

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Hiring and vetting direct support staff

Self-directing your family member's care means you are now, unofficially, a hiring manager, an HR department, and a scheduler, with none of the training and all of the stakes. Three things keep a good hire: being treated with respect, a schedule they can actually live on, and expectations stated in plain language before day one.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · BECOMING THE EMPLOYER NOBODY TRAINED YOU TO BE

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THINGS THAT KEEP STAFF

Respect. Predictable schedules. Clear expectations. Miss any one and the hire you finally landed walks within a year.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Vet before you hire

A real background check and a structured interview catch more than instinct does.



STEP 2

Train before day one

A written training plan, not a verbal walkthrough, sets expectations neither of you has to guess at later.



STEP 3

Keep them, deliberately

Respect, predictable hours, and clear expectations aren't extras. They're the entire retention plan.

The hiring and vetting checklist

Job posting	Specific hours, pay, and duties, not a vague description.
Structured interview	3-5 scenario questions, asked the same way to every candidate.
Background check	Criminal history, driving record if relevant, verified identity.
Reference calls	Actual phone calls, not just letters, to two prior employers.
Written training plan	Routines, communication style, sensory needs, emergency steps.
Trial shift	One supervised shift before solo scheduling begins.

A STORY WE KNOW



Renee hired her first three DSPs on gut feeling alone. All three quit within four months, two without notice. The fourth time, she wrote five scenario questions, called two references by phone instead of reading letters, and built a two-page written training plan covering her son's routines and sensory needs. That hire is still working with her son three years later. Renee said the difference wasn't luck. It was that she finally treated hiring like the actual job it always was, instead of an emergency she was improvising through every single time.

THE FOURTH HIRE WASN'T BETTER LUCK. IT WAS A BETTER PROCESS.

What matters, at a glance

Structured interview questions

Scenario-based, not just resume-based. Ask how they'd handle a specific realistic situation, then listen for the instinct behind the answer.

Background checks

Criminal background check, driving record if transport is involved, and direct reference calls, not just reference letters.

The instinct-only hire

Hiring on warmth alone, without a structured check, is how families end up with staff who are kind in the interview and unreliable or unsafe on the job.

Written training plan

Specific routines, communication style, sensory needs, and emergency procedures, written down before day one, not explained once and forgotten.

Retention factors

Respect, predictable schedules, clear expectations. In that order, these predict who stays and who quits within a year.

Clear expectations, in writing

Job description, pay, schedule, and what "the job" actually includes, written down so nobody is guessing three months in.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ A written job posting with specific terms | ☐ Five scenario-based interview questions |
| ☐ A background check process for your state | ☐ A written training plan and emergency procedures |
| ☐ A predictable schedule template | ☐ A 30/60/90-day check-in reminder |

YOUR MOVE

When you're about to post a job or you've just lost another DSP, here is how you build the process

- 1 Write the job posting with specific hours, pay, and duties.
- 2 Draft five scenario-based interview questions before the first applicant.
- 3 Run a background check and call two references by phone.
- 4 Write a two-page training plan covering routines and emergencies.
- 5 Schedule one supervised trial shift before solo scheduling.
- 6 Check in at 30, 60, and 90 days to catch problems early.

A good hire who quits in four months wasn't a bad hire. The process around them was missing a piece.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

nadsp.org · <https://nadsp.org/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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