Health Promoting and the promotion of self esteem in persons with Down Syndrome

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Importance of Self Esteem
- Associated with every indication of mental and physical health
- People live longer and happier lives

Promoting self esteem for persons with Down syndrome is greatly enhanced by
- Promotion of strengths
- Acceptance & adaptation to specific limitations
- Benefit of “dreams”
- Promotion of unique talents and skills

Challenges of promoting self esteem when people with Down syndrome:
- Have limitations in communicating
- Move at their own pace
- Have far less independence and control
- Have fewer opportunities in school
- Have far fewer job or career opportunities

Despite this, the vast majority of people seen at the Center have strong pride and self respect:
- People with Down syndrome have unique skills and abilities and their own internal sense of self respect
- Promotion and development of self esteem
- Often a complex and creative process

“The only disability in life is a bad attitude”
Scott Hamilton

Some things are “onboard equipment” (born with)
- Once we accept them
- We can adapt to these limitations:

Questions regarding our own limitations
- We all have to accept our “on board equipment”
- We all have strengths & limitations
- We all compare ourselves to others (at times unfavorably)
- We may have as great or greater a discrepancy of our ideal as people with Down syndrome
- We all have dreams aspirations which we won’t reach

Our dreams
- To be successful in careers & in marriage
- To be a rock star
- Star in sports

The Dreams of people with Down syndrome
- People with Down syndrome have similar dreams (Sports or Rock star)
- The Dreams of people with Down syndrome
- But they also tend to dream of doing what others do, college, marriage, to live independently etc

Regarding Dreams, Some caregivers are concerned with people who are described as:
“Story tellers, fibbers & dreamers”
who are “out of touch with reality”
Who talk of marriages, careers and other “fantasies”
That will simply not happen (for most)

We all have dreams
- Daniel J. Levinson: “Seasons of a Mans Life”
- We rarely attain our dreams
- We really don’t need to
- The dreams are still very important nonetheless
- They give us a goal, direction and inspiration

Like us, People with DS are often willing to accept limitations to their Dreams
- Gentleman who for 10 years reported to us that he wants to marry in 5 years)
- Couples may be engaged forever
- Fantasy of marrying a star is enough

Accepting limitations to their Dreams
- People who attend Jr colleges often feel satisfied.
- Police, fireperson (Wear the uniform,
- Act to help others
- they visit and volunteer at police or fire department)
- Just like for us: Some form of the dream can become a reality

The Dream and reality: Unlimited outlets
- Star
- Musician
- Athlete
- That can make people happy & Fulfilled

- Some caregivers are also concerned with people who have wilder fantasies
- Who really get into characters
- Who seem to believe movie characters are real
- Who want to meet or even marry movie characters

What to do with the Dream?
Unless it interferes in day to day life
Let it be

We all have the right to our dreams
- Despite benefits of ‘the dream’
- Development of self esteem may still be more difficult and complicated for people with Down syndrome
- Self esteem usually requires some “hands on” success in day to day life

Hands on = Competence
Key concept in Psychology:
- to do for self, and
- to gain some sense of control and mastery in our world
- Emphasis now on promoting competence throughout the life stages:
- Competence gained by doing ADL’s independently
- Starting at an early age
- Continuing through all life stages
Over the past 5-10 years: Many positive changes for people with Disabilities:
- In High school transition programs
- More exposure to different jobs and job sites
- More training in adaptive skills for the community

Promoting competence for teens and adults: May still be more difficult:
- Persons in general population are considered adults by the age of 21, (sometimes 18)
- This is not clear cut for persons with Down syndrome
- Adults with disabilities are neither “children” who look like teens or adults
- Nor are they truly ‘independent adults’
- Promoting competence: May also be difficult
- Because there is a wide range of skills between different people with DS

More important: Uneven-ness of skills
- Within the person themselves
- Many strengths: (excellent social skills; exceptional memory)
- There are also limitations of skill .. and maturity in specific areas

We need to understand and deal with:
- The specific limitations or challenges of each person
- Promote competence by targeting and adapting to this limitation
  Examples:

Reducing people to a IQ number is far too limiting
- There is so much more than this IQ numbers (e.g., ‘5 years 6 months’)
- Creative Intelligence
- Social intelligence
- But people may have less mature or “child like” areas which need to be appreciated

“less mature” areas
Examples of “age inappropriate” activities:
- Adults playing with Barbie dolls & action figures
- Reading elementary age stories (in teens or adults years)
- Coloring

Is it fair or right to judge these activities as “inappropriate”?
- Relaxing, entertaining
- Usually done in a provide space
- This is often part of a creative playful side of people

Concrete versus abstract thinking: important area to asses need
Concrete thinking may affect problem solving skills

Concrete versus abstract thought: May affect success in school
- Especially in upper grades
- Unfair and inappropriate to expect some people to deal with abstract ideas
- Recommend: Realistic and honest appraisals skills and interests
- Vocational, academic?

On the other hand: We need an individual assessment of academic skills
- If we Lump all people together
We may make assumptions that are inaccurate

Assuming chronological age equals developmental age
- In certain areas this may be true
- In others this may not
- Again depending on specific limitations of the person
  *Example: father expects his 17 year old to be interested in girls*

Remember that developmental changes continue (at a slower pace)
  *Example: the father who expects his 17 year old to be interested in girls*
  *May be surprised when this occurs at the age of in the 20’s or 30’s*

Invisible versus visible “disability”
- Advantages and Disadvantages, visible disability
- People with clearly defined disabilities are more accepted in schools
- They may be subject to assumptions & prejudices about the group

Invisible disabilities
- May escape labeling (in one form)
- Held to a inappropriate standard
- May be teased or not accepted by peers
- Labeled “odd”
- Parents labeled “bad”

Social intelligence
- Many have exceptional “people skills”
- On the Autism spectrum
- (Odd behavior) Social skills deficits may expose them to teasing
- Many people can adapt by learning how to deal with specific interactions

Language may also create opportunities to misinterpret peoples’ skills
- On one hand people with limited verbal skills may be assumed to be
- Less skilled or capable than they are
- Many who are “non verbal”
- Have superb skills
- If we can “hear” what they can do

Language
- On the other hand people with excellent verbal skills may be assumed to be
- More skilled than they are
- Get into jobs, schools, living situations which they cannot handle

Promoting self esteem in people with DS
- An area that may be ignored or downplayed is
- The recognition & development of unique talents and gifts

There is a marvelous human capacity for developing unique adaptive skills
- When there is a lack of certain talents or skills, others come to the fore
- Visual impairment
● ADD (Intuition; holistically)
● Limited academic interest or skills (mechanics; tradesmen)

Unique Skills and Abilities: persons with Down syndrome
● Artistic skill
● Music talent
● Exceptional people skills
● Strong work ethic

Promoting exceptional people skills
● “Many are great at doing for others”
● In our experience: People with Down syndrome
● Often have a greater appreciation and acceptance of others with disabilities

Great untapped people skills to be used in jobs:
● Unique people skills

People with Down syndrome have the ability to teach us lessons
● on slowing down
● and experiencing the joys and pleasures of the here and now
● People with Down syndrome really do stop to smell the roses

Compensating in the workplace, People have
● Strong work ethic
● Punctual
● Patient, persistent, reliable
● Conscientious