

HUNTERS HELPERS

DSP Essential Glossary & Support Snapshot Companion

A beginner-friendly, non-clinical guide to common support language, everyday patterns, and practical next steps.

LEARN

NOTICE

SUPPORT

CONNECT

Support for the people who support everyone else.

How to Use This Companion

Use this guide as a foundation when you hear unfamiliar words, notice a support pattern, or want a quick reminder of what may help. It is designed to build confidence without turning DSPs into clinicians.

Scope first

This companion is educational and organizational. It does not diagnose a condition, replace a person-centered plan, crisis plan, clinical instruction, emergency procedure, incident reporting requirement, or supervisor direction.

1 Learn the word

Start with the glossary. Plain-language definitions help you understand common terms without getting lost in clinical jargon.

2 Connect it to real life

Each term includes examples of what it may look like during everyday support.

3 Choose a supportive response

Use the Try This and Avoid This guidance as a starting point, then follow the person-specific plan and known preferences.

4 Use the interactive Support Snapshot

In the HTML tool, select what you are noticing to generate a quick support snapshot you can print or copy.

5 Return to the person

The glossary is a thinking aid, not a label. What you already know about the individual comes first.

DSP Quick Reference

A compact reminder for common moments on shift. Use what fits and follow the person's plan.

When someone is overwhelmed

Try: Fewer words; one step; extra time; calmer environment.

Avoid: Avoid adding instructions, arguing, or rushing.

When someone shuts down

Try: Lower demands; wait; offer one simple choice.

Avoid: Avoid rapid questions, pressure, or assuming silence is refusal.

When communication is hard

Try: Short sentences; visuals; choices; AAC; processing time.

Avoid: Avoid speaking for the person too quickly.

When sensory needs may be involved

Try: Reduce noise/light; allow safe movement; use known sensory supports.

Avoid: Avoid crowding, unnecessary restriction, or louder instructions.

When a task will not start

Try: Clarify the first step; show what done means; use a checklist.

Avoid: Avoid shame, long lectures, or taking over too fast.

When something feels different

Try: Notice what changed, when, what happened before, and what helped.

Avoid: Then follow the person's plan and agency communication process.

Mood / Emotional State

Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Anxiety / Worry

Worry, fear, or tension that may make thinking, deciding, or participating harder.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Restlessness or pacing • Repeated questions • Avoiding or delaying tasks • Irritability • Trouble focusing	• Offer one or two simple choices • Use a calm, steady tone • Break the next task into one small step • Give extra processing time	• Rushing • Giving too much information at once • Arguing about whether the worry is reasonable • Telling the person to simply calm down

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Low Mood / Low Energy

Less energy, motivation, or interest than usual; the person may need a smaller starting point.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Moving more slowly • Withdrawing from activities • Difficulty getting started • Less conversation or engagement	• Offer one manageable next step • Acknowledge how the person is feeling • Use familiar structure • Notice small participation	• Calling the person lazy • Pushing several tasks at once • Using guilt or comparison

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Overwhelm

Too many demands, decisions, sensations, or expectations are competing for attention.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Saying 'I can't' or 'I don't know' • Jumping between tasks • Shutting down • Becoming irritable	• Reduce the number of demands • Name one priority • Offer a short pause • Use visual or written steps	• Adding more instructions • Talking faster or louder • Treating overload as defiance

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Trauma Response

Past experiences may influence a current reaction, especially around safety, control, unpredictability, or reminders of earlier events.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Startling easily • Shutting down • Hypervigilance • Avoiding certain places or situations	• Use predictability • Explain changes before they happen • Give space • Follow known trauma-informed supports	• Sudden confrontation • Touching without warning • Demanding disclosure about trauma

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Trigger

A situation, sensation, memory, interaction, or cue associated with distress.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Sudden change in mood • Panic • Anger • Withdrawal	• Reduce immediate demands • Use known coping supports • Notice what happened before the reaction	• Demanding an explanation in the moment • Using the word 'triggered' as a criticism

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Grounding

A strategy that helps someone reconnect with the present moment.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Naming objects in the room • Slow breathing • Using a familiar object or sensory cue	• Offer a familiar grounding strategy if the person uses one • Keep language simple	• Forcing a grounding exercise • Over-talking during distress

MOOD / EMOTIONAL STATE

Dissociation / Feeling Disconnected

A person may seem detached, far away, or less connected to what is happening around them.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Blank staring • Slow responses • Seeming 'far away' • Difficulty recalling what just happened	• Speak softly • Use simple present-focused cues • Follow the person's plan if this is a known pattern	• Pressure for fast answers • Assuming the person is ignoring you Behavior / Response Pattern Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

