

Social Capital: Why Friendships and Relationships Matter

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Friendship is a concept that is both simple, yet complex. Simple in that we all have friends and know that friendship is a notion we talk about in a basic way. On the other hand, friendship is also complex. We all have had experiences where we lost friends or have struggled with friendship issues.

Recent studies and exploration of friendships (sociologists refer to friendships as “social capital”) have begun to codify the power and potency of relationships. We now have evidence that social capital is associated with very important life outcomes. Studies over the past 40 years have discovered that relationships are antecedent to better healthfulness, more happiness, and even greater life expectancy. Quite simply, the more social capital you have, the better your life is in both a tangible and intangible sense.

This notion of social capital is even more delicate for children. The development of self-identity and self-confidence is wrapped up in the impact of our friends (or lack thereof). We know that people with disabilities, those born with a disability, or those who have acquired a disability, have less friendships; and that this reality may be attributable to the poor life outcomes experienced by people with disabilities (unemployment, depression, poorer health outcomes, and even lower life expectancy). Perhaps the better aspects of habilitation/rehabilitative services are to focus on social capital!

This session will explore key aspects related to social capital. We will examine it from a generic perspective and look at the possible strategies, actions, or aspects that may be utilized in support of any vulnerable population who have limited opportunities to build friendships.