Supervising For Capability

Learning and Capability Development: A Guide For Supervisors

September 2023

Contents

User icon key

Each document in the NDIS Workforce Capability Framework suite of resources uses one or more icons to show the intended user or users.

Icon	Key
	NDIS participants
	Workers
	Supervisors and frontline managers
	Senior managers and leaders
	NDIS providers

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Introduction

The NDIS Code of Conduct applies to all NDIS providers and workers. Guidance from the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) for providers states that 'NDIS providers have a responsibility for ensuring workers have the necessary training, competence and qualifications to deliver supports and services'. This includes providing appropriate supervision to ensure services are delivered safely and competently. It is up to each organisation to make sure they comply with this requirement. The supervision resources have been developed by the NDIS Commission to assist organisations to meet this expectation.

Ongoing worker learning and capability development is mutually beneficial for the organisation, its workers and the participants it supports:

- Organisations are better able to achieve service delivery goals when they know what capabilities (skills, knowledge and attitudes) workers need, develop organisation-wide and individual worker development plans to assess current strengths or gaps, and provide access to relevant learning to address gaps and build capability. Regular review of learning needs at both the organisation and individual level, ensures that information on capabilities is up to date. Future planning for new or expanded services should also include an assessment of the capabilities needed to achieve new goals and the capacity of the current workforce to deliver them. The Workforce Management and Planning tool is designed to support organisations to assess and plan current and future workforce needs and prioritise strategies, including learning and capability development plans. It also provides criteria for assessing capabilities.

- Capability assessment gives workers useful information about the learning and development that would be useful, either to enhance or develop new skills to support them in their current role or prepare them for a new role. Job satisfaction generally improves as workers feel more capable and confident. Job satisfaction has a strong influence on workforce retention.

- Participants benefit when their NDIS supports and services are delivered by workers who have capabilities relevant to their needs.

Related supervision resources

This guide is part of a set of 'Supervising for Capability' resources developed by the NDIS Commission. You can view the full set of resources on our website or access related resources by selecting the links below. Further useful resources developed by the NDIS Commission are listed at the end of this guide.

Related supervision resources

- Overview of Resources

- The Supervision and Support Relationship: A Guide for Supervisors and Workers

- Working Together: A Guide for Supervisors

- Feedback Tip Sheet for Supervisors

- [Buddy Shift Tip Sheet for Supervisors](#)

- [Evidence for Assessing Capability – Tip Sheet for Supervisors](#)

- [Assessment Record template](#)

- [Reflective Practice Tip Sheet for Supervisors and Workers](#)

- [Performance Agreement template](#)

What is in this guide

This guide provides practical suggestions for planning, providing and assessing the effectiveness of learning and capability development in four sections:

- Roles and responsibilities

- Understanding learning and development needs

- Planning the learning and development approach

- Delivering learning and development

- Assessing learning and development.

Checkpoints are included to help review your current arrangements and you can download tip sheets to provide additional guidance and templates for use by organisations that do not have systems in place to track and record learning and assessment.

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Roles and responsibilities

Organisations allocate responsibility for learning and capability development in different ways. Large organisations generally have dedicated human resources and/or learning and development managers. In other organisations responsibility rests with supervisors. As a general guide:

- Business leaders and senior managers are responsible for establishing the policies, systems and culture that support learning and development, including identifying the workforce capabilities needed to achieve the organisation's service delivery goals and meet their participants' needs.

- Supervisors implement these policies and systems to ensure the workers they manage have the required capabilities to deliver participant supports.

- Workers engage in identifying and addressing their own learning and development needs and interests.

While this guide is aimed at supervisors, its approach assumes an integrated and collaborative approach between senior managers, supervisors and workers. This section describes the range of responsibilities and activities that support effective workforce learning and capability development. Refer to the supervision and senior management sections of the Framework for more information.

Organisation/Senior management

- Establish ongoing learning as a key element of the organisation's values and culture.

- Plan the workforce needed to achieve business goals, identifying necessary capabilities.

- Identify capabilities required to meet current and future needs, and plan for learning and development to address gaps.

- Establish and resource policies and systems to support relevant and effective ongoing learning, at all levels, as part of performance planning and supervision.

