DSP knowledge check

A free knowledge check from Special Learning for direct support professionals. Circle one answer for each question. Each question is built from the linked source. Where the answer depends on your state or agency, the question asks for your rule.

Name:	Date:
Agency or team:	☐ Pre-check ☐ Post-check

There are 56 questions in nine areas. Some are scenarios about people we have invented. Where a question says your state or agency sets the answer, answer from the rule you were taught.

Area A: Person-centered practice and self-determination

Choices, goals, risk, and who decides.

1. In the CMS core competencies, what is a direct service worker's part in designing a person's services or support plan?

A. Helps design it based on the choices and goals of the person supported, and involves the person.
B. Writes it alone from the agency's standard template, then reviews it with the family.
C. Waits for the clinical team to finish it, then reads it once.
D. Builds it from what staff find easiest to carry out.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

2. Amara says she would rather go grocery shopping on Sunday with her friend than on Saturday with staff, as the house schedule shows. What is the best next step for a DSP?

A. Keep Saturday, because the schedule was set for everyone.
B. Tell her Sunday is not possible without checking.
C. Take her Saturday and let her friend visit another time.
D. Support her choice, tell the team, and work out any practical concern with her.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

3. The NADSP Code of Ethics says a DSP respects each person's right to make decisions and take risks. What does the Code say the person gains from this?

A. A guarantee that no harm will follow.
B. Permission to skip the support plan.
C. The dignity of learning from the outcomes of those decisions.
D. A reward for following staff advice.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

4. Tomás has a legal representative. Under the NADSP Code of Ethics, what should a DSP understand?

A. His representative makes every choice for him, so he is no longer asked.
B. He still has the right to make choices about his life, and the DSP asks a supervisor or manager when unsure.
C. The representative's role ends the day the agency starts services.
D. Only his family may decide what he eats and wears.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

5. Wen tells you, “My sister helps me understand big decisions, but I decide.” Which response fits the NADSP Code of Ethics? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Assume the sister is Wen’s guardian and ask her for every decision.
B. Treat this as possibly supported decision-making, not guardianship: do not assume the sister decides, and ask your supervisor what is on record.
C. Tell Wen that family cannot be part of her decisions.
D. Decide for Wen when the sister is not available.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

6. The CMS core competencies describe working with a person on progress toward goals. What does the DSP do when the person’s goals or wishes change?

A. Works in partnership with the person to track progress and adjust services as needed and desired by the person.
B. Keeps the original services until the next annual meeting.
C. Adjusts services as the supervisor prefers.
D. Stops tracking progress until the person decides again.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

7. Dev wants to invite a neighbor to dinner on a weeknight. A house rule says no guests on weeknights. What does the NADSP Code of Ethics ask of the DSP?

A. Enforce the rule quietly, since a rule is a rule.
B. Let the neighbor come and say nothing to anyone.
C. Tell Dev guests are not allowed in any home.
D. Seek Dev’s guidance and bring the limit to the team, because the Code asks the DSP to seek the person’s guidance when policies, practices or others’ wishes limit their choices.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area B: Communication

Being understood, and understanding.

8. In the CMS core competencies, whose understanding is the test of whether a DSP’s communication works?

A. The supervisor reading the shift note.
B. The DSP, if the DSP spoke clearly.
C. The person supported: communication is used in a way the person can understand.
D. The family, whatever the person understood.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

9. A new service schedule starts Monday. Who should hear it explained, according to the CMS core competencies?

A. Only the family.
B. Only the case manager.
C. The person being supported, and his or her family members.
D. Nobody until the schedule is printed.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

10. Ravi uses a picture board to say what he wants. A new DSP is rushing and talks over it. What does the NADSP Code of Ethics ask?

A. Wait for Ravi to learn to speak.
B. Assist individuals who do not rely on speech to engage using their preferred methods, so the DSP slows down and uses the board.
C. Guess what Ravi wants and save time.
D. Ask a coworker to talk for Ravi.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

11. You use a term such as “person-centered plan” with someone who has not heard it. What do the NADSP competency areas say a skilled DSP does?

A. Learns and uses terminology appropriately, explaining as necessary to ensure the person understands.
B. Uses the term without explaining, so it sounds professional.
C. Avoids the topic with the person.
D. Explains it only to the family.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

12. You are writing about Imani for a team note and are unsure how she likes to be described. What does the NADSP Code of Ethics ask?

A. Use the diagnosis label from her file.
B. Use whatever the previous staff wrote.
C. Use shorthand every staff member knows.
D. Use respectful and inclusive language that reflects her preferences, so ask her.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area C: Rights and community settings

The federal qualities of a home and community-based setting.

