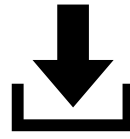


# The Download



## Guidance on the HCBS Settings Rule

### What Does “Dignity of Risk” Mean and Ways to Support This



Dignity of risk can be difficult to understand and may raise concerns. It means that people with disabilities have the same right as anyone else to make their own choices, even when those choices involve some level of risk. Risk is a natural part of everyday life. However, as providers, we are trained to prevent risk and keep people safe. This can make it challenging to balance safety with each person’s right to make their own decisions. The question becomes: how do we protect people while also supporting their dignity of risk?

Supporting dignity of risk requires a shift in how providers think. Every part of daily life carries some risk—driving a car, using a stove, or trying something new. Taking risks is how people learn, grow, and become more independent. Yet we often feel uneasy about people with disabilities taking the same risks we take without hesitation. We tend to imagine worst-case scenarios and focus on what might go wrong. In reality, most risks do not lead to harm. It is important to distinguish actual safety concerns from staff discomfort or fear of liability. When we pause, we can avoid unnecessary restrictions and support decisions in a more balanced and person-centered way. The goal is to focus on what matters to the person, not only on what concerns the system.

Dignity of risk is about giving people the tools and support they need to navigate real life. It is not about limiting opportunities. Organizations can help by offering training, preparation, and proactive planning. Support may include teaching skills, practicing tasks, adapting the environment, or adding needed supports. As people gain skills, the level of risk naturally decreases.

Before relying on policies or rules, start with person-centered conversations. Learn why a choice is important to the person. These discussions often lead to creative solutions that support both the person’s goals and any safety needs. When people feel heard and respected, they are more willing to participate in planning and problem-solving.

Ultimately, dignity of risk means recognizing a person’s opportunity—and their right—to make mistakes. Mistakes are part of learning and growing. Instead of limiting people out of overprotection, our role is to support their empowerment, independence, and ability to make informed choices.



#### Examples of Dignity of Risk

**“Jane”:** Jane says she wants to work in a busy café. Some staff share concerns about things like handling customer complaints, keeping up in a fast-paced setting, or staying safe around hot drinks. Instead of focusing on the worries, the team looks at how to support Jane in reaching her goal safely. They talk with Jane about using protective tools when working with hot coffee and practicing different customer situations together through role playing. This helps Jane feel prepared while still moving toward the job she wants.

**“Dean”:** Dean chose to stay up late to watch a movie. Staff let Dean know he had an early appointment the next morning and that staying up late might make it harder to get up on time. Dean said he understood and still wanted to watch the movie. The next morning, Dean decided to sleep in and missed his appointment. Later, he received a \$50 no-show bill from his doctor. After this experience, Dean told staff that he plans to go to bed earlier when he has morning appointments because he doesn’t want to lose money again.

## Dignity of Risk

*Written by Patrick Saunders, an individual with autism who communicates with a letterboard.*

Dignity of risk

Let me ride a bike  
Let me walk up a mountain  
Let me swim in the ocean  
Let me catch a plane  
Let me cross the road  
Trust that I can

Dignity of risk

Coach me  
Teach me  
Guide me  
I can do it  
Believe in me  
Presume that I will succeed

Dignity of risk

Assume that I will not fail  
Take risks  
Risks where I might get hurt  
Risks that are well thought out, so I don't  
You can change a life  
My life  
Dignity, my dignity

Dignity of risk

Challenge my mind  
Challenge my body  
Challenge yourself  
Your opinions  
Your preconceptions of me  
Challenge me

Dignity of risk

Ask me  
Offer me choices  
Always involve me in decision making  
Tell your family  
Tell your friends  
Tell the world

Dignity of risk

Dignity of risk starts with you  
But it ends with me.

## DIGNITY OF RISK RESOURCES



<https://youtu.be/UZR6fm7pA2c?si=rfEll4p4xsByeQuq>

[Tips to Support the Dignity of Risk - The Council on Quality and Leadership](#)

[Person-Centered Approaches to Supporting Dignity of Risk for People with Disabilities](#)

<https://youtu.be/LUka52IKtdw?si=7s5cmjgVHdgh5BES>

[Microsoft Word - DOR Fact Sheet-DRAFT 10.2.24.docx](#)

[The Three E's: Education, Experience, and Exposure - The Council on Quality and Leadership](#)

"Risk, then, is not just part of life. It is life. The place between your comfort zone and your dream is where life takes place. It's the high-anxiety zone, but it's also where you discover who you are."

-Nick Vujicic

### **What do I do if I see a HCBS Settings Rule Violation?**

**Report it to your local Human Rights Advocate at the link below and they will forward your concern through the appropriate channels:**

[OHR Contact Information - Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services \(DBHDS\)](#)

**When in doubt, report it!**