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14TH ANNUAL
MILESTONES
AUTISM Spectrum
CONFERENCE Disorder
LIFE-LONG STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Leisure Matters! The Benefits of Cultivating the Leisure Interests of Youth with Autism

David J Weiss OTR/L



Thank you to our Technology Sponsor



1

Today's Outcomes

- **Participants will be able to:**
demonstrate an understanding of the benefits of and barriers to the development of healthy hobbies and leisure interests for youth with and without autism.

Participants will be able to:
describe how individuals, families, teachers, and practitioners can cultivate healthy hobbies and interests with youth in school, at home, and in community-based settings.

Participants will be able to:
describe how to advocate for the regular participation in leisure activities for youth living with autism.

2

CONTINUED

Why Leisure?

“Sooo....., what do you do for fun?”

“What are your hobbies?”

“What do you do in your spare time?”

3

CONTINUED

“Leisure” Dramatically Impacts Mental Health and
Overall Healthy Functioning

IN EVERYONE!

EXAMPLES

Brian Sheridan, TEAM USA,
Handcycling

Mike Pistorino, Runner and Child
Abuse Prevention Advocate

4

continued

“Leisure” Dramatically Impacts Mental Health and Overall Healthy Functioning **IN EVERYONE!**

Me

Staff Sgt. Todd
Domerese, Ret.

5

continued

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



THE SANCTUARY COMMITMENTS



THE SANCTUARY COMMITMENTS



6

continued

RE-ED PRINCIPLES

- **Life is to be lived now**, not in the past, and lived in the future only as a present challenge.
- **Trust between the child and adult is essential**, the foundation on which all other principles rest, the glue that holds teaching and learning together; the beginning point for re-education.
- **Time is an ally**, working on the side of growth in a period of development when life has a tremendous forward thrust.
- **Competence makes a difference**; children and adolescents should be helped to be good at something, and especially at schoolwork.

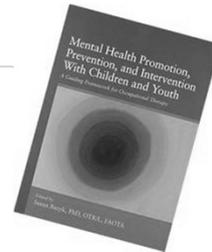
RE-ED PRINCIPLES

- **Self-control can be taught** and children and adolescents helped to manage their behavior without the development of psychodynamic insight; symptoms can and should be controlled by direct address, not necessarily by an uncovering therapy.
- The cognitive competence of children and adolescents can be considerably enhanced; they can be taught generic skills in the management of their lives as well as strategies for coping with the complex array of demands placed on them by family, school, community, or job; in other words, **intelligence can be taught**.
- **Feelings should be nurtured**, shared spontaneously, controlled when necessary, expressed when too long repressed, and explored with trusted others.
- **The group is very important** to young people; it can be a major source of instruction in growing up.

RE-ED PRINCIPLES

- **Ceremony and ritual give order**, stability, and confidence to troubled children and adolescents, whose lives are often in considerable disarray.
- **The body is the armature of the self**, the physical self around which the psychological self is constructed.
- **Communities are important** for young children and youth, but the uses and benefits of community must be experienced to be learned.
- In growing up, **a child should know some JOY in each day**, and look forward to some joyous event for the morrow

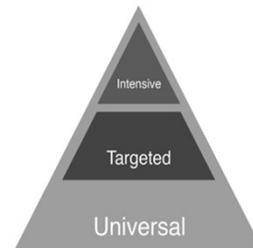
Guiding Framework: Public Approach to Mental Health



“Every Moment Counts” initiative, an ODE grant funded project--- Led by Dr. Susan Bazyk, Occupational Therapy Professor, Cleveland State University

WWW.EVERYMOMENTCOUNTS.ORG

- Address the mental health needs of ALL children
- Promotion of mental health and flourishing in ALL
- Early detection and intervention for those with mental health concerns.





