

Direct Support Professional

Help people with disabilities live their own lives. You can start within weeks, and the pay is the hard part.

TYPICAL PAY

\$45,930

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$34k to \$63k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Group homes, day programs,
supported apartments, clients' o...**

How you get there

- 1 Be 18 with a high school diploma or equivalent** Now
 A GED (General Educational Development credential, the high school equivalency) is accepted almost everywhere. Some agencies hire at 18 with no diploma at all.
- 2 Apply to a provider agency** Days to weeks
 Nonprofits and disability service providers in nearly every county. They are hiring constantly.
- 3 Background check and driving record** 1 to 3 weeks
 Fingerprints, a criminal record check and an abuse registry check. A clean driving record matters because you transport clients.
- 4 Paid orientation and training** 1 to 4 weeks
 First aid, CPR, safe lifting, crisis prevention, rights and reporting rules, plus medication administration where your state allows it.
- 5 Shadow shifts, then your own** 2 to 6 weeks
 You work alongside experienced staff until you know the people you support and their plans.

Pros and cons

- + You can start in weeks with no debt and no degree
- + Shifts that fit around college, including overnights
- + Employers often pay toward the degree that gets you out of shift work
- The pay is low for the responsibility, and your state budget sets it
- Short staffing means mandatory overtime and shifts you did not plan for
- Personal care, challenging behavior and grief are part of it

Optional boosts

NADSP (National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals) certification. Medication administration certification. Registered behavior technician. Certified nursing assistant.

Good to know

Your raise is decided in the state capitol

Most of this work is paid for through Medicaid, the joint federal and state health program, at a rate written into a state budget. When advocates campaign for a wage increase, they are lobbying legislator...

Turnover is the field's biggest problem

Workforce surveys run by state disability agencies have repeatedly found yearly turnover above 40 percent for these jobs. That is why agencies advertise all year and why a person who stays gets promot...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Social and Human Service Assistants (21-1093.00)
 National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals
 Administration for Community Living, United States Department of Health and Human Services
 Montgomery College: community college tuition and certificate programs

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/direct-support-professional>



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