- Collect data to track how well support meets expectations, identify trends in capability strengths and gaps, and flag potential workforce issues.

- Use feedback from participants, workers, supervisors and other practice experts as input to setting organisation-wide learning and development priorities.

- Establish a system to plan, facilitate, record and evaluate the effectiveness of training.

- Support supervisors to value, understand and carry out their role in supporting learning and development as part of the ongoing supervision process.

- Ensure individual workers have an ongoing capability development plan as part of their supervision process.

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Supervisors

- Create a trusted, safe environment where reflection and learning are encouraged.

- In partnership with the worker and each participant they support, confirm expectations on the supports to be delivered and identify specific participant needs and preferences.

- Develop a performance agreement and capability development plan with the worker that describes their ongoing duties, the capabilities they should demonstrate when performing those duties, and how they will be supported to maintain and develop capabilities.

- Provide clear and constructive feedback that identifies, acknowledges, and reinforces good practice in the moment and at planned sessions.

- Encourage reflection and critical thinking.

- Ensure workers have the required capabilities to perform assigned work.

- Support learning and capability development.

- Invite and apply feedback from workers to improve your approach to supervision and to provide input to the organisation.

- Pursue your own learning and development in quality practice and in capabilities related to supervision.

Workers

- Be familiar with the role description, the Framework, organisational values and goals, and any other information that is essential to understand job requirements.

- In partnership with the supervisor and each participant, confirm expectations on the services to be provided and identify specific participant needs and preferences.

- Reflect on practice, seek feedback from participants, supervisors and others to identify strengths and ask for help when needed.

- Self-assess capabilities and identify areas for further capability development to apply to a current role or a future opportunity.

- Actively participate in sharing practice insights and in learning and development opportunities.

- Seek, provide, receive and apply feedback to support personal development and development of others.

- Provide feedback on the effectiveness of learning and development and make suggestions about what else would assist.

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Understanding learning and development needs

There are three primary drivers of learning and development: organisational goals, participant needs and individual worker capabilities and interests.

Driver	What to consider
Organisational goals: Goals related to service delivery, quality and market development rely on workforce for their achievement and will influence learning and development priorities. **Information sources:** • Strategy and business plans • Workforce plan • Risk/incident management reports	What are your organisation's goals and what are the related workforce capabilities you need to achieve them? Consider factors such as location, mix of capabilities needed and how you will cover shifts as well as absences or vacancies etc. For example, to fill a gap in capabilities, you could recruit workers with the required capabilities, reassign work responsibilities to address gaps or train up existing workers. How does your organisation use and report performance feedback and what does this mean for worker learning and development? Often feedback is used to report adverse incidents or complaints, but it is equally important to let workers know when they are doing well. How can you communicate positive as well as negative performance feedback to the workers you manage? Do you explore appropriate solutions, such as learning and development, when discussing gaps? Worker capabilities are a key asset of your organisation. The way you allocate work is about more than filling shifts. It can affect worker capabilities, job satisfaction and wellbeing. For example, workers delivering more specialised supports need regular practice to maintain currency; providing a mix of low stress work can provide relief and support wellbeing of workers who deliver more intensive types of support such as positive behaviour. Getting to know how workers are going, their strengths, development interests and stress indicators allows you to adapt and find ways to support them to consistently deliver quality support.
Participant needs: The core capabilities in the Framework describe expectations that apply to all workers. Participants often have additional or more specialised needs, such as health-related supports, identity support, support to build social connections.	If you are responsible for allocating work/assigning shifts, you need to know that the workers you choose have the right capabilities to support NDIS participants' needs. You also need to keep a record of worker training and experience. Having workers with the right capabilities to match NDIS participants' needs is only one part of the workforce planning process: participants may prefer one worker over another, and unexpected absences and workforce turnover can create a gap if you do not have enough other workers with the relevant capabilities. When mapping training and experience of workers, think about whether you have sufficient workers to meet specific

