

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Wehmeyer, M., (1998). Self-determination and individuals with significant disabilities: Examining meanings and misinterpretations. *Journal of the Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 23, 5-16.

BOTTOM LINE

A self-determined person can be defined as one who charts his or her own fate without compulsion. Many people have misunderstood that self-determination is relevant for individuals with significant disabilities. This article explains that self-determination is a basic right that everyone, including people with significant disabilities, should be able to experience. This increased self-determination can lead to an improved quality of life.

TIPS

- Self-determination should not be limited to independent actions. Instead, the focus should be on providing adequate supports for individuals with disabilities so that they may participate fully in the decision-making and problem-solving process.
- Self-determination is a factor that is developed by making decisions, evaluating the effects of choices, and adjusting the strategy or behavior. As with any skill, practice will enhance the development of self-determination.

KEY FINDINGS

- Individuals with significant disabilities can successfully self-regulate and self-manage their own behavior and be self-determined with the proper education.
- Goals of self-determination for the significantly disabled focus on increasing causal agency, maximizing participation within their communities and own lives, and ensuring the presence of proper social supports.

METHOD

- A review of self-determination as a concept, including misconceptions about what the term means for those with significant disabilities, is included in the full text of this article.
- An analysis of the review identifies clear misinterpretations of self-determination and how this has affected the self-determination of the significantly disabled.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Gilberts, G.H., Agran, M., Hughes, C., & Wehmeyer, M. (2001). The effects of peer-delivered self-monitoring strategies on the participation of students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 26, 25-36.

Sands, D.L., & Wehmeyer, M.L. (1996). *Self-determination across the lifespan: Independence and choice for people with disabilities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities: Basic skills for successful transition*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

This research was conducted in collaboration with the Beach Center on Disability. It was funded by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Families of Children with Disabilities of the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research (H133B980050) and private endowments. For more information, contact the Beach Center on Disability at 1200 Sunnyside Avenue, 3111 Haworth Hall, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-7534. Phone: 785-864-7600. Email: Beachcenter@ku.edu. Website: www.beachcenter.org.

