

Meeting the Challenges, Part I: The Myths and Realities about Parents with Intellectual Disabilities

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Which parents are we talking about?

- ☑ Cannot travel alone
- ☑ Reading & writing problems
- ☑ Erratic appointment keeping
 - ☑ “Poor historian”
 - ☑ \$ problems
 - ☑ Overwhelmed
- ☑ Difficulty with child management
 - ☑ Covering-up
 - ☑ “Benefactor”
 - ☑ History




PRINCIPLES OF EMPOWERMENT

-- Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988

1. Assume that parents are competent . . .
or are capable of becoming competent.
2. Create opportunities for parents to
become competent.
3. Meet needs in ways that promote
parents' sense of control.

These principles work for parents with intellectual disabilities/challenges, too!



1. Assume that parents are competent . . . or are capable of becoming competent.


What are the myths?

What are the realities?



Some Myths About Parents with “Mental Retardation” . . .

1. Their children will not be normal.
2. They will have lots of children.
3. They cannot learn.
4. They cannot give their children adequate care.



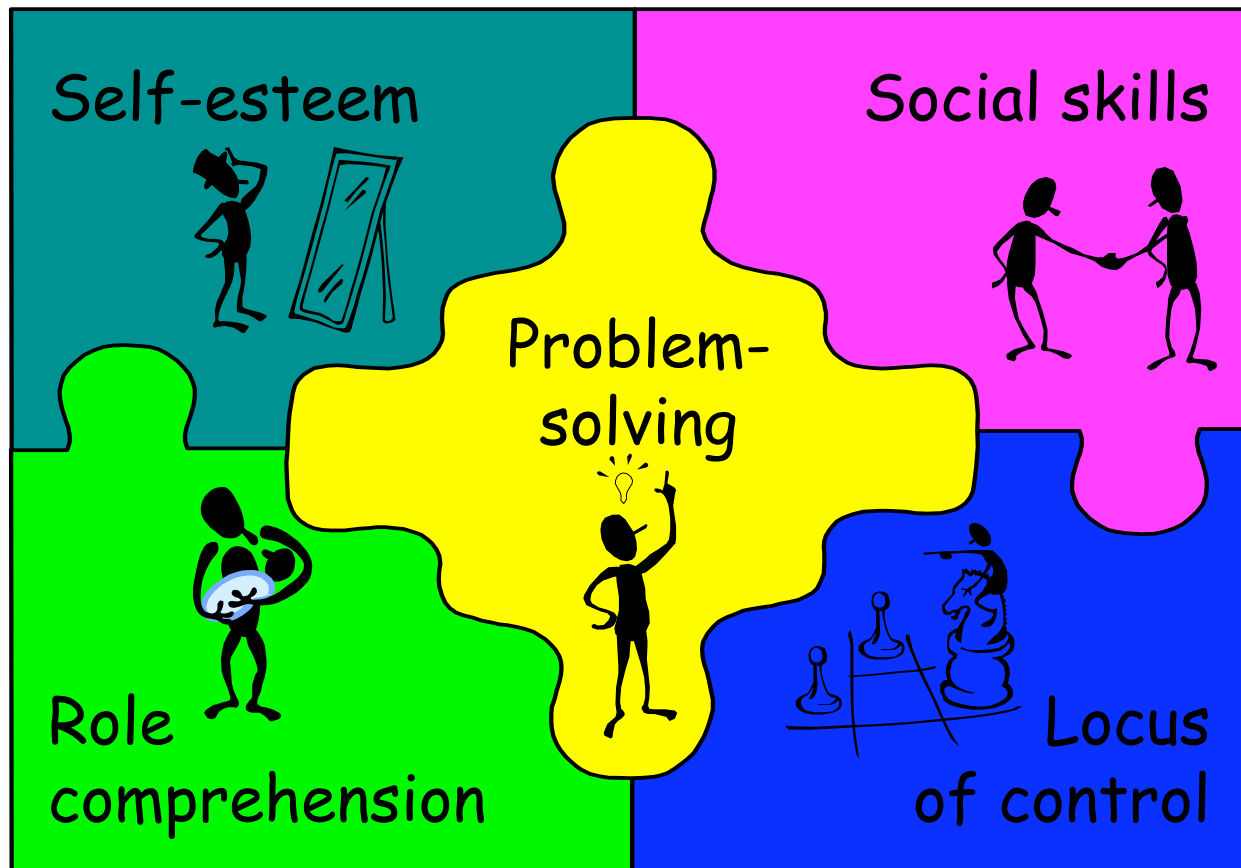
Which parents are most likely to succeed?