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Driver	What to consider
	participant needs and unexpected gaps. If not, you may need to build additional capability.
Worker capabilities: The [Supervision and Support Relationship Guide](#) includes agreeing on learning and development goals related to work requirements and worker strengths, development needs and interests.	As a supervisor your role is to support the organisation to make sure workers have the capabilities they need. To do this, your need to be able to observe and review how the workers you manage are going, and have ongoing conversations about capability strengths and development needs with them. Observing and reviewing worker performance, providing feedback and supporting capability development should be a natural part of informal check-ins, debriefing or practice review sessions, using 'in the moment' opportunities to praise good practice or to discuss alternative or improved ways of doing the work. Structured review sessions scheduled on a cyclical basis are an opportunity for more in-depth discussion on how things are going, strengths, weaknesses, and future priorities for capability development. Further information on this kind of session is provided in Supervision and support relationship guide. For some types of support, a more specific approach to assessment is required and this is outlined in the section on assessment.

Checkpoint: What types of learning and development do your workers need?

- Are you clear about the capabilities your workers need?
- Do you know how many workers you have with the required capabilities? If this does not match the profile of workers you need, how will you address this gap?
- Are there broader organisational goals or issues that have implications for learning and development of the workers you supervise (for example, expansion into new locations or offering new types of support)?
- What do you know about the existing strengths, development needs and interests of the workers you are managing? How do you find out?
- How do you keep track of the training and experience of the workers you supervise? Is there an organisation-wide system to record and report on this? If not, how else will you do it?
- What resourcing/budget is available to support learning and development? For example, what number of buddy shifts are available, is there budget to purchase/fund training, can you backfill workers who are undertaking training?

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Planning the learning and development approach

Organisations are expected to provide the learning and development workers need. Supervisors may be involved in directly providing training and coaching, making arrangements for workers to participate in learning and development, and keeping senior managers informed about worker capabilities and learning needs. This section looks at how to plan learning and development and describes some specific methods to support learning.

There is no single 'best' approach. Individual learners have different learning styles and preferences, and all learning involves a combination of acquiring knowledge – often done through in-person or online traditional training, and applying it in practice – best done on the job. It needs to cover not only the procedural requirements that explain 'what' to do, but also the essential values and attitudes that shape 'how' the work needs to be done. Many training solutions emphasise 'what' but are much weaker in developing essential 'soft' skills that influence how a participant experiences their support. For example, training developed for broader health or care sector audiences may not address the person-centred values and expectations of working in an NDIS context. In addition to a general understanding of NDIS principles, your organisation's values and approach to support can provide a point of differentiation in the market. Supervisors play a central role in supporting workers to understand and apply these values in practice.

When deciding what will work best the aim is to select options most likely to achieve the goal or purpose. Here are some factors to consider.

Factors	What to consider
Purpose	What do you hope to achieve? If it is effective, how would this learning and development translate in the workplace? What would happen differently? Being clear about the purpose of learning and development provides measures for assessing progress and judging whether your strategy worked or whether you need to try something different.
Relevance	Did you choose the right type of training or development? This is particularly useful to assess training provided by a third-party supplier such as online or in-person courses. Use the knowledge listed in the relevant capabilities in the Framework to check that course content is likely to meet your purpose. Gaps in coverage are not necessarily a problem as long as you have other ways to address them. You should also check on the expertise of the presenter.
Worker abilities and needs	Individual needs and preferences are important to consider. For example, a worker with low English literacy skills will struggle if learning requires reading and writing at a higher level than they need on the job. Are there any barriers to access for some workers? For example, if choosing an online option, are learners computer literate, do they have a computer and internet access?

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Factors	What to consider
Resources and practicalities	Learning and development needs to be viable and practical. For example, what are the costs and how will they be met? When will learning occur and how does it affect work schedules? Can some learning be addressed as part existing work?
	Learning is most effective when it is immediately followed by opportunities to apply it – can learners apply what they have learned? Are there implications for rostering or job design? Can you schedule times to check in with workers soon after completion to find out how they are going?
	As the manager at the front line of service delivery, you are best placed to keep senior managers informed about worker capabilities and their learning and development needs and options so this can be factored into forward planning and budgeting. Getting feedback from workers about the training or learning they have done provides important information when evaluating whether the approach is working well or needs review.

