

10 SSP BASICS

Katherine Gabry & Mark Gasaway

Presented at 2018 Deafblind International Conference

What is a very basic definition of a Support Service Provider (SSP)?	1	A SSP acts as the eyes and/or ears for a person who is DeafBlind. The SSP takes in information not seen or heard by the DeafBlind person, and conveys it in an unbiased, objective manner.
What specific activities does the SSP do to meet this definition?	2	The SSP: 1) provides access to visual, situational and environmental information; 2) serves as a human guide, thereby providing safe, efficient and effective access to the community and transportation; and 3) provides assistance for short exchanges of spoken and/or signed conversations. In all, the SSP does <i>with</i> , not <i>for</i> , and the SSP does not leave the DeafBlind person alone without his/her consent.
Where are services provided?	3	In home, recreational, vocational and community settings. Note that some programs may restrict certain activities.
Who do SSPs work with?	4	SSPs provide 1:1 services to DeafBlind people who are self-directed and who have an established language system. Note that SSPs are not teachers or interpreters, nor are they advocates. They remain impartial, and respect the choices and decisions of the DeafBlind person.
How does the SSP provide information?	5	The SSP uses the DeafBlind person's preferred mode of communication, relaying this information as clearly and completely as possible. Communication modes can include sign language, tactile communication, speech, print, Braille and technology, among others.
How are SSPs trained?	6	At present, there is no national standard or curriculum for SSP training. Each program has its own requirements. Nonetheless, the professional SSP realizes that learning never ends, and continually strives to improve through interaction with the DeafBlind community and through formal workshops and training programs.
What are some necessary skills and characteristics of SSPs?	7	The ability to effectively communicate, to accurately and objectively describe environmental information, to provide safe and efficient mobility (including human guide), to communicate efficiently and effectively, to think "on his or her feet," and to maintain personal boundaries. SSPs respect consumer choice, are patient and flexible, are punctual, and, generally have a knowledge of DeafBlind culture.
Is there a Code of Ethics?	8	Some SSP programs have adopted a Code of Ethics, but there is no national standard. Nonetheless, SSPs and DeafBlind people treat each other with respect and dignity, and both parties respect each other's privacy, integrity and confidentiality.
How can the relationship between the SSP and the DeafBlind person be described?	9	The SSP and the DeafBlind person form an interpersonal partnership. Both parties must be open to honest communication, and the SSP must be willing to accept guidance and direction from the DeafBlind person.
Overall, why is the SSP important?	10	Professional SSPs are a link to information. When DeafBlind people have information, they can make informed choices, more fully engage in their communities, communicate with others, and, ultimately, enjoy life with greater independence.