

# Working with Students

A guide for families,  
carers and direct  
support  
professionals





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## Welcome to this guide

This guide has been made to help you understand what it means to work with a student. It provides information on what to think about when working with a student. It also has tips on how you can help the person you support to make a decision about working with a student.

For the purpose of this document, **'person you support'** refers to either your child, someone you provide a service to, someone you are employed by, or a family member.

### What is a student?

People learning to become therapists are called students. They might be learning to become a speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist, dietitian or another therapy role. To become a therapist, students need to complete 'student placements'. This helps the student learn the skills needed to become a therapist.

The person you support might be offered to work with a student. The person will be introduced as a student, such as a "dietetics student" or a "speech pathology student".

The person you support will be given the information they need to decide if they want to work with a student.

### What is a student placement?

During a student placement, the student works at an organisation for a set period of time. They are supervised by a qualified therapist. For example, a physiotherapy student will be supervised by a physiotherapist. The student supervisor is sometimes called a 'clinical supervisor' or a 'clinical educator'.

Student placements are a very important part of learning to become a qualified therapist. Placements allow students to build their skills, and get experience in working with people of different ages, support needs and in different settings. Students must complete placements to become a qualified therapist.

Students can be on placement for different amounts of time and will have different roles and tasks. This depends on how far they are into their study.

Some organisations have students on placement almost all the time. Other organisations have students every now and then.



## Why would I work with a student?

Some benefits to working with a student include:

- The student might be able to offer extra services or appointments.
- Students bring knowledge of the most up to date research.
- The person you support might prefer to work with a student because of their age, shared interests or personality.
- The person you support might like knowing they are helping students learn.
- You might be able to discuss a smaller fee for sessions from a student.
- The student can learn how to support people with disability.
- The more students that have experience working with people with disability, the more inclusive the community will become.

## Are there any risks?

Everything that the student does is monitored by their supervisor. The student must follow the same rules and policies that the supervisor follows. This includes things like privacy, confidentiality, and work place safety. The student supervisor will make sure that the student is following the required rules. If you have any questions about the work the student is doing, you can speak to the student supervisor.

Students have the same types of insurance that the supervisor has. You can speak with the student supervisor if you have any questions about a student's insurance.

## What about my personal information?

The student must keep all information about you and the person you support as confidential. They must follow the same privacy laws and policies that the student supervisor follows. You can ask the student supervisor where personal information is stored within their organisation.

Sometimes the student will need to talk about or share their work with the university or place of study. The student is not allowed to disclose details such as your name or other information which is likely to make identification possible. Students and supervisors will do everything reasonably possible to ensure no information is shared that could identify you without your expressed consent.



## What does working with a student look like?

Students can work with people in different ways. The way a student will work with the person you support will depend on:

- The experience and skills of the student.
- The type of placement the student is completing.
- The length of the student placement.
- The services offered by the organisation.
- The needs and preferences of the person you support.

A student and their supervisor may work together in different ways. This is something you and the person you support will need to discuss with the supervisor.

Some ways that a student might work with the person you support include:

- The student can watch the supervisor work with the person you support. The student might be in the room, watching through a two-way mirror or watching a video of the session.
- The student can work directly with the person you support, and the supervisor will watch. The supervisor might be in the room, watching through a two-way mirror or using a video stream.
- The student can work directly with the person you support without the supervisor being there. The supervisor might monitor the student's work by using a video, talking with other people in the session (e.g. a classroom teacher), talking with the student, and talking to you.
- The student and the supervisor can work together at the same time. This could happen in a group class.
- There might be two or more students working with the person you support.



## How do I decide if I want to work with a student?

It is important that you and the person you support have all the information you need to decide if you want to work with a student.

Some helpful questions to ask the supervisor include:

- How long will the student be working with us?
- How will you supervise the work that the student is doing?
- Will you be in the room at the same time as the student?
- Will the student be running any parts of the session on their own?
- What do I do if I don't like what the student is doing?
- How much will the sessions with the student cost?
- Will there be other opportunities to work with students in the future if we really enjoy the service?

It is recommended that you ask the supervisor to write down the answers to these questions. This way it is clear about what you have agreed to. This could be in the service agreement or another type of written agreement.

## Developing a service agreement

A service agreement is a document that outlines details of the service the person you support will receive. Some organisations always use service agreements. Some organisations only use them on request. Service agreements can be a good way to document how the student will work with the person you support, and what fees may be charged for sessions with a student.



## Giving consent to work with students

Consent is giving permission for something to happen. Working with a student should not happen without the person you support giving their consent for this to happen.

### Who gives consent to work with students?

If the person you support is able to give informed consent, then they will make the decision about working with students.

Some people might need help in making a decision. They might need help to understand the information, think through the decision and express their consent. The person you support should never feel pressured into consenting to work with a student. More information on how to help the person you support in making a decision can be found in the next section of this guide.

### What if the person I support cannot give consent?

If the person you support is unable to give informed consent, even with support, then someone else may be asked to give consent on their behalf.

