

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Certification

Who can become a certified DSP? Who is a DSP?

A Direct Support Professional(DSP) is a person whose primary role is to provide day-to-day support to people with disabilities in their homes, at work, at school or in their communities. They may be known by other titles such as support staff, direct care staff, psych tech, personal care attendants, job coach, or para-educators. The DSP certification was developed for DSPs who are ready to demonstrate competence in the area of supporting people with both intellectual disabilities and psychiatric symptoms. If you meet the minimum requirements, you can apply for certification. Typically, DSPs do not have a clinical license but they may have a degree in a related field. Professionals who have clinical license may wish to apply for Clinical Certification instead.

How much does certification cost?

The certification requires NADD membership and a \$60 application fee. The renewal fee for certification is \$30 every two years.

An individual NADD DSP membership costs \$60. If your organization has a membership, you do not need an individual membership.

## Application

What experience in supporting people with both intellectual disabilities and psychiatric symptoms (dual diagnosis) is required?

The equivalent of one year full time experience in either a mental health or a developmental disability setting as a direct support professional is needed. The work may be either in paid positions or a voluntary role. Knowledge of both developmental disability and mental health is needed to pass the test.

Do I need to report my volunteer experience?

No, this is not necessary unless you need the volunteer time to meet the one year minimum work experience requirements. If you have worked for one year or more there is no need to report volunteer experience.

The form asks for educational background. Does formal education matter?

No. You must meet the requirements to be employed by an agency in your community. Most employers require at least a high school diploma or GED. NADD is interested in learning about the background of certified DSPs but does not have any requirements beyond those of the employer. NADD recognizes that expertise is not always linked to formal coursework.

What if I am not currently employed?

If you meet the experience requirements, you do not need to be employed. You will need to get documentation from your previous employer and letters of recommendation from your past employment experiences.

What is the NADSP Code of Ethics? How does it relate to the test?

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) developed a set of ethical guidelines specifically for DSPs that has been shared with NADD. A code of ethics helps guide practitioners in making good choices when faced with competing demands and expectations. It keeps them focused in a positive way on the person being supported.

“The NADSP convened a national panel of DSPs, advocates, families, professionals, and researchers who constructed this code of ethics. Focus groups and surveys regarding the draft language were conducted throughout the country and were integrated to create the final code. This Code of Ethics is intended to serve as a straightforward and relevant ethical guide, shedding some light on the shared path to a self-directed life. It is intended to guide DSPs in resolving ethical dilemmas they face every day and to encourage DSPs to achieve the highest ideals of the profession.” NADSP Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics should guide the DSP decision-making process. When choosing among alternative courses of action on test questions, the DSP should draw from the Code of Ethics.

Do I need an email address?

Yes. All correspondence regarding the certification process will be sent via e-mail. Provide an e-mail address that you check regularly to assure you get all required information.

How soon after I complete my application can I take the test?

NADD staff will review your application for completeness and to verify that you meet all the prerequisites for certification. Generally this review will be completed in less than a week. When this review has been completed you will be notified by email regarding the testing process.

How long do I have to submit all the material for certification?

There is no time limit.

## **Testing**

How can I study for this?

The DSP credential is based on five critical areas of support. Within each area there are broad areas of competence (called benchmarks). Specific things a

DSP should be able to do (called performance indicators) in each broad area are included. A DSP should be very familiar with each of these areas and how to apply them in practices. Services to people with both ID and MI require advanced skill. The benchmarks and performance indicators for each competency area are listed in the manual and can be found on the NADD website. Preparing for and exam on these topics can be accomplished through many different avenues. DSPs may review high quality written materials, take courses, or attend conference presentations. In-service training or other types of self-study will work. Your employer may offer training or support you by providing a mentor, identifying resources, or helping with educational fees. Consider checking with your supervisor regarding these opportunities.

When is the test available?

You can access the test 24/7 from any computer once you have been given permission to take the test (via an email directly from NADD).

If you are having problems accessing the test or have other questions regarding certification, technical assistance from NADD staff is available during regular business hours (eastern time).

Can the test be taken on any computer?

Yes. The test may be taken on any computer that has access to the Internet.

I am not good with computers. What computer skills do I need?

You need to be able to scroll through the information, answer a multiple-choice question, and submit the completed test.

Are accommodations available for people with disabilities?

Yes. Contact NADD to discuss accommodations by emailing us at [DSPCerts@thenadd.org](mailto:DSPCerts@thenadd.org).

What is on the test?

Five short scenarios are each followed by five multiple-choice questions. Each scenario and set of questions is connected to one of the five competency areas. Questions may relate to specific knowledge or may require selection of a course of action based on the information provided.

What if I want to go back and change an answer during the test?

You can go back to make changes to any of your 25 responses prior to submitting the test.

How long does the test take? Is there a time limit?

There is no time limit. Allow yourself enough time to read 5 scenarios and answer 25 multiple-choice questions. It is anticipated that the test will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. However, use your past experience

with tests to gauge how long it might take you. If you log out completing your test, it will automatically be submitted and your score will be based on the questions completed.

What is a passing score?

You must earn an overall passing score of 80% (20 correct answers) with at least 60% (3 correct answers) in each competency area.

How long will it take to hear from NADD?

You should receive a response in two business days. If you do not receive a reply, contact NADD for a response.

### **What happens after I am certified?**

A NADD-DSP certification helps you, employers, people supported and their families understand that you care about your work. It lets them know that you are familiar with important aspects of support and have achieved professional certification in this area. This certification is portable. It belongs to you, not your employer. It is based in critical competencies that all employers and people supported will find valuable. When you complete the test:

- You will be a NADD-DSP. This designation can go on your resume.
- You will receive a certificate. You may include a copy in a professional portfolio or include a copy as an attachment to a job application.
- You will be identified as a NADD-DSP on the NADD website. Potential employers will be able to confirm your certification.
- You will qualify for some discounted training opportunities through NADD.

Employers or others who want to know more about competency areas can review the NADD Competency-Based Direct Support Professional Certification manual.

How do I renew my certification?

You will need to document that you have completed 8 hours of continuing education related to mental wellness and mental health for persons with intellectual or other developmental disabilities every two years.

You need to renew your certification every two years. At that time you will need to submit documentation and pay the renewal fee. NADD will send a reminder but it is your responsibility to renew your certification.

How do I refer to the certification?

NADD-DSP.

### **What if I don't pass the test?**

What if I don't pass?

If you do not pass, you can retake the test after three months. Use this time to study. You do not need to pay additional fees or resubmit your application. You can take the test a total of three times without registering again.

If you retake a test the scenarios and questions will not be the same as the earlier test. There are several scenarios in each competency area. Each competency area has a pool of questions from which your questions will be randomly selected.

If I do not get a passing score because of one competency area do I need to take the entire test over or just that area?

You must retake the entire test.