13. Which statement matches the first quality the federal rule lists for a home and community-based setting?

A. The setting is chosen by the agency for the person’s safety.
B. The setting keeps people together so staff can supervise efficiently.
C. The setting limits outside activities to scheduled group outings.
D. The setting is integrated in the community and supports full access to it.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

14. Under the federal rule, who selects the setting?

A. The provider agency, from its own homes.
B. The funding agency, by waiting list order.
C. The individual, from among setting options that include non-disability specific settings and an option for a private unit in a residential setting.
D. The family, without the person.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

15. In a provider-owned or controlled residential setting, who should be able to lock the door to a person’s own bedroom?

A. Staff only, for safety.
B. The person, with only appropriate staff having keys, unless a documented modification in the person’s plan says otherwise.
C. Nobody, because doors stay unlocked at night.
D. The house manager only.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

16. In a provider-owned or controlled HCBS group home, the kitchen is locked at 9 PM for everyone as a house routine. What does the federal rule say about access to food?

A. Individuals have the freedom and support to control their own schedules and have access to food at any time; a limit needs a documented modification for that person.
B. Staff may set food times for convenience.
C. Access to food is a reward for good behavior.
D. Only snacks the agency supplies are allowed.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

17. Which condition does the federal rule list for visitors in a provider-owned or controlled residential setting?

A. Individuals are able to have visitors of their choosing at any time.
B. Visitors only during posted hours.
C. Visitors only with staff approval each time.
D. Visitors only if family.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

18. In a provider-owned or controlled residential HCBS setting, individuals who share a bedroom have which of the following?

A. Roommates assigned by the agency, and a standard room layout.
B. Roommates chosen by staff, and furniture chosen by the family.
C. Neither; these are privileges staff may grant.
D. A choice of roommates in that setting, and the freedom to furnish and decorate their sleeping or living units within the lease or other agreement.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

19. A coworker wants to limit visiting hours for one resident because evenings are busy. What must be in place before a condition such as visitors can be modified?

A. A note from the shift lead.
B. Agreement of the other residents.
C. A specific assessed need, justified in the person-centered service plan.
D. Nothing, if it is only for a few weeks.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

20. If your agency is an ICF/IID, what does the federal rule say about a person's mail?

A. Staff open all mail to check for safety.
B. The facility ensures clients the opportunity to send and receive unopened mail, and to communicate, associate and meet privately with individuals of their choice.
C. Mail is held until the next team meeting.
D. Only mail from family is delivered.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area D: Safety: abuse, neglect and exploitation

Recognizing, reporting, and knowing your state's rule.

21. What does the CMS Safety competency expect of a DSW about abuse, exploitation and neglect?

A. Investigate them privately before telling anyone.
B. Identify, prevent and report them according to laws and agency rules.
C. Report them only if the person asks.
D. Leave it to the supervisor, even when you see it.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

22. Which of these must a state's definition of a critical incident include at a minimum, under the federal rule for HCBS waivers?

A. Exploitation, including financial exploitation.
B. A late timesheet.
C. A person declining a meal.
D. A change in the weekly schedule.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

23. How soon must you report suspected abuse or neglect, and to whom? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Within 30 days, to your supervisor, in every state.
B. After you have confirmed it happened.
C. Only if you saw it yourself.
D. As soon as your state's law and agency procedure require.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

24. You notice bruises on Jamal, there is no explanation for them, and you did not see how they happened. What is the next step? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Ask Jamal's housemates what happened and decide who is at fault.
B. Wait a week to see if it happens again.
C. Report what you saw to the appropriate authorities through your agency's procedure, as your state requires, and write down what you observed.
D. Mention it at the next team meeting.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

25. The CMS Safety competency says a DSW recognizes signs of abuse and neglect, including which practice?

A. The use of any assistive device.
B. A person choosing to stay in their room.
C. The inappropriate use of restraints.
D. A medical appointment on a weekday.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

26. In an ICF/IID, a staff member says Lee will not get dinner because he did not finish his chores. What does the federal rule say?

A. It is allowed once, as a lesson.
B. Staff must not punish a client by withholding food or hydration that contributes to a nutritionally adequate diet, so this is not allowed and must be raised.
C. It is allowed if the supervisor agrees.
D. It is allowed if Lee has snacks later.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

27. A coworker says they borrowed $20 from Mina's spending money and will put it back. What is this, and what do you do? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. It may be exploitation, including financial exploitation; report it through your agency's procedure and your state's requirement.
B. A private matter between coworkers if it is repaid.
C. Fine if Mina does not notice.
D. Something to mention only if it happens twice.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area E: Crisis prevention and restraint

Preventing a crisis, approved approaches, asking for help.