If the person you support is a young person (under the age of 18 years), and unable to give informed consent, then consent will be provided by the parent who has legal responsibility for the young person.

If the person you support is an adult (18 years or older), and is unable to give informed consent, then consent will be provided by the 'person responsible'. A person responsible is not always the person's 'next of kin'. A person responsible is someone who can make decisions about medical treatment. According to the law, the hierarchy to follow to identify the person responsible is:

1. Guardian – an enduring or appointed guardian who has the function to consent to the service.
2. A spouse or partner – where there is a close and continuing relationship.
3. Carer – unpaid who provides or helps with domestic support on a regular basis.
4. Relative or friend – who has a close and personal relationship with the person.

(State of New South Wales Department of Justice, 2015)

Decisions about dealing with a person's personal or health information where a person has limited decision making capacity are to be made by an 'authorised representative'.

It is important to remember that even if the person you support has a person responsible, they should still be involved in making a decision about working with a student.



## The role of the direct support professional

If you are a direct support professional, and the person you support is being asked to work with a student, then your role could include:

- Helping the person you support to make a decision about working with students.
- Helping seek consent from the person responsible about working with students.
- Making and attending appointments.
- Helping the person you support to provide feedback about working with students.

As a direct support professional, you will not be asked to give consent for the person you support to work with students, unless you have the legal responsibility to do so.





## Helping the person I support to make a decision

The following strategies might be useful to help the person you support to make a decision about working with a student:

- Let the organisation know how the person you support likes to communicate and express themselves. This includes the best way to provide them with information. Tools such as receptive communication charts, expressive communication charts or communication profiles can provide specific information to the organisation.
- A decision making profile can be given to the organisation to help them understand how the person you support can make a decision.
- Give the organisation time to prepare information in a way that the person you support needs.
- Give the person you support the time they need to make their decision. They might want to think through the information at a different time or in a different place where they are more comfortable.
- Let the person you support ask questions about how the student will be involved. If the person you support can't ask the questions themselves, then you can ask these questions for them. This information should then be documented in a way that the person you support most easily understands.
- Encourage the person you support to talk with other people to help them make a decision. They might choose a friend, relative or professional to help think through the decision.
- You can work through the pros and cons of the decision. Lots of people find stating these out loud or writing these down to be helpful when making decisions.
- Ask the organisation if an initial meeting with the student could be organised. This might allow you to see if the person you support wants to or does not want to work with the student.



## What if we change our mind?

It is always okay for a person to change their mind about working with students. Any arrangements can be stopped or changed.

The organisation providing the service should always ask for new consent if the student or the way the student will be working with you is going to change. The person you support should be provided with the help they require to make an informed decision in each new situation.

Some reasons why the person you support may change their mind about working with students includes:

- The goal that the person you support is working towards. For example, the person you support might not want to work with students for personal care goals, but would be happy to work on other goals.
- The setting of the service. For example, the person might feel differently about the practice of skills in a personal care environment compared to activities in the community or a classroom.
- How the person you support is feeling at the time about their disability and their situation.



## Providing feedback on my experience

You and the person you support should feel comfortable to provide regular feedback about your experiences when working with a student. This can include what is working well, and what is not working well. You can provide feedback to the student, the supervisor or the organisation as a whole. You should feel comfortable to request opportunities for the person you support to provide feedback through the communication methods that are most comfortable for them.

You might find the **'Working/Not Working Tool'** useful for thinking about how to give feedback.

The organisation or supervisor may also ask you to fill out a questionnaire, survey or interview about working with a student.

Giving feedback helps the organisation make sure the service you are receiving is best meeting your needs.



## Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Advisory Committee</b>	A group of people who meet to discuss the development of a project.
<b>Allied health services</b>	A range of health care professionals who are not doctors. This includes physiotherapists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and dietitians.
<b>Authorised Representative</b>	A person who can provide the consent to the collection of personal or health information.
<b>Carer</b>	An individual who is not paid, but assists another person in their day to day living. This is often a friend or family member.
<b>Coercion</b>	Convincing someone to do or agree to something against their primary will.
<b>Direct Support Professional</b>	A person who is employed and paid to assist another person in their day to day living.
<b>Person Responsible</b>	A person responsible is someone who can make decisions about medical or dental treatment on behalf of another person in particular situations.
<b>Student</b>	A person studying for a qualification in dietetics, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, social work, speech pathology or another therapy role.
<b>Student placement</b>	A period of time where a person who is studying towards a particular qualification (the student) will be 'placed' with a qualified health professional to learn knowledge and skills for their future role.
<b>Student supervisor</b>	A qualified health professional responsible for facilitating the students learning and overseeing the work they do while on placement with their organisation.
<b>Supported decision making</b>	The process of assisting a person with disability to make their own decisions.



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## Thank you

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Please visit our webpage for more student placement resources:

<https://www.benevolent.org.au/about-us/professional-resources/disability>



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