

In partnership with people with disabilities and their families, CCDH advocates, coordinates and provides support and services.



# Early Learning and Inclusion

## Why Inclusion?



This handout discusses:

Why Inclusion?

Benefits of Inclusion

Making Accommodations

Inclusion is the right of all individuals to participate actively in all aspects of community life (i.e. school, child care, recreational activities, et cetera). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), “The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential,” (DEC & NAEYC 2009).

“Inclusion is NOT about placing a child with a disability in a classroom or a school. That is only a tiny piece of the puzzle. Rather, inclusion is about how we deal with diversity, how we deal with difference...How else can we explain the emotions unleashed by the presence of a tiny child in a wheelchair or the presence of a teenager with down syndrome in a local school...Inclusion does not mean we are all the same. Inclusion does not mean we all agree. Rather, inclusion celebrates our diversity and differences with respect and gratitude. The greater our diversity, the richer our capacity to create new visions... If we exclude children, we are programming them for the fight of their lives - to get in and to belong.” (Forest & Pearpoint, n.d.).

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian born psychologist in the 1920s, has contributed a wealth of ideas to early childhood education. At the core of Vygotsky's theory, called the Cultural-Historical Theory, is the idea that child development is the result of the interactions between children and their social environment. He provides the theoretical basis for inclusion. Vygotsky believed that people learn via social interactions with others who are more “capable” in a given ability or field of knowledge.

Therefore, the greatest challenges for children with special needs are not created by their disability, but by their isolation from typically developing peers. Children with special needs should be in groups with same-age peers whenever possible in order to increase and enrich their overall development.

Vygotsky believed that cognitive and language development is also socially based, with children first learning new ideas on the social level with more-capable peers and adults, and then internalizing those ideas. Therefore, the most important aspect of an early childhood program for children with special needs is improving social skills and interaction with adults and more-capable peers, (Berk & Winsler 1995).

## Disability Laws

• **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** assures full civil rights to individuals with disabilities, including access to and accommodations in early childhood settings. Under the ADA, early learning centers cannot discriminate against parents or children with special needs, nor can they charge more than they would for any other child. Early learning centers must be willing to make “reasonable accommodations” which meet children’s individual needs. This presents exciting opportunities to plan for and include children with disabilities or other special needs in all early childhood settings.

• **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** further strengthens mandates for inclusion of preschoolers, infants and toddlers. It calls for children to be educated alongside their typically developing peers as much as possible from birth thru 21.



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## Benefits of Inclusion

Children learn from each other. When they are exposed to inclusive environments starting at a young age, they learn acceptance of other people and that each person has unique abilities.

### Benefits of inclusion for children with or without disabilities

- make friends
- learn by imitating others
- show more pride in achievements
- build interdependence and ability to deal with obstacles
- notice similarities between themselves and others
- develop better language and communications skills
- develop interpersonal skills
- increase problem-solving ability
- learn to become more assertive
- learn self-respect by being a part of a positive, natural environment
- learn to accept others as they are
- develop patience and compassion
- learn to accept their own strengths and needs
- accept others as individuals, not “labels”
- learn to help others

### Benefits of inclusion for families

- enable families to work because they have increased access to child care services
- understand that all children have negative behaviors such as tantrums or toilet problems
- discover that others can provide a secure and nurturing environment for the child with special needs
- learn to accept children’s strengths and needs.
- share common experiences
- feel a kinship with other families
- the opportunity to see chronologically age appropriate activities

### Benefits of inclusion for early care and school age care education providers

- develop networks of professional service & community resources
- expand their knowledge about special needs
- develop awareness that all people have unique needs
- create a setting that encourages understanding and flexibility
- realize and appreciate differences
- develop compassion, kindness and respect for others
- acquire a larger share of the market by enhancing their own image

## Making Accommodations

The following tips from the California Child Care Health program are intended to help providers care for children with disabilities and other special needs. When considering adaptations it is helpful to consider the severity of the disability, the child’s age and developmental level.