' Every Moment Counts' Project Emphasizes:

1. Mental Health Promotion- in students with and without disabilities and mental health challenges
2. Inclusion of students with disabilities and/or mental health challenges with non-disabled peers (LRE)
3. Integrating related services in natural school and community contexts-academic and non-academic
4. Collaboration among all school personnel, community providers and families



" Every Moment Counts" Project Goals

1. **Build capacity** of OTs, school personnel and families to promote mental health and contribute to prevention and intervention
2. Develop, implement and evaluate **model programs and embedded strategies** focusing on mental health promotion
3. **Disseminate materials** using website, Pinterest, and Facebook

CONTINUED **ed** Mental Health Promotion Initiative
KIDS THRIVING

Based on a solid understanding of positive mental health

- What is it?
- How to promote it?
- Who should be involved?

RESEARCH: positive psychology, mental health literacy, positive youth development, mental health promotion

13

CONTINUED **ed**

Being Mentally Healthy is a POSITIVE state of functioning

1. Positive affect or emotional state. Feeling good emotionally- happy, content, positive about life, etc.
2. Positive psychological and social function- enjoy fulfilling relationships?
3. Doing well functionally- engaging in productive occupation/activities – academically, socially, physically –tune into children’s schoolwork, friendships, interaction during lunch/recess/after school
4. Coping with life stressors and challenges- observe how a child copes with a poor test grade? Losing a game? Being teased? Etc.

14

How to Promote Positive Mental Health?

- Participation in *enjoyable activities*; experiences that *induce positive emotions*- joy, pleasure, contentment
- Repeated thought-action tendencies have the potential to broaden habitual modes of thinking and acting
- Experiencing positive emotions can build enduring personal resources that can foster resilience in the face of challenges.

15

How to Promote Mental Health?

- Use of individual *character strengths* (creativity, kindness, curiosity, persistence)
- Helping others; *acts of kindness*
- *Expressing gratitude*
- *Positive institutions*- environments that foster positive emotions and character strengths

16

How ELSE to promote mental health?

MEANINGFUL LEISURE PARTICIPATION!

Positive Youth Development: Leisure is a context for positive youth development

KEY FEATURES:

- regular participation schedules,
- Direction by one or more adults,
- Rule guided interaction
- Emphasis on skill development,
- Performance requires sustained active attention over time and the provision of feedback

BENEFITS OF LEISURE PARTICIPATION

Personal Development

- Identity work (assess talents, interests, values)
- Development of initiative-involves intrinsic motivation, concerted engagement, and commitment over time
- Development of cognitive, physical, and emotional skills

Interpersonal Development

- New peer friendships, social skills, close connections to adults with social capital

Promotes positive mental health and builds resilience

- Participation in enjoyable activities brings about positive emotions-joy, pleasure, contentment, creativity

CONTINUED

ADDRESSING EXTRACURRICULAR RECREATION ACTIVITIES IS IN IDEA!!

IDEA- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Sec. 300.107 Nonacademic services)

States must ensure the following:

- (a)... provision of supplementary aids and services determined appropriate and necessary by the child's IEP Team, to provide nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities in the manner necessary to afford children with disabilities an equal opportunity for participation in those services and activities.
- (b)... Nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities may include...athletics,...recreational activities, special interest groups or clubs sponsored by the public agency,...Etc.

19

CONTINUED

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Sec. 300.117 Nonacademic services)

...Additionally...

In providing or arranging for the provision of nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, including meals, recess periods, and the services and activities set forth in Sec. 300.117, each public agency must ensure that each child with a disability participates with nondisabled children in the extracurricular services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of that child. The public agency must ensure that each child with a disability has the supplementary aids and services determined by the child's IEP Team to be appropriate and necessary for the child to participate in nonacademic settings.

