift is like.*
Training and support we give	*For example: paid orientation, a mentor, shadow shifts before working alone, and check-ins in the first 90 days.*

These rows hold only a grey prompt, on purpose: what your state, your funders and your organization require differs by state, by service and by agency.

Acknowledgment

I have read this job description and had the chance to ask questions about it.

Employee name		**Date**	
Employee signature		**Date**	
Supervisor signature		**Date**	

The New Jersey sample ends with an acknowledgment that the employee and supervisor sign; this line is ours.

Part 2. Structured interview guide

Ask every applicant for the role the same questions, in the same order. Two interviewers each score every answer from 1 to 5 against the answers you agreed on, then compare. Use one copy of this guide and the ten-skills chart for each candidate, and one for each interviewer if you score separately.

1. **Ask every applicant the same questions.** Choose 8 to 10 questions for the role and ask them of every applicant for that position, in the same order.
2. **Agree on what a good answer sounds like, before the first interview.** With DSPs and supervisors, write what an excellent (5), average (3) and poor (1) answer to each question would include.
3. **Interview in pairs or a panel, and take notes.** Two interviewers, one of them an experienced DSP where you can, each scoring on their own and then comparing.
4. **Involve the people you support.** Invite people you support, and families where the person wishes, to meet candidates or ask a question.
5. **Score each answer, then the whole.** Add the scores and compare candidates on the same ten critical skills and qualities.

Where this comes from: Larson and Hewitt, ch. 4 (RTC); ANCOR sample DSP structured interview questions; Jobs that Care New Jersey: information for employers. In the research Larson and Hewitt summarize, structured interviews were rated "High (.48 to .67)" in predictive validity and unstructured interviews "Low to medium (.23 to .37)"; they conclude: "Clearly, structured interviews are one of the most effective, if not the most effective, selection strategies available." "Elements of structure include asking all applicants the same job-related questions and establishing clear criteria for evaluating responses to the questions," and "Behavior description questions ask candidates to describe situations they faced, what the candidates did, and what happened as a result." ANCOR's sample, based on the NADSP competency areas, suggests: "We suggest your agency ask the same set of questions of all applicants for a particular position."

Scoring guide

5	**Excellent**	A recent, specific example; what they did and why; a good outcome or a clear lesson.
3	**Average**	A real example with some detail, or a sound general approach without a specific example.
1	**Poor**	No example, an answer that ignores the person's choices or safety, or blames others.

The 5, 3 and 1 levels come from Larson and Hewitt, who suggest asking experienced DSPs and supervisors to "reach consensus about excellent (5), average (3), and poor (1) answers to each question"; the general descriptions here are ours. 2 and 4 sit between the levels.

Candidate		**Position**	
Interviewer		**Date**	

To open (not scored)

What attracted you to this position? Why do you think you might want to do this work? (New Jersey sample, as published)

Question 1 · NADSP Area 1: Participant Empowerment

Ours	**Tell me about a time you supported someone to make their own decision, even when you would have chosen differently. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened?**
Listen for (ours)	Respects the person's right to choose; shares information without taking over; stays involved to support the choice.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 2 · NADSP Area 2: Communication

ANCOR sample, as published	**Describe a situation in which your attempts to communicate with someone were ineffective. What was the situation, what did you do and what happened as a result?**
Listen for (ours)	Notices the message did not land; tries another way (words, pictures, gestures, timing); checks for understanding.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 3 · NADSP Area 5: Facilitation of Services

ANCOR sample, as published	**Tell me about a time when you had to practice professional confidentiality. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?**
Listen for (ours)	Keeps private information private; knows who may be told and when; handles pressure to share politely.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 4 · NADSP Area 14: Provide Person Centered Supports

New Jersey sample, as published	**Tell me about a time when what the person you supported wanted conflicted with what a family member/parent wanted. How did you handle that?**
Listen for (ours)	Keeps the person at the center; listens to both; brings in the team or supervisor where the plan or policy calls for it.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 5 · NADSP Area 10: Crisis Prevention and Intervention

ANCOR sample, as published	**Describe the last time you became involved in a conflict or crisis situation. What was the situation? What did you do? How well did it work? What would you have done to prevent the situation from occurring?**
Listen for (ours)	Stays calm; keeps people safe; gets help; reflects on early signs and on what would prevent it next time.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 6 · NADSP Area 11: Organizational Participation

ANCOR sample, as published	**Describe a situation in which you had a conflict with a co-worker. What was the issue, what did you do, what was the outcome of the conflict?**
Listen for (ours)	Raises it directly and respectfully; looks for a solution; involves a supervisor when needed; no blame.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 7 · NADSP Area 12: Documentation

ANCOR sample, as published	**Describe a situation in which you were asked to document an event. Describe what occurred, what information was documented, and the reasons behind your documentation.**
Listen for (ours)	Writes facts, not opinions; is timely and complete; understands why records matter to the person and the team.
Agreed answers	*5 =* *3 =* *1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 8 · NADSP Area 13: Building and Maintaining Friendships and Relationships

