

Building Natural Supports: A Guide for DSPs

Training for Direct Support
Professionals (DSPs)

Objectives

- Define natural supports and why they matter
- Understand the DSP's role in fostering natural supports
- Identify strategies to help individuals build and maintain natural supports
- Promote community inclusion and relationships

What Are Natural Supports?

- Relationships and connections that exist outside of paid supports
- Examples: family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, church members, peers
- They are sustainable, voluntary, and rooted in community life

Why Natural Supports Matter

- Improve quality of life and emotional well-being
- Encourage independence and self-determination
- Reduce reliance on paid staff
- Support long-term stability and inclusion

DSP Role in Building Natural Supports

- Model and encourage social interaction
- Facilitate opportunities to meet others
- Support the person in making choices about who they spend time with
- Respect personal preferences and boundaries

Identifying Opportunities

- Join community events or local clubs
- Volunteer or participate in recreational activities
- Connect through shared interests and hobbies
- Rebuild or maintain family ties when desired

Supporting Skill-Building

- Practice conversation and social skills
- Teach appropriate boundaries and relationship safety
- Encourage self-advocacy and asking for help
- Help set realistic social goals

Overcoming Barriers

- Address anxiety or fear of rejection
- Support transportation or accessibility needs
- Combat stigma or isolation through advocacy
- Celebrate small successes and relationship growth

Maintaining Natural Supports

- Help keep in touch with contacts
- Support planning for visits or phone calls
- Recognize and respect relationship changes
- Encourage mutual give-and-take in friendships

Key Takeaways

- Natural supports empower and connect people to community life
- You play a vital role in creating opportunities for connection
- Support without controlling—foster independence and choice
- Relationships are built one interaction at a time

Thank You!

- Your support helps people build the lives they want.