- **NOT IQ**
- **Spouse/significant other**
- **Extended family**
- **\$\$**
- **Number of children**
- **Mental health / substance abuse**
- **Comprehensive services**
- **Willingness to take advantage of those services**
- **Attitude of service providers**

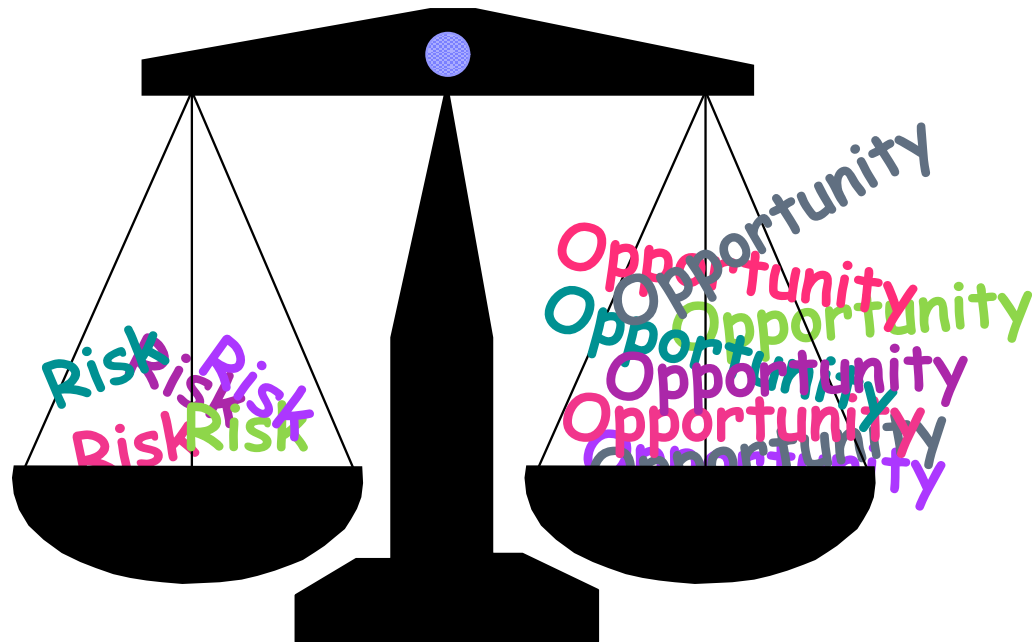
2. Create opportunities for parents to become competent.

- **Self-esteem**: Positive or negative attitude about oneself, which can fluctuate across situations and settings
- **Social skills**: Quality and quantity of interactions with others
- **Locus of control**: Perception of events that influence one's life as either the consequences of one's own actions (internal) or the result of outside forces (external)
- **Role comprehension**: Understanding and fulfillment of the role of caregiver
- **Problem-solving**: Ability to seek solutions to address an issue effectively