Behavior / Response Pattern

Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

BEHAVIOR / RESPONSE PATTERN

Avoidance Loop

A task or situation feels too big, confusing, uncomfortable, or uncertain, leading to delay or escape.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Changing the subject • Repeatedly saying 'later' • Missing appointments or tasks • Starting but not finishing	• Shrink the task into a first step • Clarify what 'done' looks like • Ask what part feels hardest	• Shaming • Calling the person lazy • Taking over immediately

BEHAVIOR / RESPONSE PATTERN

Freeze Response

Stress may show up as stillness, silence, delayed response, or difficulty deciding.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Silence • Staring • Very delayed responses • Not moving	• Lower demands • Give extra processing time • Offer one simple choice • Use fewer words	• Rapid-fire questions • Adding pressure • Interpreting silence as deliberate noncompliance

BEHAVIOR / RESPONSE PATTERN

Fight / Pushback Response

Stress may show up as arguing, sharp language, refusal, or attempts to regain control.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Arguing • Raised voice • Strong refusal • Rejecting help	• Lower your own intensity • Give space • Offer choices where possible • Return to the issue later	• Power struggles • Matching volume • Cornering the person verbally

BEHAVIOR / RESPONSE PATTERN

Flight / Escape Response

Stress may show up as leaving, avoiding, or trying to escape a demand or environment.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Walking away • Leaving the room • Ending the conversation • Avoiding a location	• Check whether the environment or demand can be reduced • Offer a safe break when appropriate • Reconnect later	• Following closely while continuing demands • Assuming manipulation

BEHAVIOR / RESPONSE PATTERN

Masking

Hiding distress, confusion, or difficulty in order to appear okay or fit expectations.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Forced agreement • Saying 'I'm fine' while showing strain • Copying others • Holding it together until later	• Create low-pressure check-ins • Pay attention to changes from baseline • Give permission to ask for help	• Assuming agreement equals understanding • Praising someone only for hiding distress

BEHAVIOR / RESPONSE PATTERN

De-escalation

Reducing intensity and helping a situation become safer and calmer without unnecessary confrontation.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Lowering voice • Creating space • Reducing stimulation • Using simple language	• Stay calm • Reduce audience and demands • Follow the person's crisis or support plan	• Debating • Crowding • Trying to 'win' the interaction Communication Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

Communication

Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

COMMUNICATION

Processing Time

The time someone needs to understand information, organize a response, or act.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Long pauses • Slow answers • Looking away while thinking • Responding after others have moved on	• Wait • Ask one question at a time • Leave silence after speaking	• Repeating the question immediately • Answering for the person

COMMUNICATION

Receptive Communication Support

The person may need information presented more simply, slowly, visually, or one step at a time.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Confusion after long instructions • Missing parts of multi-step directions • Better response to demonstrations	• Use short concrete sentences • Give one step at a time • Show rather than only tell	• Long explanations • Repeating the same wording louder • Assuming 'yes' means understood

COMMUNICATION

Expressive Communication Support

The person may know what they want or feel but need more time, choices, visuals, gestures, writing, or another method to express it.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Long pauses • Gestures instead of words • Frustration when misunderstood • Short phrases	• Wait • Offer choices without forcing them • Use visuals or gestures • Confirm what you think you heard	• Speaking for the person automatically • Pretending to understand • Rushing

COMMUNICATION

AAC / Alternative Communication

Communication beyond or alongside speech, such as devices, picture systems, signs, gestures, or boards.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Using a device • Pointing to symbols • Using signs or gestures • Combining speech with AAC	• Keep the system available • Give enough time • Respond to AAC as real communication • Use the person's established method	• Removing the device as a consequence • Answering before the person can communicate

COMMUNICATION

Literal Thinking

Language may be understood exactly as spoken, making idioms, sarcasm, hints, or vague directions confusing.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Taking jokes literally • Confusion with sayings • Following exact wording • Missing implied meaning	• Use clear concrete language • Say exactly what you mean • Check understanding	• Heavy sarcasm • Vague hints • Assuming the person should 'read between the lines' Sensory / Environment Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

Sensory / Environment

Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

SENSORY / ENVIRONMENT

Sensory Overload

Noise, light, movement, touch, smell, crowding, or multiple demands may exceed what the person can comfortably process.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Covering ears or eyes • Leaving the area • Irritability • Shutting down • Less communication	• Reduce unnecessary noise or light • Offer access to a calmer space • Use fewer words • Follow known sensory supports	• Increasing volume • Crowding • Forcing continued exposure without a support reason

SENSORY / ENVIRONMENT

Sensory Seeking

The person may seek movement, pressure, touch, sound, or other sensory input that helps them regulate or stay engaged.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Pacing or rocking • Touching objects • Seeking movement • Chewing or fidgeting	• Offer safe movement opportunities • Use approved sensory items • Build movement into tasks	• Restricting harmless movement unnecessarily • Removing regulation tools without a reason