Delivering learning and development

There are many ways to support learning and development, ranging from using everyday activities and incidental contact such as buddy shifts or team meetings through to more structured training programs. This section offers ideas about how to use or strengthen what you are already doing and suggestions of other options you could consider. It describes two broad types of learning: on-the-job learning, which occurs continuously, and structured training. A more conscious approach to on-the-job learning can strengthen and fast-track development. Structured training is particularly useful to build knowledge that underpins practice. Both knowledge and practice are essential to developing capabilities.

On-the-job learning	Modes of delivery
Practice While theoretical learning provides a useful knowledge base, learning by doing builds technique and confidence. Setting clear expectations and indicators of what good practice looks like and providing regular feedback, especially early on, allows workers to track their own progress, ask questions and request extra support when they need it.	On the job.

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On-the-job learning	Modes of delivery
Buddy (shadow) shifts Pairing up a learner with an experienced worker is widely used to introduce a less experienced worker to the participant and the work. For tips on how to design effective buddy shifts, download this tip sheet.	Face to face.
Coaching Coaching includes demonstrating, observing, providing real-time feedback and building the learner's capacity to self-reflect. This approach is often used to support workers delivering more specialised support such as positive behaviour support although all workers benefit from opportunities to discuss, reflect and adapt the way they work.	Face-to-face Video call – phone or app In person.
Reflective practice The worker is presented with a real or hypothetical situation and invited to discuss how they did/would respond. This approach is often used for more complex types of support. The reflective practice tip sheet provides advice on facilitating or participating in reflective practice discussions.	Face-to-face Video call – phone or app
Lunchbox/in-house information sessions Useful to update or refresh knowledge, especially where there is relatively high worker turnover or in response to changing expectations such as an update in practice guidelines. You could set up an agenda of topics to address on a cyclical basis.	Staff/team meetings. If workers do not routinely meet in person, consider other options such as social media and messaging platforms, learning management systems, video team meetings etc.
Real-time feedback Feedback – both positive and negative – helps workers understand how well they are doing. Some feedback is best provided in the moment. If the matter is sensitive or complex, you need to schedule a follow up conversation, ideally soon after. Download this tip sheet about what, when and how to provide feedback.	On the job, in-person.
Debriefing and support	Face-to-face

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On-the-job learning	Modes of delivery
A discussion about what happened, what immediate actions may be required and what can be learnt. This supports worker wellbeing, and may set actions can be set in place to reduce risk if needed.	In person with supervisor, and/or peers and technical experts Video call – phone or app.
Self-directed and structured learning Builds deeper knowledge. Formally recognised training also supports professional development.	
Induction Organisations are expected to provide induction training for new workers. This includes ensuring that all workers have completed the NDIS Worker Orientation Module: Quality, Safety and You as well as introducing them to the organisation's expectations, values and practices. This provides the foundation. As a supervisor, you need to make sure new workers are demonstrating these values and applying the capabilities they need when supporting individual participants. The next section of this guide describes how to assess capabilities.	Mixed methods of delivery such as in-person, one-on-one and group sessions and online delivery.
Just-in-time learning Sometimes called micro-learning, this approach breaks topics down into bite-size chunks learners can access as and when they need and can be useful to refresh or check knowledge on a specific work procedure or participant requirement. A wide variety of platforms host this kind of content which usually includes tests and quizzes for revision and self-assessment.	Learning platform delivery apps; podcasts and other remote delivery methods.
Short courses These are usually designed to address specific aspects of capability such as a course in manual handling or supported decision making.	When choosing courses provided by external providers, consider whether the mode of delivery (such as in-person, online etc.) and the expertise of the presenters is suited to meeting your training needs.
Course-based learning	When choosing courses provided by external providers, consider

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On-the-job learning	Modes of delivery
Formal qualifications such as the Certificate 3 in Individual Support or the Certificate 4 in Disability can provide a broad foundation for working in the sector. When choosing either short courses or qualifications, refer to the factors in the previous section to decide if it is likely to address the capability gap and what else you can do to support and reinforce learning.	whether the mode of delivery (such as in-person, online etc.) and the expertise of the presenters is suited to meeting your training needs.
Professional networks Peer networking and communities of practice can be a good way to stay current and build work connections. These arrangements most often apply to professional roles, but some also address technical roles or focus on supporting participants with a specific type of disability.	Often hosted by technical or professional bodies and may involve face-to-face or virtual meetings.

