

Early support of development of children with disabilities in their family environment

Summary

The subject of the work is a new concept of early support of development of children with disabilities or children threatened with disability. Until now there has been paid too much attention to direct interactions of specialists with disabled children in the process of early support, instead of focusing on interactions with the parents and other members of the family. Only in the last twenty years the traditional paradigm of early support, which was professional-centered, has been replaced by the new one which is family-centered. The essential difference is visible in the attitude towards working with disabled children. Direct interactions between professionals and disabled children were displaced by cooperation with families, as well as building partner relations with their members, especially with the parents. The most important task of professionals now is to support families in such a way that their functioning would be better, and they could provide optimal developmental conditions for their disabled children.

The book consists of five chapters. In the first chapter the author analyzed an influence of family on the development of a small child in the light of the social-interactive concept as well as the family system concept. The social-interactive concept was the base and the background of further more detailed analyses of educational strategies of persons supporting the development of disabled children in their home environment. As far as the family system concept is concerned, it enabled the author to show complexity of internal family relations, and to describe relations between all family members, between parents, disabled children and their parents, siblings, and grandparents.

The second chapter concerns theoretical background of early support of children with disabilities. The most important concepts of the development support were introduced which were written by Polish authors: Barbara Kaja, Anna Brzezińska, Irena Obuchowska, Edyta Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, and others. Next the author analyzed terms included in a semantic field of an expression "early support of the child's development", such as early intervention, early rehabilitation, psychotherapy, psychostimulation, psychocorrection, upbringing, family counselling, family assistance. On the basis of conducted analyses it was assumed that early support of the development is a process of planned and systematic activities aimed at shaping such patterns of interaction between carers and a child, which have the best influence on improving physical, mental, and social functioning. Activities are undertaken by a team of specialists in close cooperation with a family, and concern children at risk of disabilities as well as children being disabled either from the moment of discovering a risk, or identifying a disability, till the time of starting education at school. The last part of the chapter describes the legal regulations concerning early support of children development.

The third chapter is about the role of a family in the process of early support of disabled children. It includes arguments convincing that there is a necessity of engaging families in the process of supporting their children development as well as a description of the paradigm of an early support of child's development focused on a family. Next the five most representative concepts were presented: a model of support of family patterns of interaction according to Michael Guralnick, a model of support-based home visiting by Robin McWilliam, a model of responsive teaching by Gerald Mahoney, a contextually mediated practices model by Carl Dunst, and finally a model of enhanced milieu teaching by Terry Hanckock and Ann Kaiser. Common features of the described models are: (a) placing supporting actions in natural family life situations, (b) keeping partner relations with the family based on mutual respect and trust, (c) adjusting actions to needs and preferences of family members, (d) using the family resources and competences of individual family members, and (e) supporting the family in independent decisions about their own matters.

In the fourth chapter the author presented his own model of early support of child's development focused on interactions between parents and their children. Six features which should determine interactions influencing development were distinguished: emotional bonds with a child, sensitive responses for child's behavior, sharing the topic of interaction, adjusting actions to needs and abilities of a child, reciprocity, and guiding child's behavior. It was assumed that the mentioned features are not credited to interactions *per se*. They appear when parents and carers behave in a certain way, which means that they use special strategies in contacts with children. In the last part of the chapter results of some research, which can confirm effectiveness of the proposed model were presented.

In the last fifth chapter the author described cooperation of specialists with parents in the process of early support of children with disabilities. It was assumed that the aim of the cooperation would be empowerment of the parents. It appeared that the most effective form of this cooperation are home visits. There were also described different models of cooperation between specialists, as well as methods of preparing parents to supporting development of their children, including a method of coaching. Furthermore the author introduced some study, as well as conclusions following it about preparing specialists to cooperate with parents.

In the final part of the work were presented some changes in the theory and practice of early support of child's development. First, the author introduced these changes which have been occurring for a longer time and they are commonly accepted, so they should be taken into consideration while constructing programs of early support of child's development. Next changes were introduced taking place nowadays, which determine directions of further development of theory as well as practice in the field of early support of development of children with disabilities.