SENSORY / ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Trigger

Something in the surroundings contributes to distress or difficulty.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Struggling only in one setting • Reacting to noise, crowding, smells, or certain transitions	• Look at the environment before assuming behavior is the problem • Reduce or modify what can safely be changed	• Focusing only on the person while ignoring the setting Follow-Through / Executive Functioning Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

Follow-Through / Executive Functioning

Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

FOLLOW-THROUGH / EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Executive Functioning

Skills used to plan, organize, remember, start, sequence, shift, and complete tasks.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Losing items • Forgetting steps • Difficulty planning • Starting late • Getting stuck when plans change	• Use visual checklists • Break tasks into steps • Externalize reminders • Keep routines predictable	• Assuming difficulty means lack of effort • Giving several new directions at once

FOLLOW-THROUGH / EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Task Initiation

The ability to get started on a task even when the person knows what to do.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Long delays • Sitting near the task without starting • Repeated 'in a minute' responses	• Define one first action • Use a countdown or start cue if the person prefers it • Begin alongside the person when appropriate	• Long lectures • Repeated nagging • Doing the entire task for them

FOLLOW-THROUGH / EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Task Avoidance

Moving away from a task because it feels overwhelming, unclear, unpleasant, or uncertain.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Excuses • Changing the subject • Leaving the area • Doing easier tasks instead	• Clarify the difficult part • Use micro-steps • Offer a choice about how to begin	• Shame • Assuming the reason • Turning every delay into a confrontation

FOLLOW-THROUGH / EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Cognitive Fatigue

Mental effort has become harder to sustain, especially after long periods of concentrating, deciding, or coping.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• More mistakes later in the day • Slower responses • Irritability • Trouble with decisions	• Reduce unnecessary decisions • Use familiar routines • Offer a pause • Move complex tasks to a better time when possible	• Adding complexity • Assuming performance should stay the same all day Relationship / Trust Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

Relationship / Trust

Plain-language definitions with practical examples for everyday support.

RELATIONSHIP / TRUST

Rapport

A trusting, respectful connection that makes support easier and safer.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• More open communication • Greater comfort asking for help • Relaxed interaction	• Be consistent • Keep promises • Show interest without prying • Respect preferences	• Using rapport to pressure compliance • Overstepping professional boundaries

RELATIONSHIP / TRUST

Validation

Acknowledging a person's experience or feeling without necessarily agreeing with every conclusion.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• 'That sounds frustrating.' • 'I can see why this feels like a lot.'	• Reflect the feeling or difficulty • Stay genuine and brief	• Minimizing • Arguing with feelings • Using validation as a script to end the conversation

RELATIONSHIP / TRUST

Supportive Presence

Being calm, steady, respectful, and available without adding unnecessary pressure.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Quiet availability • Predictable tone • Listening without rushing	• Regulate your own tone and pace • Stay nearby if wanted • Let the person set some of the pace	• Filling every silence • Taking distress personally • Making the moment about your own frustration

RELATIONSHIP / TRUST

Boundary

A clear limit that protects safety, respect, roles, privacy, or wellbeing.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• 'I can help with X, but I cannot do Y.' • Ending disrespectful interaction until it can restart safely	• State limits calmly and clearly • Be consistent • Follow agency policy	• Threats • Punitive boundary-setting • Changing the rule based on mood

RELATIONSHIP / TRUST

Co-Regulation

One person's calm, predictable presence helps another person regain steadiness.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Matching a slower pace • Using a calm tone • Sitting quietly nearby	• Regulate yourself first • Reduce stimulation • Use familiar supportive routines	• Expecting instant calm • Matching distress with distress

Self-Regulation

Using skills, routines, movement, communication, or coping strategies to manage emotions and arousal.

In real life this may look like	Try this	Avoid this
• Taking a break • Using music • Pacing • Breathing • Asking for space	• Learn what works for the person • Protect access to safe regulation tools	• Treating every self-regulation behavior as something to stop

Support Snapshot - Printable Thinking Sheet

Use this page when you want a paper version of the same thinking process used by the interactive generator.

Use observation, not diagnosis

Choose only what fits what you are seeing or what is already known about the person. Do not use this worksheet to assign a diagnosis or label.

Mood / emotional state

What I am noticing: _____

What may help: _____

What I should avoid: _____

Behavior / response pattern

What I am noticing: _____

What may help: _____

What I should avoid: _____

Communication

What I am noticing: _____

What may help: _____

What I should avoid: _____

Sensory / environment

What I am noticing: _____

What may help: _____

What I should avoid: _____

Follow-through / executive functioning

What I am noticing: _____

What may help: _____

What I should avoid: _____

Next step

If something has changed from the person's usual baseline, use the appropriate Hunters Helpers observation/handoff tool and your organization's required communication process.