28. Which of these does the CMS Crisis Prevention and Intervention competency ask a DSW to do?

A. Waiting for a crisis, then using the approved response.
B. Keeping the person away from anything that could upset them.
C. Having a staff member shadow the person at all times.
D. Recognizing risk and working to prevent a crisis in a way that meets the person's need.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

29. In a crisis, a new DSP wants to use a hold learned at a previous job. What does the CMS competency say a DSW uses? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Any hold that worked before.
B. Whatever the most senior coworker suggests.
C. A hold from a video, if no one is hurt.
D. Approved approaches your agency and state allow and have trained you on.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

30. A person is escalating and you are alone on shift. What does the CMS competency say a DSW does?

A. Handles it alone to protect the person's privacy.
B. Waits for the person to calm down without telling anyone.
C. Seeks help from other staff or services when needed during a crisis.
D. Asks a housemate to help.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

31. You notice your raised voice makes a tense moment worse. What is the best next move?

A. Raise the voice more so it is heard.
B. Recognize that your own tone may be part of the problem, and change how you respond.
C. Leave the person alone without telling the team.
D. Blame the person for the escalation.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

32. Which of these is in the federal minimum list of critical incidents for HCBS waivers? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Misuse or unauthorized use of restrictive interventions or seclusion.
B. Any use of a communication device.
C. A staff member changing shifts.
D. A person choosing a different activity.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

33. After an incident, what does the CMS competency say about reporting? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Reports incidents according to rules.
B. Reports only if the person was hurt.
C. Reports when the supervisor asks.
D. Reports at the next team meeting.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area F: Health, wellness and medication

Appointments, emergencies, and medication within the rules.

34. Who may give medication to a person supported? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Any DSP, once asked by a coworker.
B. Any DSP, if the label is clear.
C. No DSP, in any state.
D. It depends on your state and agency; know what yours allow.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

35. A pill does not look like the one you gave yesterday. What does the NADSP competency area ask? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Give it, since the label matches the person.
B. Cut it in half to be safe.
C. Administer medications accurately and in accordance with agency policy and procedures, so stop and follow your agency's procedure before giving it.
D. Skip the dose and say nothing.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

36. Which medication event is on the federal minimum list of critical incidents? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Any refused dose.
B. A medication error resulting in a call to poison control, an emergency department or urgent care visit, a hospitalization, or death.
C. Any dose given 10 minutes late.
D. Any change in a prescription.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

37. What part does the CMS competency give a DSW for health care appointments?

A. Goes to the appointment and answers for the person.
B. Helps the person make and keep regular health and dental care appointments.
C. Cancels appointments that are hard to cover.
D. Decides which appointments matter.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

38. A person falls and is hurt. What does the CMS Safety competency expect?

A. Maintains the person's safety in an emergency, uses universal precautions and gives first aid as needed, following your agency's emergency procedure.
B. Moves the person quickly to a chair, without checking.
C. Waits for the person to say what hurts, then waits again.
D. Writes the incident note first.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area G: Confidentiality, boundaries and ethics

The NADSP Code of Ethics in daily work.

39. Under the NADSP Code of Ethics, what does a DSP do about the person's information?

A. Shares it with anyone on the support team, without asking.
B. Shares it with the person's neighbors if they ask nicely.
C. Keeps it private from the person.
D. Asks individuals how, when, and with whom they want their information shared.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

40. A neighbor asks why Kofi has appointments on Tuesdays. When does the Code allow a DSP to share confidential information?

A. Whenever the neighbor is a friend of the agency.
B. Whenever the person is not around.
C. Only with the person's permission, or when necessary to prevent serious or imminent harm.
D. Whenever it is an ordinary conversation.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

41. You photograph a person's medication list and text it to a friend who is a nurse, to ask a question. What do the CMS core competencies say?

A. It is fine because the friend is a nurse.
B. It is fine if you delete the text later.
C. A DSW maintains confidentiality in all spoken and written communication and follows HIPAA, so you do not send it and ask your supervisor instead.
D. It is fine if the name is cropped.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

42. Two DSPs talk about a person's behavior plan in the checkout line. What does the NADSP Code of Ethics ask?

A. Nothing, as long as no names are used.
B. Follow your employer's and the state's confidentiality policies, taking care to prevent private information from being overheard or seen by others.
C. Whisper and keep going.
D. Wait until the person is in earshot.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

43. A person you support asks you to lend them money and to be friends on social media. Which response fits the Code? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Stay warm and respectful, maintain clear boundaries as your agency's policy describes, and talk it through with your supervisor.
B. Say yes to both to build trust.
C. Say no and stop speaking with them.
D. Say yes once, as a favor.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

