

Glossary of Developmental Disabilities and Supported Employment Terms

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Introduction

Clear and consistent terminology is essential for professionals supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in employment and related services. This glossary is designed to provide employment support staff, job coaches, and intake professionals with a shared understanding of key terms commonly used in supported employment, person-centered planning, and regulatory compliance.

By offering concise definitions and context-specific notes, this guide promotes effective communication, accurate documentation, and better alignment with federal, state, and New York City standards. It also supports training, service delivery, and quality assurance efforts across the human services field.

Whether used in direct service, policy development, or staff orientation, the glossary serves as a practical tool to ensure clarity and uphold professional standards in the support of individuals with IDD.

This glossary is an **open standard**, intended to be periodically reviewed and updated in alignment with ongoing developments in the supported employment industry and the evolving regulatory and service delivery landscape.

Glossary of Developmental Disabilities and Supported Employment Terms

abuse - any action that intentionally harms or injures an IDD individual.

Note 1.: Abuse can take many forms including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation among others.

Note 2.: Examples of physical abuse can include hitting, slapping, or restraining an individual, while emotional abuse can involve verbal abuse, threats, or humiliation. Sexual abuse can involve any unwanted sexual contact or exploitation. Neglect can involve failing to provide necessary care, such as food, water, or medical attention. Financial exploitation can involve the misuse or theft of an individual's financial resources.

accommodation and reasonable accommodation - any change in the environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables a IDD individuals to enjoy equal opportunity or access. Allowing IDD individuals to perform a task or accomplish a goal with needed supports or in an alternative way. The term “reasonable accommodation” is specified in Federal legislation to indicate that not all desired accommodations must be provided, and that cost-related factors can be considered in determining what is reasonable.

acquired disability - a condition that occurs suddenly or develops gradually during the lifespan; thus, the person has had prior experiences, expectations, and identity as a non-disabled person.

assistive technology - products or modifications that are used to increase the functional abilities of IDD individuals, thereby enabling them to perform activities or accomplish desired outcomes. Assistive technology may be low-tech or involve complex technological products and processes.

competitive integrated employment - a work that is performed by the person on a full or part-time basis (including self-employment) and establishes three essential criteria for employment: competitive earnings, integrated workplace, and opportunities for advancement.

Note 1.: The legal definition of the term (competitive integrated employment) is given in the Rehabilitation Act.

Note 2.: The work setting “competitive integrated employment” is at a location where the IDD-employee interacts with other persons who are not individuals with disabilities (not including supervisory personnel or individuals who are providing services to such IDD-employee) to the same extent that individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are in comparable positions interact with other persons (Rehabilitation Act, 1973).

congenital or early-onset disability - when a condition is identified at birth or so early in the person’s development that her or his recollected experience has been one of always having the disability.

customized employment - competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, which is based on an individualized determination of the unique

strengths, needs, and interests of the individual and designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual and the business needs of the employer.

Note: The legal definition of the term (customized employment) is given in the Rehabilitation Act.

developmental disabilities - a group of lifelong conditions that emerge during the developmental period and result in some level of functional limitation in the person's learning, language, communication, cognition, behavior, socialization, or mobility.

direct support professional (DSP) - an umbrella term that includes many different titles and functions; for example: direct care, direct support worker/specialist/assistant/counselor, habilitation specialist, residential counselor, activities of daily living specialist, relief staff, apartment worker, developmental disabilities specialist, job coach, employment specialist, community bridge-builder, paid friend/neighbor, family care provider, family support services aide, community companion, personal assistant, etc. A person who performs one of these or similar functions for a salary, stipend, or payment for services rendered is considered a DSP (OPWDD, Administrative Memorandum, 2014).

disabilities' categories - autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment.

exploitation - any action of taking advantage of an IDD individual for personal gain, often in an unfair, unethical, or illegal way.

Note 1.: Exploitation of IDD individuals can take many forms, including financial exploitation, sexual exploitation, and labor exploitation among others.