ANCOR sample, as published	**Tell about a time you helped a person you supported communicate with their friends and relatives.**
Listen for (ours)	Values relationships; follows the person's wishes; finds practical ways to keep in touch. Examples from work, school, volunteering or community life all count.
Agreed answers	*5 =* *3 =* *1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 9 · NADSP Area 15: Supporting Health and Wellness

ANCOR sample, as published	**Describe a time you helped to promote the health and wellness of a person you support.**
Listen for (ours)	Supports the person's own choices about health; notices changes and reports them; follows plans and policy.
Agreed answers	*5 =* *3 =* *1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 10 · NADSP Area 8: Advocacy

ANCOR sample, as published	**Describe a time when you advocated or assisted a person when they were being treated badly by another person.**
Listen for (ours)	Steps in safely and respectfully; supports the person to speak up; reports as policy requires.
Agreed answers	*5 =* *3 =* *1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 11 · NADSP Area 7: Education, Training & Self-Development

Ours	**Tell me about the last time you learned something new, at work or on your own. How did you go about it, and how did you use it?**
Listen for (ours)	Curious; asks for help and feedback; puts learning into practice.
Agreed answers	*5 =* *3 =* *1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

Question 12 · CMS: Professionalism and Ethics

New Jersey sample, as published	**Tell me about a time when you made a mistake. How did you handle this experience?**
Listen for (ours)	Owns it; tells the right person promptly; fixes what can be fixed; learns from it.
Agreed answers	*5 = 3 = 1 =*
Notes	
Score (1 to 5)	

To close (not scored)

What questions do you have about the job, the people we support or how we work? (Ours)

Marked "Ours" where we wrote the question; the others are quoted as published in the ANCOR sample (based on the NADSP competency areas) or the New Jersey sample. Every "Listen for" line is ours, a starting point for your own agreed answers. The New Jersey sample notes its questions "are not intended for use in a single interview," and ANCOR's says: "It is not the intent of this tool that you ask all applicants all questions listed below." The order follows a natural interview flow, not the area numbers.

Your 10 most critical skills and qualities

Larson and Hewitt suggest that "it may be also helpful to prepare a single-page chart listing 10 most critical job skills and qualifications on which each candidate will be scored." List them before the first interview; score each from 1 to 5 for every candidate.

#	Skill or quality	Score (1 to 5)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
	Total of the question scores, and of these ten	

Part 3. Realistic job preview checklist

A realistic job preview (RJP) shows an applicant the good and the hard parts of the job before they decide, so the people who say yes know what they are saying yes to.

1. Build it

Before you post the job.

✓	Item	Done (date)
☐	Make sure the job description is complete and accurate, and give it to every applicant.	
☐	Ask current DSPs, newer and experienced, what is best and hardest about the job (the six questions below).	
☐	Ask the people you support, and their families, what they look for in a DSP.	
☐	List what newcomers are unlikely to know or may expect differently, good and hard.	
☐	Choose how you will share it: a visit, a meeting with DSPs, a written preview, or a video.	
☐	*Your own item (write in)*	

2. What to cover

The information to highlight, from Larson, O'Nell and Sauer.

✓	Item	Done (date)
☐	Your organization, its vision and mission.	
☐	Hours and scheduling, pay and paid leave (write in yours).	
☐	What the job requires before hire (write in yours).	
☐	Typical duties, including cooking, personal care, documentation and community outings.	
☐	What you expect at work: on time for every shift, notice for a shift conflict, respectful interactions, working without daily direct supervision.	
☐	The interests of the people supported, shared with their permission.	
☐	Why current DSPs love the job, in their words.	
☐	The hard parts of the job, also in their words.	
☐	*Your own item (write in)*	

3. Give it

At the right time, with time for questions.

✓	Item	Done (date)
☐	After the job offer and before the person accepts.	
☐	As a conversation where you can, with time for questions.	
☐	For a site visit: ask the people who live or spend their day there first, and respect their privacy.	
☐	Visit at a busy but routine time, such as a meal, and watch DSPs at work, not supervisors.	
☐	Give the applicant the questions to watch for and to ask (below).	

4. After it

Talk it through, and see whether it is working.

✓	Item	Done (date)
☐	Talk it through: what excited them, what bothered them, what confused them, and what they want to know more about.	
☐	Respect a "no": an applicant who decides the job is not for them has made an informed choice.	
☐	Track how many new DSPs are still with you at 6 months.	

Where this comes from: Larson, O'Nell and Sauer, ch. 3 (RTC); CMS DSW Promising Practices, 2006; Jobs that Care New Jersey: information for employers; Larson, Frontline Initiative, 1996. "One meta-analysis found that RJPs improved retention rates by 9%–17%," and RJPs "delivered after a job offer has been made but before an applicant decides whether to accept a position are more effective in reducing turnover than RJPs offered when an applicant first makes contact with the organization"; those "that involve a verbal exchange of information (in which the applicant can ask questions about the RJP) are the most effective in reducing turnover but that written RJPs are also effective. Videotaped RJPs were much less effective in reducing turnover" (Larson, O'Nell and Sauer). For a site visit they advise: "People receiving supports should be consulted about the structured observation before its implementation," and "Observations should be followed by a debriefing." The checklist wording is ours.

