Self-Determination: A Family Affair

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Transition as a Bridge to the Future
A Bridge to Where?
A Bridge to a Bright Future...
...or a Bridge to Nowhere?
A Bridge to Where?
Building the Bridge: Changing How we Think About Disability
Historically, disability was understood within a model that was an extension of the medical model, which conceived health as an *interiorized state* and health problems as an *individual pathology*; a problem within the person.

Within such a context, disability was understood as a characteristic of the person; as residing with the person.

- The person was seen as broken, diseased, pathological, atypical, or aberrant; as outside the norm.
- Perhaps unavoidably, people with disabilities were, consequently, associated with numerous negative stereotypes.
- Particularly with introduction of Mental Age estimates, led to “infantilization” of people with disabilities.
Changing Expectations: Changing Understanding
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Disability

Personal Competence

Environment
Implications for Changing Understandings of Disability

- Strengths-based
- Part of, not apart from, typical human functioning
- Focus on environment/context, not fixing individual
- Emphasizes personalized supports, not programs
- Increased emphasis on electronic and information technology
- Focus on self-determination
# VIA Classification of Strengths

## VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth)

VIA-Youth is a tool developed by the VIA Institute on Character to assess the character strengths of individuals, particularly youth. It is designed to help understand and develop personal growth and well-being. The VIA-Youth is based on the VIA Classification of Strengths, which categorizes character strengths into six clusters: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Each cluster includes specific virtues that are considered important for personal development.

### Clusters of Strengths

- **Wisdom**
  - Creativity
    - Originality
    - Adaptive
    - Ingenuity
  - Curiosity
    - Interest
    - Novelty-Seeking
    - Exploration
    - Openness
  - Judgment
    - Critical Thinking
    - Thinking Things Through
    - Open-mindedness
  - Love of Learning
    - Mastering New Skills & Topics
    - Systematically Adding to Knowledge
  - Perspective
    - Wisdom
    - Providing Wise Counsel
    - Taking the Big Picture View

- **Courage**
  - Bravery
    - Valor
    - Not Shrinking from Fear
    - Speaking Up for What’s Right
  - Perseverance
    - Persistence
    - Industry
    - Finishing What One Starts
  - Honesty
    - Authenticity
    - Integrity
  - Zest
    - Vitality
    - Enthusiasm
    - Vigor
    - Energy
    - Feeling Alive

- **Humanity**
  - Love
    - Both Loving and Being Loved
    - Valuing Close Relations with Others
  - Kindness
    - Generosity
    - Nurturance
    - Care & Compassion
    - Altruism
    - "Niceness"
  - Social Intelligence
    - Aware of the Motives/Feelings of Self/Others
    - Knowing what Makes Other People Tick

- **Justice**
  - Teamwork
    - Citizenship
    - Social Responsibility
    - Loyalty
  - Fairness
    - Just
    - Not Letting Feelings Bias Decisions About Others
  - Leadership
    - Organizing Group Activities
    - Encouraging a Group to Get Things Done

- **Temperance**
  - Forgiveness
    - Mercy
    - Accepting Others’ Shortcomings
    - Giving People a Second Chance
  - Humility
    - Modesty
    - Letting One’s Accomplishments Speak for Themselves
  - Prudence
    - Careful
    - Cautious
    - Not Taking Undue Risks
  - Self-Regulation
    - Self-Control
    - Disciplined
    - Managing Impulses & Emotions

- **Transcendence**
  - Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence
    - Awe
    - Wonder
    - Elevation
  - Gratitude
    - Thankful for the Good
    - Expressing Thanks
    - Feeling Blessed
  - Hope
    - Optimism
    - Future-Mindedness
    - Future Orientation
  - Humor
    - Playfulness
    - Bringing Smiles to Others
    - Lighthearted
  - Spirituality
    - Religiousness
    - Faith
    - Purpose
    - Meaning
Building the Bridge: Promoting Self-Determination
What is Self-Determination?
Self-Determination and Determinism

- The philosophical doctrine of determinism posits that actions are caused by events or natural laws that precede or are antecedent to the occurrence of the action. Behavior, then, is governed by these other events or natural laws.
Self-Determination and Determinism

- Self-determinism, or self-determination, implies that individuals *cause* themselves to act in certain ways, as opposed to someone or something else ‘causing’ us to act in certain ways.

- People who are self-determined embody the characteristic or quality of ‘self-determination,’ a noun referring to the degree to which that person acts or behaves in ways that are self-(instead of other-) caused.
What is Self-Determination?

Self-Determination is a dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the *causal agent* in one’s life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life.

*Causal agency*: To make or cause something to happen in one’s life.

*Volitional action*: Making a conscious choice or decision with deliberate intention.
Empowerment is a term usually associated with social movements, and typically is used, as Rappaport (1981) stated, in reference to actions that “enhance the possibilities for people to control their lives” (p. 15).

Self-Determination and Disability

Within the context of the disability rights and advocacy movement, the construct as a personal characteristic has been imbued with the empowerment and “rights” orientation typically associated with the sense of the term as a national or political construct.
The Right to Self-Determination

Nirje (1972):

- Chapter in Normalization by Wolfensberger titled The Right to Self-Determination.
- Clearly articulates the importance of this personal self-determination to all people, not excluding people with disabilities;
- Equates self-determination with the respect and dignity to which all people are entitled;
- Recognized that people define themselves, and others define them, by the circumstances and conditions of their lives. Salmon Rushdie, the noted novelist, once said in a newspaper interview that "our lives teach us who we are."
- This recognition that self-determination is fundamental to attaining respect and dignity and to perceiving oneself as worthy and valued is a major reason people with disabilities have been unequivocal and consistent in their demand for control in their lives.
Dignity, Respect, Equality...

"People with autism should be treated with the same dignity, respect, and equality as people without autism.”  Jean-Paul Bovee

"We don't have to be told what self-determination means. We know it is just another word for a life filled with rising expectations, dignity, respect and opportunities.“  Robert Williams
Promoting Self-Determination

- Choice-making
- Decision-making
- Problem-solving
- Goal setting and attainment
- Self-advocacy
- Self-observation, evaluation and reinforcement
- Internal locus of control
- Autonomous motivation
- Self-awareness
- Self-knowledge
Self-Determination: The Importance of Family
Walk the tightrope between protection and independence. Allow your son or daughter to explore his or her world.

Encourage your child to ask questions and express opinions. Involvement in family discussions and decision-making sessions is one way of providing this opportunity to learn.

Recognize the process of reaching goals, don’t just emphasize outcomes.
The Role of Families in Promoting Self-Determination

- Schedule opportunities for interactions with children of different ages and backgrounds.
- Have high expectations for your son or daughter.
- Don’t leave choice-making opportunities to chance. Take every opportunity to allow your child to make choices; what she wears, what is served for dinner, or where the family goes for vacation.
Thank You

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