It is good practice to record the learning goals you set with the workers you supervise and track their achievement. Organisations sometimes record this information in separate learning and development plans and/or learning records. If your organisation does not have these systems in place, you can use the capability development plan section in the Performance Agreement template to record a development plan for each worker and track progress against the plan.

> **Checkpoint: What arrangements will you put in place to facilitate learning and development for the workers you supervise?**
>
> - Do you have a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities for planning, facilitating and/or providing learning and development for the workers you supervise?
>
> - Do the workers you supervise have clear learning and development objectives and a plan to address them?
>
> - Do you have your own learning and development goals? If not, you could review your responsibilities and the supervisor capabilities in the Framework and develop your own development goals to discuss with your manager.
>
> - Based on the learning needs you identified for you workers, which learning methods will you use?

Assessing learning and development

This section explores assessment from two different perspectives. The first looks at options to assess an individual worker. The second considers how well the overall approach to workforce learning and development is working and whether it is achieving the outcomes you expect.

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Individual assessment

Regularly assessing how well individual workers are doing in their work is an important part of the supervision process. It gives you up-to-date information on capabilities, how confident the worker is in doing their work, areas where they might benefit from feedback and/or further development, and/or any potential to work in situations requiring different or more complex capabilities. Your approach to assessing worker capabilities will be influenced by the worker's experience, the opportunities available to observe their work and the work requirements.

Existing training and experience: When you take responsibility for a new worker, you do not need to assess all aspects of competency, particularly where workers have existing experience, but you do need to be confident that they can do their job. Checking in more regularly with workers who are new to your organisation or have recently completed training, and actively seeking participant feedback, are examples of ways to confirm that relevant capabilities are demonstrated in practice.

Opportunities available to check practice: Practices that develop a worker's skills and confidence, such as coaching, debriefing sessions and team meetings, also provide opportunities to gauge how the learner is progressing.

The work requirements: Continuous assessment occurs routinely as supervisors observe, respond to questions or requests, discuss and provide ongoing support. Feedback on progress can occur in the moment – *'I noticed how you picked up that Ben was feeling distressed and managed to reassure him – great work'*. Arranging for more structured conversations from time to time, provide a chance to talk with the worker about how they are going and whether they are getting the support they need, share more detailed feedback and discuss practice issues in depth, and review and update development goals. Download the performance agreement template and use the capability development plan section to keep a record of development goals.

Tips when planning assessment

- Assessment should be a collaborative process designed to support the learner. Talk with them what to expect and get their input before you start.

- The assessment method should be appropriate to what you are assessing. For example, to assess that a worker knows how to use support a person at mealtimes, observing the worker demonstrate what to do is more reliable than relying only on verbal or written questions. On the other hand, verbal or written questions are a good way to test formal knowledge (for example: list three examples of restrictive practices that require authorisation before they are used). You can download this tip sheet on types of evidence to consider.

- It is unrealistic to assess every aspect and application of capability, but it is always a good idea to observe practice more than once to know you are seeing typical practice rather than a one-off occurrence.

- The approach and timing of assessment depends on what you are assessing. Continuous assessment and feedback may be appropriate for confirming general support capabilities. Where workers need to follow a specific procedure, and especially where workers are delivering higher risk support, a more formal approach to assessment before working independently and at regular intervals, to confirm currency of capability, is required.

Conducting formal assessments

This type of assessment takes a point-in-time approach to confirm that a worker has the capabilities needed to work independently before they start delivering support. It involves reviewing the evidence, deciding whether the worker has the required capability and if not, advising what additional development and evidence is needed. Consider this approach to assessment for higher risk or procedure-critical types of support.

Choosing an assessor: The assessor must at least be competent in the procedure or practice they are assessing and will often have higher levels of expertise. For example, assessing delivery of health-related supports is often done by a health or allied health practitioner. They also need to understand the assessment process and their role in it. It is good practice to assign different people to the roles of trainer and assessor to minimise the risk of bias, although this may not be practical when developing and assessing more specialised capabilities.

