

Keep It Simple!

Focus on Solutions, Not Problems

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

My beloved sister, Sandi, forwarded an Email that was making the rounds entitled, “Focus on Problems or Solutions?” It included several examples of highly complicated, expensive solutions, as compared to simpler quick-fixes. My favorite example involved NASA trying to solve the problem of astronauts writing in space. Regular pens wouldn’t work at zero gravity, so after a decade of work and a \$12 million dollar investment, they developed a pen that worked in outer space, upside-down, underwater, on practically any surface, and within a wide temperature range.

The Russians, however, simply gave their cosmonauts a pencil. *Badda-bing, badda-boom*. I don’t know if this story is 100 percent accurate or if it’s an urban legend. Regardless, it makes a good point about keeping things simple. Can we apply this lesson to issues in the Disability Arena?

Speaking of pencils, why spend enormous amounts of time and resources trying to teach a child to write with a pencil, instead of simply providing him access to a computer? What are we not teaching the child (reading, writing, math, etc.) when so much time is spent on handwriting? Ditto, teaching a child math

in the traditional way, instead of providing her with a calculator? (How often do people without disabilities do math without a calculator?) Can you think of other examples?

Why spend years trying to teach an adult “bed-making” skills (and other “daily living skills”) instead of focusing on skills that would enable the person to get a real job? (How critical are these skills in the lives of people without disabilities?)

Why spend billions in tax dollars funding “special” (segregated) programs for people with disabilities and creating a duplication of services, instead of using the natural supports and generic services that already exist: general education classrooms instead of special education classrooms; ordinary preschool/daycare instead of special preschools; ordinary employment services instead of vocational-rehabilitation; friends and neighbors instead of paid assistants . . . and the list goes on.

We certainly need changes in rules and regulations, but there’s much we can do, right this minute, to keep things simple and to focus on solutions, not problems. In the process, we’ll contribute to significant positive change in the lives of children and adults with disabilities!