Putting Together the Puzzle



Shifting the Balance



Balancing Risks & Opportunities

RISKS

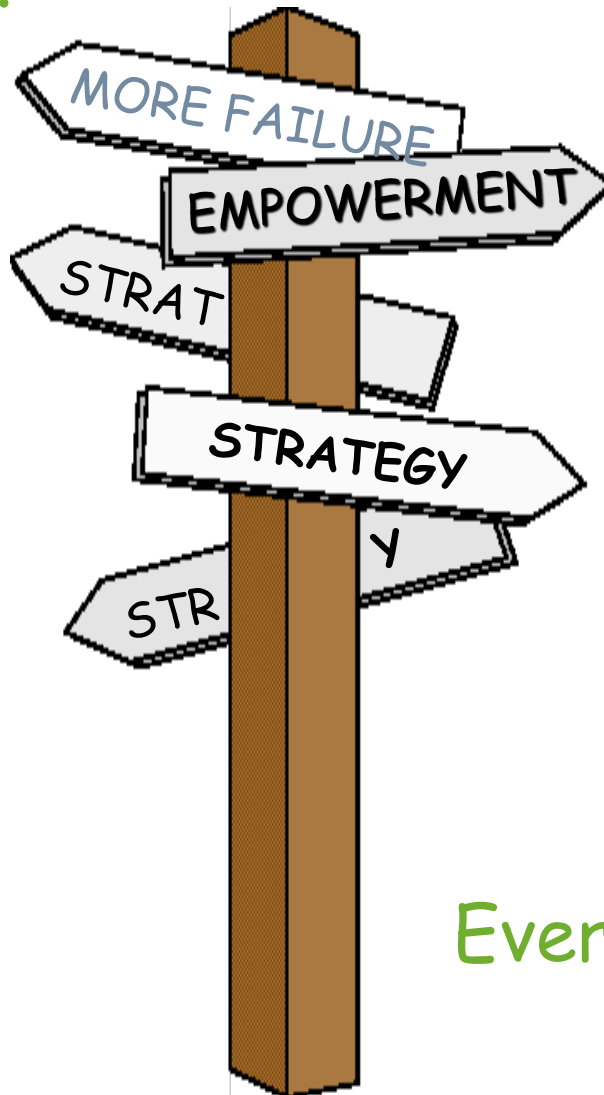
OPPORTUNITIES

Mother's age
Parent education
Income
SES
Job stability
Pregnancy
Number of children
Residential stability
Marital status
Marital stability
Child temperament
Infant separation
Parental mental health
Parental health
Parental self-esteem
Parental locus of control
Parental social skills
Coping strategies
Parenting style
P-C interactions
Nutrition
Accidents/toxic substances/illnesses
Alternate caregivers
Extended family
Extrafamily support
Life events




-- Dunst, 1993

Every interaction is an
intervention . . .



Every interaction is
an opportunity.



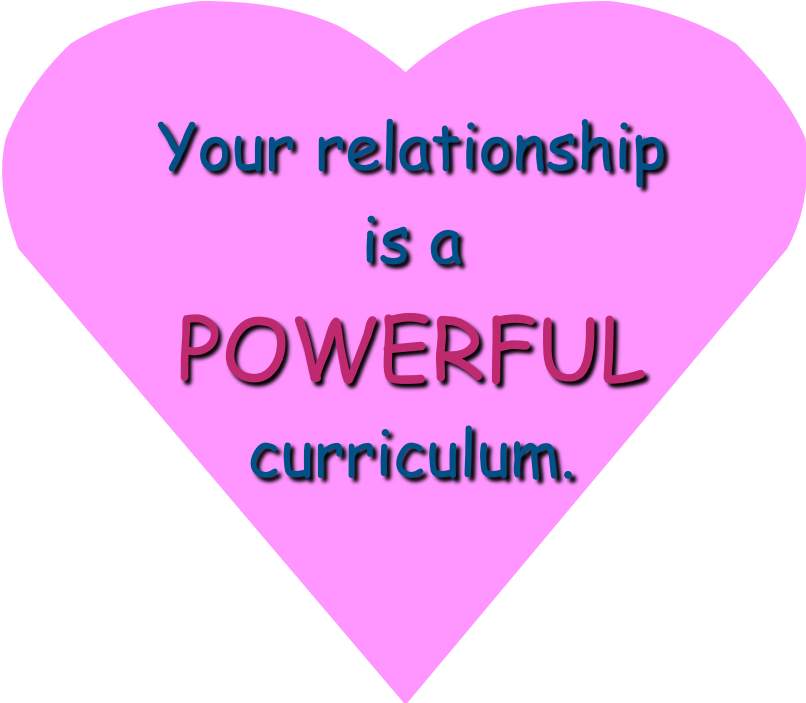
Every interaction is an intervention . . .
Every interaction is an opportunity.

Strategy A

Strategy B

Strategy C


3. Meet needs in ways that promote parents' sense of control.



Your relationship
is a
POWERFUL
curriculum.

Your Relationship IS a Curriculum

-- Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988

- Think ahead. Show you care.
 - Go ahead and offer.
 - Make sure your offer fits the need.
 - Allow the family to decide.
- Keep the "costs" (financial and psychological) low.
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- Help shouldn't make the family feel or look "different."
- The benefits should outweigh the costs.
 - Allow families to give something back.
 - Nothing works like immediate success.
 - Build on what's already there.
 - Share the responsibility.
 - "How to fish" is more important.
 - Families should see themselves as "change agents."



Shifting the Balance

1. Choose a family with an intellectual disability with whom you're working.
2. What are their risks? What are their opportunities?
3. Which risks could be turned into opportunities?
4. What could you change about your relationship with this family to make it a more powerful curriculum?
5. The next time you see this family, what specific change will you make in your work with them?
How will you know if the change is working?

