

USE THE 'CAPABILITY APPROACH':

INVEST IN YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER'S EMOTIONAL STABILITY

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When you invest in using the 'Capability Approach' with your son or daughter with a developmental disability, you are investing in life experiences that can enhance self-expression through meaningful involvement, using strengths and interests. This kind of exposure has a far-reaching impact on your teen or young adult's willingness to enter new settings, participation, and emotional wellness.

The 'Capability Approach' draws upon 'Broad Creative Supports' that make an activity, event, or experience purposeful and supportive. It is the exposure to particular settings along with consideration of 'Broad Creative Supports' consisting in this framework: 1) the environment 2) the structure, 3) the people supports, and 4) physiological. These combined supporting factors enable the individual to participate, learn life skills, and achieve higher capability levels.

To explain the Capability Approach, let's look at this illustration. Perhaps, you may identify an experience with your own teen in a different situation, but with similar results.

Sarah heard from Jan that her son Paul was interested in joining boy scouts. Jan encouraged Sarah to enroll her son James too. Initially, Sarah was resistant because she had deep concerns about the scout leaders ability to understand James' needs, because of his autism. Sarah and Jan both talked with the scout leaders about James' needs and the necessary strategies to assure a successful inclusion. The leaders agreed to initiate these supports: 1) pair James with another scout during activities, and 2) a scout leader would provide James with close proximity with one-to-one instruction when necessary. The scout leaders assured Sarah not to worry, that James would be accepted. Over several months of scout meetings, James did in fact exhibit impulsive outbursts and was inattentive, but the combined supports eventually led to progress. James began to relax and enjoy the meetings because he felt safe among the other boy scouts and leaders. Thus he exhibited a higher capability to participate in the scouts as others acknowledged his needs and the supports that met those needs.

Wolman (1973) distinguished the difference between one's 'ability' levels and 'capability' levels. He described 'ability' as the extent a task or action can be performed independently. Rather 'capability' is the maximum effectiveness a person can attain under optimal conditions of support. Most surprisingly, as an individual's capability increases, learning progresses and irrelevant behaviors diminish, sometimes significantly.

George (a pseudonym), a 26-years old, had a childhood history of being ridiculed by his school peers, some very harshly. Look how the 'Capability Approach' with an emphasis on using his strengths with 'Broad Creative Supports' changed his life and his emotional stability.

Because George was unable to recognize certain social rules and appropriate behaviors, he was a target to other students. He spoke loudly and impulsively. His peers mocked him, asking him to do and say silly things. He believed when they laughed at him he was being funny and accepted among them. One day his mother walked into the school cafeteria unexpectedly, she was shocked at the scenario of children scoffing at George. Worse, no school staff intervened. As a result, his parents decided to take George out of public school and home school him for the following seven years. When George reached age 14, his parents

realized that if he were to live in this world, they must try the school setting once again. But this time, they intended to request individualized supports to meet his intensity.

The summer before high school started, George took a road trip with his grandfather through the Black Hills of South Dakota and Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. He created watercolor and chalk drawings and then later acrylic paintings of the beautiful nature scenes and numerous wild animals. When high school began in the fall, his mother asked that George have an assistant as needed to aid his adaptation during the course of a school day. She also requested that George be placed in the high school advanced art class. When the staff denied George enrollment in the art class, she asked for a second meeting and showed all his drawings to reveal his talent from the travels with his grandfather. The art teacher agreed that George was indeed talented and accepted him into her class on a trial basis. Soon after, the teacher became very fascinated with George's talent and unique personality. She included him in projects such as making posters for school-wide events and the football team. All of these activities and supports in combination increased his inclusion and acceptance among peers, and most importantly his emotional stability.

