

Hope for Autism

The Concept of Symptom Free

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I first developed the concept of becoming symptom-free of disability when I was working on my Career Development Award from The National Institutes of Health. As a brain scientist working for the most rigorous medical research facility in the world, I discovered that many disorders thought to be due to permanent brain malfunction could actually be improved to a symptom-free status.

Brain Based Communication Disorders

During this time, many years before my own autistic son, Whitney, was born, I was studying 4 populations:

1. **Preschool Children With Language Disorders**

My staff and I evaluated 600 Head Start children per year for 12 years and provided a multiple therapy approach to help children become ready for school. Our average Headstart child was 2 years behind and was within normal range after 20 sessions.

2. **School Age Speech-Language impaired Children**

We evaluated thousands of children as an outreach program to private schools and offered hospital based outpatient treatment for children who were having trouble at school due to language processing disorders.

3. **Stutterers**

I treated thousands of stutterers world-wide and wrote Stutter-Free Speech (Charles Merrill Publishers), which lead to awards from The White House and an Oprah interview.

4. **Brain Damaged Hospital Patients**

I provided rehabilitation team services to in-patients and out-patients with brain injuries and strokes. My work was honored by many federal agencies, and featured on the cover of USA today. My articles are recommended by The American Speech & Hearing Association as examples of Best Practices.

Changing the Brain

All of these populations have symptoms in attention, memory, listening, reading, writing or speaking. At the time of our research in stuttering for example, this disorder was thought to be a chronic life long disability. Therapy was organized around support groups to manage living with the problem or therapy to desensitize you so you did not feel as bad when you stuttered. I headed a research team working on helping stutterers become symptom free which resulted in changing how therapists view stuttering world wide. As a result, I began to see other populations of the communication-impaired differently and started setting goals for symptom free with all of my patient groups. From this research we learned how to make step by step plans to change the brain to reduce or eliminate symptoms.

Turning Disability to Ability

We found that the fastest way to reach a symptom free goal is to evaluate and train positive behaviors. With stutterers for example, instead of working on getting the stuttering to stop, we worked on teaching the behaviors that would compete with stuttering and replace the behavior. Now we do that with the symptoms of autism. We teach the attention, memory and communication skills that compete with autism to replace the symptoms. As a result, we are able to turn severe disability into life long ability.

Dr. Cheri Florance is a brain scientist with training and clinical experience in how to teach the brain to replace symptoms of communication and language disorders. In her books, *Maverick Mind*, (www.penguinputnam.com) and *A Boy Beyond Reach* (www.simonschuster.com), she describes how she taught her own autistic son, Whitney to replace disability with ability and become symptom-free. To learn more about her own personal journey and successful methods visit her complimentary Learning Library at www.ebrainlabs.com.