

1. Facilitating Life Skills, Meaningful-Day Experiences and Socially Valued Roles Through Community Connections

Basic Facts

Once the first six need areas are identified and met, the PwDD will be much more able to grow and mature into all that they can be. This absolutely includes their potential to be empathic and learn to be committed to contribute to other's lives and well-being. In each community there are meaningful volunteer and employment opportunities to foster this goal of self-reliance, relative independence and commitment to community building, social justice and other community concerns.

PwDD often suffer from either boredom or under-utilization of their gifts in meaningful achievements. Both of these conditions can be reduced if we provide these individuals with a way to make a meaningful contribution to their world by using the gifts they already have.

One of the first activities critical to meeting this need is to facilitate the PwDD community connections. The following is a summary of some key strategies from Peter Block and Dr. John McKnight's (2010) excellent book on community connections, *The Abundant Community*.

The following steps will help supporters promote meaningful connections for the person supported:

1. Determine the PwDD gifts and interests by what they tell and show, by the activities they try.
2. Ensure that all disability/mobility challenges are fully addressed.
3. Conduct a complete inventory of interests and skills of all staff and family members. Compile a similar inventory of all the PwDD interests and skills. Match supporters and PwDD by interests and skills.
4. Determine socializing and role preferences. Is the individual an introvert or an extrovert? What activities cause the individual social anxiety? This is a most critical step as it will be emotionally harmful to facilitate an individual who has predominately introvert preferences to engage in extravert activities, e.g. larger group experiences versus one on one.
5. Explore community resources.
 - inventory all activities in the community such as recreation centres, libraries
 - visit activity locations: stocked fishing ponds, sports arenas, parks, recreation centres, swimming pools etc.;
 - visit stores or suppliers of equipment and talk to staff about customers who might be interested in helping. Leave a picture and resume of the individual receiving support;
 - make follow-up visits to receive the names of interested community members.
6. Talk to individuals or small groups in the community. Ask them the following questions:

- What gifts were you born with? What interests do you have? Would you be willing to share them with others?
 - What skills have you developed? Would you be willing to share them?
 - What are you passionate about? Would you be willing to teach that to someone else?
 - What would you like to learn?
 - What organizations do you belong to?
 - Who else do you know whom you think I should talk to?
7. Select places where the PwDD can share his or her gifts—jobs are good, but gift sharing is preferable. Offer choices to the person supported.
 8. Facilitate and maintain connections. Assess and continue, stop and start.

Adaptive/Positive Reinforcement for a Meaningful Day

Use the following chart to assess the likelihood that various activities have a positive effect on the individual’s day, alleviating stress and creating greater calm. Make notes that reflect the individual’s responses. Be proactive in assisting the PwDD to pursue the adaptive activities that they identify for themselves.

Activities	Really Enjoys/ Stress Reducers	Somewhat Enjoys	Does Not Enjoy/ Stress Inducers
Entertainment/ Recreational/ Toys/Hobbies			
Food Preferences			

Activities	Really Enjoys/ Stress Reducers	Somewhat Enjoys	Does Not Enjoy/ Stress Inducers
Social/Friends/ Family e.g. introvert vs extrovert preferences			
Academic/Work			
Communications			
Miscellaneous			

2. Providing Help In Managing Social Situations

The statements below are what the individual whom you support would like to say to you so you could better understand their need for independence, self-reliance and purpose.

- **Behavioural & Mindful, Emotional & Self Regulation Skills' Development e.g. ABA, IBI Learning**

"If I don't have a chance to use my energy constructively, my nervous and sensory systems can get bored and agitated".