### Children with developmental delays

- Teach in small steps
- Give clear directions, speak slowly and clearly using only a few words
- Move the child physically through the task so he can feel what to do
- Stand or sit close to the child to help as needed
- Help the child organize his world by providing structure, consistency and by labeling things with pictures and words
- When moving from one activity to the next let the child know ahead of time and allow plenty of time for the transition
- Work closely with agencies and personnel who provide specialized services

### Children with speech and language delays

- Be a good listener and observer
- Engage infants and toddlers in shared conversations by reading their sounds, gestures, facial expressions and body language
- Give directions using as few simple words as possible in complete sentences
- Use everyday activities such as singing songs, reading books and dramatic play to encourage language development
- Talk about what you or the child is doing as you are doing it
- Encourage the child to talk about what he is doing by asking specific questions
- Repeat what the child said and add missing words, or ask the child to repeat what you are saying
- Build on what the child said by adding new information
- Praise the child’s efforts at communicating even if he doesn’t do it exactly right.



### Children with visual impairments

- Use communication during activities such as dressing and eating to help the child get oriented
- Think about the physical space of the room. Be wary of sharp edges on tables, curled up edges of rugs and other potential hazards
- Once you've found an arrangement of furniture that works for the room, try not to change it too much as the child may rely on it to navigate through the room
- Give specific directions and use descriptive language
- Avoid glaring lights. Increase or decrease the room lights gradually
- Display simple, clear, uncluttered pictures that are easy to see
- Avoid standing with your back to windows. The glare may make you look like a silhouette
- Encourage hands-on and sensory experiences such as touching, holding, exploring, tasting, smelling and manipulating
- Ask first if the child needs assistance - try not to assume you should help

### Children with physical/neurological impairments

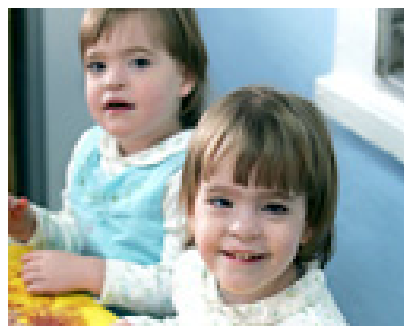
- Consider the physical space: are there any obstacles that prevent the child from moving safely in the area? Are the pathways wide enough to accommodate special equipment such as walkers or wheelchairs?
- Know the child's strengths and needs so that independence is realistically encouraged and supported
- Assist the child with activities he may not be able to do alone such as kicking a ball
- Ask any therapists involved with the child to show you proper positioning techniques and how to use and care for special equipment
- If you are having difficulty positioning or feeding the child, consult his parents for suggestions
- Give all staff opportunities to hold and position the child to ensure everyone is comfortable
- Help other children understand why "Ashley" can't walk. Emphasize what "Ashley" can do
- Try to experience the disability yourself so you can gain a better perspective
- Work closely with other agencies and personnel who provide specialized services like early intervention or therapy
- Whenever possible, ensure the child's positioning is similar to what other children in the class are doing
- If the child is unable to use playground equipment, schedule other outdoor activities he can participate in, such as blowing bubbles or flying kites.

### Children who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Find out from the parents the degree of the child's hearing loss and what that means for the child
- Ask the child's parent how to use and care for the hearing aid or other special equipment
- Support the child socially
- Be sure you have the child's attention before giving instructions
- Speak in full sentences (*at normal speed*) to the child's face - and smile
- Use visual cues such as pictures or gestures as you talk
- Encourage the child to let you know when she doesn't understand by using a special signal
- If the child doesn't understand at first, rephrase your comment rather than repeating it
- If the child uses sign language, learn some simple sign language symbols
- Provide opportunities for the child to talk
- Try not to change activities abruptly. Alert the child to any change in schedule ahead of time
- Seat the child close to you. Give occasional physical and verbal reassurances and encouragement

### Techniques for supporting positive behavior

- Notice and praise positive behavior. Focus on what the child can do and accentuate the positive
- Acknowledge the child's feelings
- Model the kind of behavior you want to see in them
- Help children to talk about, act out and understand their strong feelings and behaviors
- Follow through with realistic consequences
- Give children a variety of reasonable choices
- Be consistent with the way the child's family and culture handles behavioral issues and their social and emotional goals for the child



For more information on how you can make your program more inclusive, go to

[www.ccdh.org](http://www.ccdh.org)

or contact

The ACT Project  
9555 N. Kendall Drive  
Suite 206  
Miami FL 33149  
305-596-1160  
act@ccdh.org



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