Promoting Meaningful Days for Adults with Severe Disabilities: Current Challenges & Recommended Strategies

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Why Focus on Meaningful Days?

- Long-standing issue: *life wasting*
- Children with autism and IDD in good (ABA) school programs grow up and enter the adult service system
- Only about 20% are involved in integrated, community activities and life
How Most Adults with Severe Disabilities Spend Their Weekdays

- Over 70% do not work
- Among those that work, the job is usually part time and involves contract work
- There are notable exceptions
- Most spend their weekdays in congregate or center-based settings
Meaningful Days Require:

- Meaningful context
- Effective teaching services
- (and, of course, sufficient staff resources)
General Continuum of Functional Activities for Adults with Disabilities

- DAY SUPPORT PROGRAMS & SETTINGS
  - Usually Most Functional
    - Working in a real job
    - Working in a supported job
      - Individual job placement
      - Work crews, enclaves, agency-based job
    - Sheltered, contract work
    - Individual table-top activities in a congregate setting
  - Usually Least Functional
National Trends

- Changes in CMS funding requirements
- DOJ litigation
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References for Functional Skills


References for Functional Skills (continued)

Guidelines for Choosing Functional Skills

1. Skills that involve an activity that someone else would have to do for a person if the person could not do the activity

2. Skills that are needed often

3. Skills for taking part in age-appropriate activities instead of age-inappropriate activities

4. Skills for meaningful work (not prevocational): working in real jobs for real pay
Background Research: Changing Nonmeaningful Group Activities to Meaningful

Changing Group Activities from Nonmeaningful to Meaningful: 1

- **Step 1**: Identify group(s) of concern
- **Step 2**: Identify nonmeaningful materials and/or activities
- **Step 3**: Identify relevant staff
Changing Group Activities from Nonmeaningful to Meaningful: II

- **Step 4:** Meet with selected staff
  - Review purpose and functional guidelines
  - Prompt initial staff ideas on changing existing activities
  - Instruct staff to develop plans re how to change materials and activities
  - Set date for next meeting to review staff plans

- **Step 5:** Meet again with selected staff and review/finalize plans

- **Step 6:** Secure any necessary materials

- **Step 7:** Begin new group activities
Long-Term Case Example

Summary

- Background and purpose
  - Two formal studies
  - Two long-term follow ups
  - Normative comparisons

- Collaborative team approach
  - Participative management
  - Involvement of indigenous personnel from the beginning
Comparison (Normative)
Observational Data: Sources

- Green, Reid et al. (1986). *Applied Research in Mental Retardation*
- Parsons, Schepis, Reid, McCarn, & Green (1987). *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*
- Reid, Parsons, & Green (2001). *American Journal on Mental Retardation*
- Recent observations (2013-15)
Overall Summary and Some Key Points

- Despite some improvement over 30 years, many day programs for adults with IDD often provide relatively few meaningful activities.
- Meaningful activities usually do not occur without meaningful materials.
- Promoting meaningful activities requires support staff to have and use skills to teach.
Key Points (continued)

- Consistently providing meaningful activities requires sustained effort by staff and supervisors.
- Difficult to treat problem behavior in a problem environment.
- If behavior analysts do not work to make improvement in day programs, many adults with severe disabilities will likely continue to engage in *life wasting* activities over the next 30 years.
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