Six questions for current DSPs

Questions for current DSPs, quoted from Larson, O'Nell and Sauer, who call them "some of the most effective questions." Ask newer and experienced DSPs; their answers become the preview.

What is the best part of your job?	
What makes you want to stay at this organization or in this job?	
What could your employer do to make your job better?	
What was the hardest part of starting this job? Give specific examples.	
What specific incidents make you want to leave this organization or job?	
What would you tell a friend who was applying for your job?	

For the applicant on a visit

For the applicant on a visit: the first three to watch for, the last three to ask DSPs, quoted from the Structured Observation Worksheet in Larson, O'Nell and Sauer (adapted there by permission from Taylor and others, 1997, and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota).

Watch for: What are the various job activities that DSPs do?	
Watch for: What kinds of things do the people you observed seem to like?	
Watch for: How did staff members figure out what a person wanted to eat or to do? Were choices offered?	
Ask a DSP: What do you like best about your job?	
Ask a DSP: What is the most difficult part of your job?	
Ask a DSP: What kinds of supervision do you receive?	

Talk it through afterwards

What excited you?	
What bothered you?	
What confused you?	
What would you like to know more about?	

Our questions, following the four prompts that close the same worksheet.

For training leads and HR: set it up in five steps

1. **Write the job description with your DSPs.** Start from the duties here, and keep, change or remove each one to fit the role. Ask DSPs who do the job now, and the people they support, what is missing. Write the summary in your own words.
2. **Fill in the blanks.** Pay, hours and schedule, benefits, requirements, physical demands and work environment are blank on purpose: they are yours, and what your state and funders require differs by state, by service and by agency.
3. **Choose your interview questions and agree on good answers.** Pick 8 to 10 questions, one per area that matters most for the role. Before the first interview, agree with DSPs and supervisors on what a 5, 3 and 1 answer sounds like, and list your 10 most critical skills and qualities. Ask every applicant the same questions.
4. **Build the job preview, and give it after the offer.** Ask current DSPs the six questions, choose what to cover, and give the preview after the job offer and before the person accepts, as a conversation where you can.
5. **Follow through after hire.** Give the new DSP their signed job description on day one, plan their first 90 days with the onboarding checklist, and count how many new DSPs are still with you at 6 months.

Next: DSP onboarding checklist, DSP competency observation checklist, DSP turnover cost calculator, NADSP Code of Ethics onboarding guide

Where this comes from

Read November 15, 2026. The duty wording, the summary, the questions marked Ours, every "Listen for" line, the scoring descriptions and the checklist wording are Special Learning's; the quoted lines and questions are as published. None of these organizations has reviewed or endorsed this template. New Jersey's samples are New Jersey's own examples. The fillable Word version is at the web address at the foot of each page.

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3. **Jobs that Care New Jersey: information for employers.** New Jersey Department of Human Services, Jobs that Care New Jersey, "Information for Employers" (DSP recruitment and selection guide for employers). https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/jobsthatcare/employers/
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5. **Larson and Hewitt, ch. 4 (RTC).** Sheryl A. Larson and Amy S. Hewitt, "Selection Strategies," chapter 4 of Larson and Hewitt, Staff Recruitment, Retention, & Training Strategies for Community Human Services Organizations (Paul H. Brookes, 2005; republished 2012 by the Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota). https://rtc.umn.edu/docs/Larson_and_Hewitt_Staff_rrt_book_U_of_MN_reprint_2012.pdf#page=103
6. **Larson, O'Nell and Sauer, ch. 3 (RTC).** Sheryl A. Larson, Susan N. O'Nell and John K. Sauer, "What Is This Job All About? Using Realistic Job Previews in the Hiring Process," chapter 3 of Larson and Hewitt, Staff Recruitment, Retention, & Training Strategies for Community Human Services Organizations (Paul H. Brookes, 2005; republished 2012 by the Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota). https://rtc.umn.edu/docs/Larson_and_Hewitt_Staff_rrt_book_U_of_MN_reprint_2012.pdf#page=75
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10. **NCI-IDD State of the Workforce, 2024.** National Core Indicators Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (NCI-IDD), State of the Workforce in 2024 Survey Report (Human Services Research Institute and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, December 2025). https://idd.nationalcoreindicators.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2024-NCI-IDD-SoTW_Final-Tagged.pdf
11. **NADSP Competency Areas.** National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), The NADSP Competency Areas, as published on nadsp.org. https://nadsp.org/resources/competency-areas/
12. **CMS DSW Core Competencies, 2014.** Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, National Direct Service Workforce Resource Center, Direct Service Workforce Core Competencies, Final Competency Set, December 2014. https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/2019-12/dsw-core-competencies-final-set-2014.pdf

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14. **O*NET 21-1093.00 Social and Human Service Assistants.** U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, O*NET OnLine, summary report for 21-1093.00 Social and Human Service Assistants. https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/21-1093.00

One next step: if your staff support autistic people, the Level 1 ABA Online Training Course for groups introduces autism and behavior-support foundations. $99 per learner · One-time purchase · Each learner has 12 weeks of access from the day they activate their code · Free 7-day trial of the first 2 sessions.