20

MORE AMMUNITION FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF LEISURE: EMPLOYMENT FIRST

- Evidence Based Predictors for Post-School Success: Ohio Employment First Transition Framework Evidence Based Predictors Tool
- Analysis of this tool, the following are areas that fit with participation in leisure activities

21

EMPLOYMENT FIRST EVIDENCE BASED PREDICTORS (8 predictors)

- Each predictor lists EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH and IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
- Listed are elements that support the importance of cultivation of leisure interests

PREDICTOR 1:

Collaborative Networks for Student Support:

- *Implications for research:* -
 - Intra-agency collaboration and coordination, which is clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process, promotes cross-agency, cross program, and cross-disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth
 - Students with support from self-family-friend network to find a job were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment

22

EVIDENCE BASED PREDICTORS, Con' t

- Students with formal or informal mentors had higher self-esteem and were more likely to be employed during high school
- Students with informal mentors are more likely to have greater academic success
- Students who had support from informal or formal supports were more likely to work in community based work settings

Implications for practice:

- Create connections for youth in the community that support the youth's preferences, interests, and strengths
- Create a network of informal support for each youth

23

Evidence Based Predictors, Con' t

PREDICTOR 2

Individualized Career Development

Implications for Practice: Design work and community experiences so that youth can identify high interest areas as well as situations and careers for which they have no interest or skill

PREDICTOR 4

Social and Social-Emotional Instruction and Skills

Implications for Research:

- High peer social skills were 3.5 times more likely to obtain postsecondary employment
- High social skills were more likely to have higher quality of life and to be engaged in post-school employment
- Students with severe disabilities who are perceived to have less difficulty related to communication and self-care skills were more likely to have paid employment

24

Evidenced Based Predictors, Con' t

- High social skills in high school was a significant predictor of students' capacity to perform self-determination behaviors and opportunities to engage in self-determined behavior in-school

Implications for Practice:

- Employers cite that social skills (or lack of) are among the top reasons adults lose their jobs. Therefore, social skills, and the related 'soft skills', must be a primary focus of assessment, planning, support and service.
- Standard social skill curricula taught in group settings may not be sufficient to teach the contextually based social skills of adult environments. Individualize direct instruction for the youth in targeted environments.
- Provide opportunities for youth to practice communication, interpersonal, negotiation, conflict resolution and social conventions in a variety of authentic environments such as work sites, community environments, school, and home.

25

Evidenced Based Predictors, Con' t

- Assist youth to use problem-solving skills in context when difficult interpersonal situations arise
- Peer mentorship may offer opportunities to enhance social skill learning across multiple settings
- ID natural social supports in community settings. Collaborate and communicate with each person involved to understand their role in providing natural supports.

PREDICTOR 6

Supporting Parental Involvement and Expectations

Implications from Research:

- Youth who had parents with high expectations were more likely to be engaged in postsecondary employment
- Youth with positive perceptions of independent living skills parents taught them had greater postsecondary self-determination skills

26

Evidence Based Predictors, Con' t

- Youth who spent more time per week with friends during school were more likely to experience higher quality of life.

Implications for Practice:

- Support families to become comfortable in their role as the ongoing “case manager” for their son or daughter. In this role a few important contributions include: Assisting in community connections and ‘social capital’
- Promote early discussion with families about high expectations and possibilities for youth with disabilities, beginning with the first IEP
- Assist families in cultivating an informal support network of family members, community members, friends
- Families need information and examples of ways to use everyday life events to talk with their sons and daughters about working and careers

27

Evidence Based Predictors, Con' t

PREDICTOR 7

Self-Determination, Independent Living Skills Instruction, and skill building

Implications from Research:

- High self care skills were more likely to be engaged in post-school education, employment, and independent living
- Strength based adaptive behavior skills were more likely to be engaged in post school independent living

Implications for Practice:

- Emphasize the importance of teaching skills for independence
- Early in the child’s life, create the expectation that the youth will be self-sufficient as an adult. Initiate early and ongoing conversations with families about ways their child can develop independence skills.