Note 2.: Examples of financial exploitation can include misusing an individual's financial resources or property, stealing from them, or coercing them into signing documents or contracts. Sexual exploitation involves the use of someone's sexuality for personal gain, often through manipulation or coercion. Labor exploitation involves the use of someone's labor without fair compensation or under unsafe or abusive conditions.

human services industry to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities – the field of human services dedicated to meeting the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, focusing on prevention as well as remediation of problems, and maintaining a commitment to improving the overall quality of life for people with IDD.

individual with a significant disability – an individual with a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) impacting an employment outcome; and whose vocational rehabilitation will require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended time (6 months or more).

intellectual disability (formerly known as mental retardation) - a lifelong condition where significant limitations in both intellectual (cognitive) functioning and adaptive behavior emerge during the individual's developmental period (before adulthood).

Note: The intellectual disability can be caused by a problem that starts any time before a child turns 18 years old – even before birth. It can be caused by injury, disease, or a problem in the brain. For many children, the cause of their intellectual disability is not known. Some of the most commonly known causes of intellectual disability – like Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, fragile X syndrome, genetic conditions, birth defects, and infections – happen before birth. Others happen while a baby is being born or soon after birth. Still other causes of intellectual disability do not occur until a child is older; these might include serious head injury, stroke, or certain infections.

intellectual disability levels – mild, moderate, severe, profound.

intensive SEMP services - ongoing support services that are needed to support and maintain the IDD individual in supported employment through intensive job development and/or intensive job coaching.

mistreatment - any behavior that is harmful, abusive, or neglectful towards an IDD individual.

Note: Mistreatment of an IDD individual can take many forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, neglect, and discrimination among others.

natural supports - support that is provided by people in an IDD individual's natural environment such as family members, friends, coworkers, supervisors, and other community members.

neglect - a failure to provide adequate care and support to an IDD individual.

Note 1.: Neglect of an IDD individual can take many forms, including physical neglect, emotional neglect, medical neglect, and educational neglect.

Note 2.: Examples of physical neglect can include failing to provide food, water, shelter, or clothing. Emotional neglect can involve failing to provide emotional support, attention, or stimulation. Medical neglect can involve failing to provide necessary medical care or treatment. Educational neglect can involve failing to provide access to educational resources or support.

ongoing support services - services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a significant disability in supported employment.

progressive disability - a disability which is expected, based on medical science models, to increase in degree or severity, as opposed to a disability that typically remains stable in its manifestations for many years.

person-centered planning - a team planning process with the goal of maximizing the probability of personal success and satisfaction in a future stage of life, typically of an individual with a developmental or cognitive disability. That person is at the center of the process, which begins by eliciting her/his desired goals and activities for the future. The process includes mapping out how goal attainment can be accomplished over time with the support and facilitation of a caring circle of family, friends, and other mentors from the community.

rehabilitation counseling - a systematic process that assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the integrated environment (the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification - CRCC).

self-direction - the practice of empowering people with developmental disabilities to manage the supports and services they receive, determine who provides the support, and how and where they are provided.

Note: In self-direction the person with developmental disabilities chooses the mix of supports and services that work best for them, how and when they are provided, and the staff and/or organizations that provide them.

supported employment (SEMP) services - a person-centered employment planning and support services that provide assistance for an IDD individual to obtain, maintain, or advance in self-employment or in competitive integrated employment in the general workforce, for which the individual is compensated at or above the state or federal minimum wage (whichever is greater).

Note: The legal definition of the term (supported employment services) is given in the Rehabilitation Act.

support network - a group of people who provide emotional, practical, and/or professional support to an IDD individual.

Note: In the context of employment, a support network can include colleagues, supervisors, mentors, family members, and friends who provide encouragement, guidance, and feedback to an individual as they navigate the challenges of a new job or career.

transition services - coordinated services that support an IDD individual through the transition from one significant life phase to the next (e.g., from school to post-secondary education, work, or independent living).

vocational rehabilitation, also abbreviated **VR** or **voc rehab**, - a process which enables persons with functional, psychological, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities, impairments, or health disabilities to overcome barriers to accessing, maintaining, or returning to employment or other useful occupations (Wikipedia).

youth with a disability - an individual with a disability that is not younger than 14 and not older than 24.

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