I NEED YOU TO:

- treat me as an intelligent adult
- stop giving me 'silly' rules
- keep my BSP current and relevant as I am developing and maturing
- protect me from supporters who offer me less than optimal behavioural interventions, e.g. power struggles
- through behavioural best practices teach me caring for and about others
- help me to revise my outdated ideas of who I think I am e.g. I don't have to please or gain your approval, rather we need a relationship built on respect for each other
- consistently implement my behaviour support plan without increasing my anxiety

- **Contribute to Others' Wellbeing Through Socially Valued, Meaningful & Inclusive Roles**

"I feel useless and anxious if my days lack what I perceive to be purpose and meaning".

I NEED:

- to have meaningful days where I can feel useful, appreciated, stimulated and have opportunities to be included in social interactions that (like you) recognizes my unique needs and gifts.
- you to know what my unique social interaction needs are e.g. Am I an introvert or an extrovert.
- you to help me to find ways to contribute to others' wellbeing.

- **Helping Managing Social Situations**

- **accommodate (as required) brain and body physical disabilities**

“Unlike you, I have a higher than average sensitivity to emotional stressors, e.g. like social situations, or when I don’t understand or can’t process communications fast enough or I don’t know what to say or I don’t know what to do, I can become confused which often results in increased anxiety”.

I NEED:

- to communicate with you therefore ‘go slow’ with the ways that I know
- social engagements within my Window of Tolerance
- step by step instructions and requests
- consistency
- help with transitions to be prepared for changes
- predictability
- some private time alone
- encouragement
- my social needs met/not mainly yours
- mindfulness exercise practice to help me learn to calm myself

- **Safe & Nurturing Home & Activities’ Settings**

I NEED:

“a safe and nurturing environment where I can learn that I am safe, loveable, capable and ‘connected’ to others and even to something bigger than myself or others”.

e.g.

- absolutely no power struggles
- no activation of trauma triggers
- appropriate and timely rituals of celebration, grieving, forgiveness and gratitude
- storytelling e.g. acts of courage, friendship, connections

Accommodations – Further Facilitating Opportunities

Many symptoms of ASD/DD will be significantly reduced and eliminated as a result of Conscious Care and Support interventions. Some will continue.

The following are examples of how supporters can **if required**; best further facilitate opportunities for individuals to be all that they can be.

1. Brain Growth and Development:

- Reducing inflammation/irritation (e.g. NAC);
- Follow recommended nutrition and supplements plan;

- Strongly encourage participation in and structure a wide variety of physical, mindful/'noticing' and mental exercises into daily routines (e.g. BB-ABC).
2. **Dietary Needs:**
 - Encourage the reduction/elimination of poor food choices;
 - As required, facilitate adherence to meal schedules and food amounts eaten;
 - Advocate for and closely adhere to recommended diets and supplements;
 - Keep blood sugar levels stable.
 3. **Communications:**
 - Teach an effective form of communicating;
 - Validate opinions and ideas – avoid vetting or correcting except as useful, timely and necessary;
 - Communicate slowly as indicated by their thought processing needs;
 - Only as necessary, offer prompts, complete sentences, thoughts etc.;
 - Honour and respect repetition, incorrect memory and confabulations.
 4. **Social:**
 - Honour and respect social preferences e.g. introvert/extrovert;
 - Proactively offer Awareness Based Calming supports in anticipation of social stressors e.g. transitions, waiting times, change in plans;
 - Prevent environmental stressors e.g. keep person well informed;
 - As indicated, offer limited choices and use effective open and closed questions.
 5. **Sensory Processing:**
 - Know the individual's hypo and hyper sensory needs and offer integration and processing exercises;
 - Prevent the individual from experiencing environmental overwhelm, based on known sensory needs.
 6. **Meaning and Purpose:**
 - Authentically celebrate achievements, roles and activities based on probable brain development level versus individual's chronological age;
 - Facilitate participation in work and volunteer roles that are meaningful to the individual and socially valued.
 7. **Emotional:**
 - Structure (hour by hour) calming self-regulation exercises e.g. mindful movement.
 8. **The Supporters' Conscious Connecting and Facilitating Process:**
 - Only do for the individual what they cannot or will not do for themselves at the time.