28

Research Based Predictors, Con' t

- Use authentic environments and situations to teach, assess, and practice skills for independence
- Team with parents and other community partners to teach, assess and practice skills for independence
- Team with parents and other community partners to teach and support the development of skill in this area
- Intensive accommodations provided to youth, instead of intensive instruction in skills to develop self-determination and independence, is counterproductive to the youth becoming independent

29

Evidence Based Predictors, Con' t

PREDICTOR 8

Inclusive Practices and Programs

Implications from Research: Youth who had the highest degree of integration with age-appropriate peers were more likely to engage in post-school employment

Implications for Practice: Expose youth to role models that provide high levels of expectation for achievement in both school and community environments

SUMMARY: 6 of 8 predictors provided support to the importance of leisure; 15 points from research implications, 19 points from implications for practice

30

continued

IN OTHER WORDS....

LEISURE IS
IMPORTANT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

31

continued

POSSIBLE BARRIERS

- Limited financial resources
- Lack of parental ‘ buy in’ (“Parents who can, most often do.”)
- Lack of staff/administrative ‘ buy in’
- Behavioral issues
- Frequent lack of information/understanding of volunteers/coaches in programs
- “ But I’ve got to work on IEP goals”
- “ But this child doesn’ t like anything”
- “ But how can I bill for this service?”

32

6 STEPS TO SUCCESS:

1. Start the conversation about the importance of leisure
2. Interest inventory: Spark an Interest
3. Explore school or community-sponsored options
4. Make a match and a plan
5. Just do it! Child/youth participates in the activity
6. Occupational reflection and future plans

Tier 2 (at risk groups) and Tier 3 (intensive individual)

Examples:

Adapted sports/lessons, Recess groups, Game groups, Baking groups

**THE BEST OF THE BEST UNDERSTAND
THE IMPORTANCE OF LEISURE**

“ Do you know what my favorite part of the game is? The opportunity to play.”
-Mike Singletary, NFL Hall of Famer

“ Do not let what you can't do get in the way of what you CAN DO.”
-John Wooden, 10x NCAA Champion

Persistence can change failure into extraordinary achievement -Matt Biondi, multiple gold winning swimmer

35

EXAMPLE OF LEISURE COACHING
Kelson

Setting: Separate facility school

Kelson: 13 yr. old male w anxiety disorder (NOS), ASD, optic nerve hypoplasia, SED (severe emotional disturbance)

- Very social, enjoys playing, helpful with tasks
- Attending challenges, motor incoordination, no leisure interests outside the home

Family: single mom; limited income

- She struggles with behavioral outbursts, has had to call 911
- Frequent Hospitalizations
- Limited neighborhood opportunities for active play; card table with art activities at home for indoor leisure

36

Process- Kelson

1. **Start the conversation-** Talked with mother about importance of leisure; mother – “ I want him to be able to be a part of team like other kids....and have male role models”
2. **Interest exploration-** Interested in playing/watching football
3. **Explore community-sponsored options-** Searched for adaptive sports programs; found Achievement Centers for Children
4. **Make a match and plan-** multiple phone calls and visits (filled out application, assisted with securing funds, sent reminders of upcoming events

37

Process- Kelson

5. **Just do it!** Coaching/support during the football session; direct 1:1 with Kelson; support for volunteers
6. **Occupational reflection and future plans:** Checked back with mother and Kelson about how things were going; followed up with adapted soccer/basketball clinics in winter

http://www.everymomentcounts.org/view.php?nav_id=192

38

UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS: TIER 1

- UTILIZE INFORMATION to make the case about the importance of leisure activities to children's development and positive mental health
- Make the case why OTs have expertise in non-traditional areas (and our roots in mental health)-This is a part of our practice framework!
- Have a plan and a process (OVER-communicate, make your first foray a success)
- Win the support of decision makers
- Show staff/families how interventions positively impact students and THE ENTIRE CULTURE
- CAN AND DO WORK ON IEP GOALS with these activities-embed rec/leisure into goals; sensory, motor, work-based, play