Reviewing the evidence: The process should confirm that the worker has both the required knowledge and can apply it in practice. The Framework capabilities and the High Intensity Support Skills Descriptors list the knowledge requirements when delivering more specialised types of support. This is a useful starting point to structure questions to test knowledge. The skills or behavioural indicators for each capability provide a guide for assessors to check what to look for during observation.

Making the decision: The decision is based on reviewing the evidence collected. As an assessor, you need to be confident that they can reliably demonstrate the attitudes, skills and knowledge that define capability. If not, you may want to collect further evidence or recommend what additional development is needed before arranging a follow up assessment.

If your organisation does not have a system to record this type of assessment outcome, you can download the Assessment Record template. This includes an example of how this could look when used to record assessment of a worker supporting tube feeding. The evidence collected to support the assessor's decision, such as written answers, assessor notes, videos or photos, can be attached to the record or stored electronically to provide evidence if required.

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Reviewing the effectiveness of learning and development

In addition to assessing an individual worker's progress, it is equally important to consider how well you and the organisation are going in planning, implementing and reinforcing learning and development and using this information to improve your own approach, provide feedback to your managers and contribute to your organisation's workforce planning processes.

Your approach will depend on the purpose and method used to address it. Here are some propositions and corresponding factors to consider.

Proposition	Factors to consider
People are more open to learning when they see it as being useful and relevant to them. For example, most workers want to do a good job and want learning that helps them achieve that.	How do you involve workers when deciding topics too address? Do you know what they want to learn more about? How easy is it for workers to undertake learning and development? Are there any barriers or hurdles that are likely to put some people off?
To understand how well learning and development is working, you need to be able to measure outcomes and impact.	What do you expect to see as a result of workers undertaking learning and development? How do you measure or confirm this outcome? Information to consider includes participant and worker feedback, service delivery data (e.g. ratio of filled to unfilled shifts), reportable incident trends, and morale indicators such as absenteeism and turnover. Success is often measured in terms of immediate organisational priorities – such as the number of workers who can fill shifts. Measuring impact can be more difficult but is equally important. How can you measure improvement in the way support is delivered? Do you encourage participants to give feedback about both positive and negative experiences to help you track what is working well? Achieving organisational results is one aim of learning and development; supporting workers to pursue their professional interests is another. What indicators do you use to know whether workers see personal value in the learning on offer?

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Proposition	Factors to consider
Learning needs to be supported in the workplace. Supervisors can reinforce learning by checking understanding and answer questions, arranging opportunities to practice and providing ongoing feedback and support.	How do you encourage workers to give feedback, not only on the specific learning and development activity or process they participate in but also on how you are supporting them to practice and apply capabilities?
If learning and development does not result in the expected change it is possible that this is the wrong strategy.	Learning and development is effective in supporting workers to develop or consolidate and demonstrate the capabilities they need. If this is not happening, other types of support or development may be more effective. Otherwise, the matter may be more appropriately addressed by other, more formal processes, for example to address ongoing poor attitude or wilful misconduct, respond to a serious breach of required standards, or counsel a worker who is a poor fit for disability work. Processes to address these issues are usually established and managed separately from ongoing supervision and are not addressed in these resources.

Other useful resources

- The NDIS Workforce Capability Framework: describes the attitudes, skills and knowledge required by all workers – including supervisors – and the behaviours you can expect to see.

- Workforce Management and Planning: a tool designed to support organisations to assess and plan current and future workforce needs and prioritise strategies, including learning and capability development plans.

- NDIS Code of Conduct: promotes safe and ethical service delivery by setting out expectations for the conduct of both NDIS providers and workers.

- The NDIS Code of Conduct - Guidance for Service Providers

- NDIS Code of Conduct: Guidance for Workers.

- NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators: specify the quality standards to be met by registered NDIS providers to provide supports and services to NDIS participants.

- High Intensity Support Skills Descriptors: guidance for NDIS providers and workers supporting participants with high intensity daily personal activities.

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