

Rights-based approaches in childhood disabilities

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Background: The UN Conventions on the Rights of Children and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities support key rights of children with disabilities. Rights-based approaches can support developmental outcomes, and can help research and services create indicators and advocacy for children with disabilities.

Objectives: To identify rights-based approaches in childhood disability to inform policy and practice.

Methods: Realist review including a scoping review of multidisciplinary research literature, followed by multiple stakeholders consultations to validate and contextualize the information. Stakeholder consultation (grassroots organizations, parents and children and youth with disabilities) through online survey and face-to-face interviews with parents, and photo elicitation with children. Themes identified included: 1) Inclusion (social inclusion and inclusive education), 2) Participation (participation in public life and participation in leisure, and 3) Family support. Grassroots organizations, families, and youth validated the relevance, identified gaps and suggested implementation directions in the themes identified. Stakeholders confirmed the importance of the themes proposed, and emphasized the need for more opportunities for participation and “full citizenship”, to create opportunities for youth to learn advocacy skills, and to create communities that are inclusive. Moreover, rights-based approaches should consider the variety of disability groups, and evolving needs across the lifespan.

Conclusion: The use of evidence-based approaches and rights-respecting solutions, informed by the lived experiences of stakeholders can contribute to better health care practices and to inform policy development. Occupational therapists should be aware of rights-based approaches to impact policies, programs and services promoting the health and rights of children with disabilities and their families.