39

SUCCESS EXAMPLES:

STRATEGIES:

1. Make the case with administration about how the school/students will benefit
2. Brainstorm the ways ALL students can benefit/participate; regardless of the nature/severity of their disability
3. BRING THE EVENTS TO THE TABLE WITH ENTHUSIASM!!!
4. OVER-plan, OVER-communicate
5. Set up skill building sessions, practice sessions, dress-rehearsals to create predictability for students
6. Utilize best practices; social stories, visual supports, predictable schedule, etc.
7. Be able to articulate how these activities benefit students: skill building, positive mental health, social skills, etc.
8. Win the support of staff....(Make it FUN for everyone!)

40

School Wide Special Olympics Event HIGHLIGHTS:

- Opening ceremonies parade- ALL participate
 - Parent/family attendance-feedback
 - Medal ceremonies, and take home items like photos and event programs
 - Skill building through GM time, practices-ALL participate
 - A specific schedule
 - Healthy snack period
 - Student set/up clean up, program handout responsibilities
- ALL STAFF/CLASSROOM INVOLVEMENT----
- Success from this event led to staff/administrative buy in for future events

41

Special Olympics Highlights

42

School Wide “ Prentiss Super Bowl” Football Event HIGHLIGHTS, Con’ t

- Sportsmanship lines
- Chants
- “ Catch, throw, run, get flags, make friends”
- Students created PBIS based rules
- Game set up so all players had the chance to score
- STAFF INVOLVEMENT

43

School wide “ Prentiss Basketball Skills Competition” HIGHLIGHTS

- A student came up with the idea!
- GM “ drills”/practice- ALL kids participate
- “ Preliminary” round- ALL kids participate
- School advertising
- True competition, finalists from best scores
- Free throws, layups, consecutive dribbles, dribbling obstacle course, and passing accuracy
- Social story about winning/losing
- Sportsmanship focused
- 25+ kids represented in finals
- Prizes for all finalists, certificates for all finalists
- Photos sent home to families

44

Prentiss Walking/Running Club- “ We Run this City” Highlights

- PBIS rules
- Student skill improvement
- Typically inactive students actively participating
- 20-30 kids!
- Kids seeing group-deciding to join
- Academic Skills; match pictures, FM skills, charting, numbers/graph
- 3 students completing WRTC program 2016, 7- 2017, 9- 2018
- Community Involvement (practice run, Rite Aid Marathon)
- Student Pride



45

Prentiss Walking/Running Club- “ We Run this City” Highlights

- Kids lead rules/stretching
- Musical Motivation, choices
- Increased endurance, increased motor skills
- STAFF CARRY OVER/INVOLVEMENT

46

Just Some of the Benefits....

- Gross motor skills development
- Fine motor skills development
- Academic skills vocational skills
- Social skills
- Functional sensory based activity
- Problem solving

47

BEHAVIORAL AND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- Less aggression/violence; more pro-social behaviors
- Social skills development
- Trust development (peers and adults)
- Increased willingness to attempt novel activities
- Sense of accomplishment (pride)
- New friends
- Ability to work with others
- Handling frustration
- Problem solving
- Leadership opportunities

48

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS...

- Increased parent/school collaboration/communication
 - Parent Group
- Staff Involvement/satisfaction
 - Staff enthusiasm
- Staff initiation of MORE intervention!
 - Prom, School Talent Show, Special Olympics activities
- Community partnerships



Inclusion Successes

Inclusion Successes

Inclusion Successes

CLOSING THOUGHTS...

- REMEMBER WHY LEISURE IS IMPORTANT!
- Challenge the status quo
- Win the support of administration/decision makers
- Know the practice framework
- Utilize your own strengths/interests
- Passionately pursue ways to improve the lives of the individuals/communities you work in/with
- Success breeds success

53

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Email: Dweiss@pepcleve.org

54

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