Assimilation into society is critical to the adaptations and wellbeing of individuals with developmental disabilities. Before a person becomes assimilated into an environment, often the social and physical environments must be structurally modified (Yee, 2002). We can see that George's success occurred because of modifications and supports provided. Here are some examples of individualized supports that are linked to Wolman's (1973) factors that affect a person's behaviour:

- (1) *physiological*—These supports include bio medical treatment. Others may include devices or strategies to improve functioning, i.e. glasses for vision, therapies in speech and auditory treatment, communication devices and tools that facilitate receptive and expressive communication;
- (2) *structural*— These may include the use of checklists or calendars to aid the understanding of the series of events within a day; or the steps to initiate the self regulation if one's responses to others and/or managing the stimuli within an environment, the order of daily activities, or list of events that have purpose, meaning, or enjoyment;
- (3) *environment*—The exposure to different settings to increase the individual's developing interests, adaptations, skill maintenance, growth, and personal contribution, and;
- (4) *organismic*--The people supports such as a peer student, peer mentor, or coworker support on the job that reflects positive feedback and acceptance of the individual.

Specifically, George had an assistant that helped him navigate through the school day, and an art teacher who provided support and guidance as well as exposure to activities and settings to use his artistic talent among typical peers. These factors in combination became a shield warding off social barriers that may have interfered with advancing his talent, personal growth and successful inclusion. Therefore, these 'Broad Creative Supports' were particular factors that increased George's adaptations. We can see that George expressed well through his art and therefore connected him, acceptance within a group.

People thrive on having a choice and a voice about what happens in life. According to White (as cited in Haidt, 2006 p. 220) people have a basic drive to make things happen. Haidt (2006) shows us how making things happen can be seen even with infants, playing with a busy box ringing bells and spinning wheels. Haidt also provided an example of how lethargy sets in when people retire because of limited interests and connections to others. Making application to individuals with developmental disabilities, the teen or young adult's inactivity can lead to lethargy which may turn into a series of behaviors that could induce a crisis. Perhaps crises can be prevented using the 'Capability Approach' with 'Broad Creative Supports'. White (as cited in Haidt, 1959, p. 220) called the basic drive to make things happen the 'effectance motive' defined as a need to interact or have control over one's environment. White stated it is almost as basic as food and water, yet it is not a deficit need like hunger that disappears for a few hours. 'Effectance motive'

is a constant presence in our lives. We all have a basic desire to make things happen. Our youth with developmental disabilities need our help to create the supports and opportunities so they can be active in choice making and use their own voice however they express it to make things happen on their own behalf.

In private practice, I use the 'Capability Approach' to help connect youth and young adults to a life with meaning, by identifying their strengths and intensity of need for supports through an assessment. Using The Capability and Independence Scale created from my own research (Marquette, 2007), I lead families through a process of determining their teen or young adult's intensity of need for a support, as well as *the* necessary supports that may enable participation in an activity or event. The purpose is also to enable youth to obtain and practice life skills as well. The method has shown to increase a teen's capability and emotional stability levels in these areas of living: (a) general functioning, (b) cognitive, (c) social, and (d) occupational capabilities, (e) domestic/household work, (f) emotional stability, and (g) communication.

I encourage you to work the process of the Capability Approach on behalf of your teen or young adult. Your teen's emotional stability and potential can increase. Here are some suggestions.

- 1) make provision that basic needs are met and satisfied; such as sleep, nutrition, cleanliness surroundings, medical care, therapy, and access to education or training;
- 2) ensure their safety and connections to others;
- 3) examine the 'Broad Creative Supports' that enable participation and involvement;
- 4) provide exposure to activities, settings, and events of interests with specific meaning;
- 5) offer ample ways to use self expression, i.e., art making, playing an instrument, collecting insects, thus having a voice and choice about what happens in life;
- 6) discover ways that lead one to be part of something, a family, or a group and to know that he or she is somebody.

The story does not end for George. During his senior year in high school, George entered an art contest in his city and out of 55,000 entries, his painting won first place and sold for \$6,000.00. Today George has his own art business and lives in his own apartment with supports. His mother never dreamed he would have reached this point in his life.

Use 'Capability Approach' when using other strategies or therapies or when nothing seems to be working at all. Through belonging, people find acceptance. Through self worth, people feel love. Through capability, people feel secure.



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