

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY... THE NANNY STATE

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

Personal responsibility is something most of us take pretty seriously—in our individual lives, within our families, on the job, and in other areas of life. As parents, we take responsibility for our children and, in turn, attempt to instill a sense of responsibility in them, expecting them to assume more and more responsibility as they grow. But for people with disabilities, personal responsibility is skewed, aberrant, or nonexistent. Instead, the Nanny State—allowing professionals, experts, and others to take charge—seems to be the norm!

Why have we allowed people with disabilities to become exempt from personal responsibility and the many wonderful opportunities that are part and parcel of autonomy and self-direction? Why have parents invited a “third parent” into their families?

Like a giant with open arms, the Nanny State catches and holds children and adults with disabilities, making them helpless and dependent on others. Some parents and people with disabilities are unaware they’re entering the Nanny’s firm grip. Others go willingly, erroneously believing it’s the only choice.

In the Nanny State, children and adults with disabilities are not *expected* to be responsible. And we should not be surprised that—like others—they may live up (or down) to our expectations. Many *are taught* to be helpless, irresponsible, and dependent. Simultaneously, the service system’s help carries the unspoken message that people with disabilities and their families are incompetent. While the expertise and/or assistance from providers, therapists, and others may be necessary and helpful at times, if their efforts also promote helplessness and dependence, they’re doing more harm than good.

Parents of babies with disabilities may “share parenting” with therapists, early interventionists, and others. Their homes may devolve from private sanctuaries to “in-home therapy clinics.” Professionals

are in-and-out regularly, and the entire family’s schedule is dictated by services for the child with a disability. Many parents have been led to believe they don’t have the “expertise” to effectively parent their child with a disability—experts to the rescue! Moms and dads may not feel they’re helpless and dependent on service providers, but for many, the thought of reducing and/or eliminating early intervention and/or therapeutic services, in order to restore a normal family life, is too frightening to even consider.

The alternative is for parents to reclaim their responsibility and common sense! (Do we really *like* being treated like children in the Nanny State?) Parents know their children best, and if they feel they

Good government is no substitute for self-government.

Mahatma Gandhi

need a little help on how to best meet their child’s needs, they can use professionals as consultants—who can provide information to parents and others—instead of as

“direct care” providers. Therapists, for example, can help parents learn how to incorporate enjoyable and beneficial activities throughout a child’s day, instead of “doing therapy” on the child. In turn, parents can restore their family’s life to normalcy by limiting or eliminating home visits of professionals. Marcy, the parent of a very young child with a disability, said, “Sometimes professionals make my son cry or disrupt the peace of our home, and if my baby can’t feel safe and secure in his own home, where *will* he feel safe? So I meet professionals at the park, McDonald’s play area, or other neutral location.”

Parents of preschoolers with disabilities routinely accept a segregated special ed preschool “placement” for their children. They’re led to believe this is the only “appropriate” place for the child: keeping your preschooler home with you and/or enrolling him in a neighborhood preschool just won’t do! Some parents are unhappy with the segregated nature of most special ed preschools, but when asked why they don’t consider an ordinary (and inclusive) childcare setting,

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some respond, “Because I’d have to pay for it!” *What?* Didn’t they pay for childcare for their other children? Is the child with a disability not worth it? Ohhh—dependence on the Nanny State and abrogation of personal responsibility are now entrenched.

In schools across the country, students with disabilities of all ages are placed in segregated classes where tying your shoes, cooking, washing your hair, or other so-called life-skills are taught. For students *without* disabilities, teaching life-skills is the parents’ responsibility! Public schools should be responsible for teaching *all* students the skills they need to move on to post-secondary education and/or to the job market. When educators segregate and under-educate students, they’re preparing them only for a life of helplessness and dependence. And in this regard, educators have abrogated *their* responsibility. As parents or teachers, how dare we allow children to waste years and years being under-educated, prepared only for a dismal future? If public schools aren’t doing the job, parents need to band together (there’s safety in numbers) to influence positive change, or find a private school, embrace homeschooling, and/or do whatever it takes to ensure our precious children receive the education they need to live the lives of their dreams!

Tom, a 20-year-old *man* with a disability, is still attending his local high school (per Federal law which provides for special ed services for students with disabilities to the age of 22). His parents justify this action (they admit it’s *their* decision, not their son’s) because the school will “place” Tom in a job. But when questioned, they admit that Tom will not be paid for his work. This is not a job—it’s slave labor or volunteer work! When asked why Tom should still be at the high school at age 20, they say, “Because there are no other programs for him until he’s 22 and can go into adult services.” And they’re right! There *are* no other “programs,” but there are plenty of *options*: Tom’s parents and/or others can help

Should you fail to pilot your own ship don't be surprised at what inappropriate port you find yourself docked.

Tom Robbins

Tom learn how to find a real job on his own and/or Tom could begin vocational training or other post-secondary education. Tom’s parents have ceded their personal responsibility to educators, and have also prevented Tom from taking personal responsibility for himself. And as many have realized, parents who are dependent on the Nanny State raise children who remain dependent as adults.

In the world of adult services, some providers are content to let people with disabilities remain dependent and irresponsible, while others are attempting to ensure the people they serve become more responsible via working in real jobs, living independently, and more. Sadly, some providers meet with great resistance when an adult with a disability states, “My parents said I would never have to work.”

To solve this dilemma, providers of services (including special education) can first acknowledge that their “helpfulness” has the potential to contribute to the abrogation of personal responsibility in the lives of people they serve. They can then take steps to minimize and even reverse this terrible outcome.

Parents and people with disabilities can choose to use disability services as a last resort, instead of the first choice, in order to maintain their personal responsibility and autonomy. Parents can believe in themselves and their abilities; seek assistance from more natural resources in their communities; use professional help sparingly, if at all; and teach their children to become responsible for themselves.

Our dependence on the Nanny State reflects more than dependence on others for services and decision-making. Ultimately, we’ve also made others responsible for our success or failure, happiness or misery, and even life or death! Are we willing to trade our personal responsibility, freedom, autonomy, self-respect, and self-determination for the open (and controlling) arms of the seemingly benevolent Nanny State?