

Removing Barriers for Youth with Physical Disabilities Increases Participation

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Summary

It is known that participating in leisure activities is beneficial to youth's health. However, participation is limited among youth with disabilities. Factors affecting participation, such as environmental barriers and activity demands, have been heavily researched. However, little focus has been placed on promoting participation by altering the various aspects that affect involvement.

About the study

This study aimed to gain more insight into the effectiveness of altering the environment in which youth with physical disabilities participate in leisurely activities in Quebec. Six adolescents, attending special education high school or class, were enrolled in a 12-week intervention study. One of four occupational therapists was assigned to each participant. Therapists worked with the adolescent and parents to explore potential modification to environmental barriers and activities to implement solutions to these barriers. Intervention on participation was studied across three participation goals per participant. Goal performance was measured throughout the study using Canadian Occupation Performance Measure, an individualized, client-centered outcome measure.

Performance scores significantly improved in all goals set by the adolescents and there was an improvement in participation patterns. A small improvement in participation frequency and certain aspects of quality of life was also found. Interestingly, the number of environmental barriers, such as lack of transportation, physical inaccessibility of facilities or unsuitable activity equipment, remained similar before and after intervention. A potential explanation for this is that new barriers may arise replacing older ones to which a solution was found. This study supports upcoming approaches where environmental factors are modified instead of altering the abilities of the child for inclusion purposes.

What families should know

The findings of this research allow parents to gain knowledge in developing strategies to overcome barriers surrounding participation. Parents were very satisfied with the effectiveness of the intervention and were also taught that intervention at the level of the environment, instead of attempting to alter the abilities of the child, can promote participation of youth with physical disabilities. For example, the barrier of the youth needing an assistant to accompany them in activities was solved by the therapist or teacher connecting participant's parents with contact information of available peers. Furthermore, parents working with therapists to find solution-based strategies in order

to overcome barriers instead of trying to alter the child's abilities is effective for meeting the goals of the child.

What practitioners should know

This research can shift clinician's attention to alternate methods of delivering therapy such as incorporating a leisurely community-based ecological intervention into rehabilitation. Additionally, this study can be used for effective strategies to remove environmental barriers in order to increase participation in youth with disabilities, guide practice and empower families.

About the researchers

Dana Anaby (PhD) is an Associate Professor in the School of Physical and Occupational Therapy at McGill University and a Research Associate at CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research. Mary Law (PhD) is an Associate Dean and Professor at the School of Rehabilitation Sciences at McGill University and a Co-Director at CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research. Annette Majnemer (PhD) is a Professor, Director and Associate Dean at the School of Physical and Occupational Therapy at McGill University. Debbie Feldman (PhD) is a Research Professor at the Université de Montréal. This summary is based on their study "Opening doors to participation of youth with physical disabilities: an intervention study." It is published in *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 83(2), 83-90.

Reference

Anaby, D., Law, M., Majnemer A., Feldman, D. (2016). Opening doors to participation of youth with physical disabilities: an intervention study. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 83(2), 83-90.