44. You are asked to do a task you have not been trained for. What does the Code of Ethics ask?

A. Try it, since most tasks are simple.
B. Decline silently and walk away.
C. Ask the person to show you without telling a supervisor.
D. Acknowledge your limitations and seek guidance from the people you support, colleagues, supervisors or mentors when needed.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

45. You realize you missed a log entry last night. What does the Code of Ethics ask?

A. Fill it in later as if it had been done on time.
B. Hope nobody notices.
C. Ask a coworker to say they did it.
D. Take responsibility for your decisions and actions and learn from mistakes, and be transparent and honest in all communication.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

46. Bao says he wants to start dating. A DSP is uncomfortable with that personally. What does the Code of Ethics ask?

A. Discourage it until the family agrees.
B. Tell him dating is not part of the program.
C. Support Bao's right to manage relationships as he chooses, and separate personal beliefs about relationships from his.
D. Share your beliefs so he can decide wisely.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area H: Documentation, observation and growth

Notes, data, feedback and training.

47. How does the CMS Person-Centered Practices competency describe documentation?

A. Writes notes after the week ends.
B. Completes and submits documentation of services on time.
C. Writes notes only when something goes wrong.
D. Leaves notes to the supervisor.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

48. At the end of a shift you have notes to write. What do the NADSP competency areas say about records?

A. Maintain accurate records, collecting, compiling and evaluating data, and submitting records to appropriate sources in a timely fashion.
B. Copy yesterday's note and change the date.
C. Write what you plan to do tomorrow instead.
D. Write only what the supervisor will like.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

49. In the CMS Evaluation and Observation competency, what does a DSW observe?

A. The health and behavior of the individual within his or her cultural context.
B. Only behavior, apart from health.
C. Only changes the family reports.
D. Only what the plan lists.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

50. What data does the CMS Evaluation and Observation competency say a DSW collects?

A. Data about how quickly staff finish tasks.
B. Data about incidents only.
C. Data only when a funder asks.
D. Data about the person's goals and satisfaction with services.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

51. Your supervisor gives you feedback after an observed shift. What does the CMS competency describe?

A. Explains why the feedback is wrong.
B. Asks only coworkers who agree.
C. Seeks feedback from many sources and uses it to improve work performance and skills.
D. Treats it as the end of the topic.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

52. If your agency is an ICF/IID, what does the federal rule say about staff training? *(Your state or agency sets this.)*

A. Initial training only, at hire.
B. The facility provides each employee with initial and continuing training that enables the employee to perform duties effectively, efficiently and competently.
C. Training only for staff who ask.
D. Training only for new job titles.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Area I: Culture, community and family

Learning from the person, and belonging.

53. You notice you feel uneasy about a person's food and holiday customs. What does the CMS Cultural Competency area ask?

A. Tell the person the customs are inconvenient.
B. Recognize your own bias and keep it from affecting how you work with the person.
C. Ask the person to follow house customs instead.
D. Say nothing and change the menu.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

54. According to the NADSP Code of Ethics, how does a DSP learn about a person's culture, preferences and needs?

A. Seeks guidance from the person.
B. Reads the diagnosis in the file.
C. Asks the agency about typical preferences.
D. Assumes from the person's family name.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

55. Priya wants to join a community choir. Staff say a day-program music group is easier. What does the CMS competency say a DSW does?

A. Keeps her in the day-program group.
B. Tells her the choir is too hard.
C. Chooses a group for her based on what staffing allows.
D. Supports the person to connect with friends and to live and be included in the community of her choice.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

56. What does the CMS Community Inclusion and Networking competency say about family members?

A. A DSW shares every detail with family on request.
B. A DSW leaves family out of planning.
C. A DSW respects the role of family members in planning and providing services.
D. A DSW lets family decide in place of the person.

My answer (circle one): A B C D

Sources

Questions are built from these sources, read November 15-17, 2026. They are our own questions and wording; the quoted lines are as published.

CMS Direct Service Workforce Core Competencies. https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/2019-12/dsw-core-competencies-final-set-2014.pdf

NADSP Competency Areas. https://nadsp.org/resources/competency-areas/

NADSP Code of Ethics. https://nadsp.org/the-nadsp-code-of-ethics/

42 CFR 441.301. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/section-441.301

42 CFR 441.302. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/section-441.302

42 CFR 483.420. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/section-483.420

42 CFR 483.430. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/section-483.430

One next step

If your staff support autistic people, the Level 1 ABA Online Training Course for groups introduces autism and behavior-support foundations, including errorless teaching and prompting. $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.

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