DSP Situational Playbooks

Short “if you see this -> try this” guides for common moments. These are support reminders, not crisis protocols.

Client refuses a task

If you see	Try	Avoid
• Says no • Walks away • Changes the subject • Argues about the task	• Check whether the task is understood • Ask what part feels hard • Offer a smaller first step or meaningful choice • Follow the support plan	• Power struggles • Shame • Doing the whole task immediately

Documentation reminder: Record observable facts, what support was offered, and what happened next according to agency requirements.

Client shuts down

If you see	Try	Avoid
• Silence • Blank staring • Very slow responses • Stops moving or deciding	• Lower demands • Use fewer words • Give processing time • Offer one simple choice	• Rapid questions • Pressure • Assuming silence is intentional refusal

Documentation reminder: Note the context, observable change, supports tried, and response.

Client escalates

If you see	Try	Avoid
• Voice gets louder • Pacing increases • Language becomes sharper • Distress rises	• Lower your own intensity • Create space • Reduce stimulation • Use the person's crisis/support plan	• Debating • Crowding • Matching intensity • Trying to prove a point

Documentation reminder: Follow required incident/crisis documentation and supervisory procedures.

Client avoids an appointment

If you see	Try	Avoid
• Delays getting ready • Changes subject • Says 'later' • Refuses transportation	• Clarify what is worrying or unclear • Break preparation into steps • Review what will happen • Use known supports	• Shame • Threats outside policy • Assuming laziness

Documentation reminder: Record factual barriers, supports tried, and whether follow-up is needed.

Client has sensory overload

If you see	Try	Avoid
- Covers ears/eyes - Leaves area - Becomes irritable - Communicates less	- Reduce noise/light - Offer a calmer space - Use fewer words - Use known sensory supports	- Louder instructions - Crowding - Unnecessary touch

Documentation reminder: Note the environment, observable response, support used, and result.

Client is anxious before a community outing

If you see	Try	Avoid
- Repeated questions - Pacing - Delaying departure - Asking for reassurance	- Review the plan simply - Use a visual schedule if helpful - Offer one or two choices - Allow extra transition time	- Last-minute surprises - Long explanations - Telling them there is nothing to worry about

Documentation reminder: If relevant, note what preparation helped or what barrier affected participation.

Client has low energy and is not engaging

If you see	Try	Avoid
- Stays in bed/chair - Moves slowly - Talks less - Declines usual activities	- Check for known health/safety concerns per plan - Offer one manageable action - Keep routine gentle and predictable - Notice change from baseline	- Calling them lazy - Pushing multiple activities - Ignoring a significant change

Documentation reminder: Record observable change from baseline and follow required reporting/medical guidance.

Client is overwhelmed by paperwork

If you see	Try	Avoid
- Stops reading - Skips sections - Says 'I can't do this' - Avoids the task	- Break it into sections - Read one instruction at a time - Use a checklist - Clarify what requires the person's own decision	- Completing decisions for the person - Giving all instructions at once - Shame

Documentation reminder: If this affects services or deadlines, note the barrier and needed follow-up.

DSP Mental Health Starter Course

A short orientation for brand-new DSPs before they use the glossary and Support Snapshot on shift.

1 Your role: notice, support, communicate

DSPs are not expected to diagnose or provide therapy. The foundational job is to notice what is happening, support the person according to their plan and preferences, communicate useful facts, and know when to involve the appropriate supervisor or professional.

2 Read patterns without judging people

Words like avoidance, shutdown, sensory overload, anxiety, and executive functioning can help describe a support pattern. They should never become labels used to explain away the person.

3 Communication changes the outcome

Receptive and expressive communication are different. Some people need fewer words, more processing time, visuals, gestures, or AAC. "They did not do it" is not the same as "they understood the instruction and refused."

4 Environment and sensory needs matter

Noise, light, movement, touch, crowding, and transitions can change how easy it is for someone to participate. Support should consider the environment, not only the person's behavior.

5 Follow-through is a skill, not a character trait

Task initiation, planning, memory, sequencing, and cognitive fatigue can affect follow-through. Break work into steps, use supports, and avoid turning a support need into a moral judgment.

6 Use the snapshot, then return to the person

The generator is a thinking aid. It should help you ask better questions and choose a calmer next step - not replace what you already know about the person, their support plan, or your agency's procedures.

Remember

Good support begins with curiosity. Notice the person, use clear language, follow what is already known to help, and ask for guidance when a situation is outside your role or training.