



Nurturing...

Relationships, Responsiveness, Readiness

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Inclusive From the Start: Maximizing Belonging for Children with Disabilities and Family Members

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2 PM to 3:30 PM

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Inclusive From the Start: Maximizing Belonging for Children with Disabilities and Family Members

Agenda

By the end of the presentation, participants will be able to

- Identify benefits of inclusion for children with disabilities, children who are typically developing, EHS teachers, family members, and the community
- Utilize strategies that help children with disabilities or other special needs thrive in early care and education settings
- Describe sensitive methods for supporting families of children when identified with disabilities from the prenatal period through age three

- **WELCOME!**

- **SETTING THE STAGE FOR INCLUSION**

- **IT'S ABOUT BELONGING**

- **DEFINITION AND BENEFITS OF INCLUSION**

- **WHEN CONCERNS ARISE: RESPONSIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH VERY YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

- **STRATEGIES TO MAXIMIZE INCLUSION**

- **CLOSING THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS**

Inclusion, Integration & Mainstreaming

What Are the Benefits?

Several terms are used in discussing opportunities for children with special needs to spend time with children who are typically developing, sometimes interchangeably. For the purpose of this discussion, the terms will be defined as follows (adapted from Brault, 1992): *Mainstreaming* refers to the placement of children with special needs into programs or parts of programs in which the primary focus is to serve children who are typically developing and where support for the children with special needs is minimal. Simply put, mainstreaming means giving children with special needs the chance to join in the “mainstream of life” – through group experiences in the home, school, and community. *Integration* goes one step further and implies that interactions between populations of children with special needs and children who are typically developing are adequately and appropriately supported so that all children can participate and be included to their fullest extent. Full inclusion is even broader and means that children, regardless of their disability or special need, receive specialized services in whatever setting is appropriate, typical and available to other children of their age – their *natural environment*. The concept of integration stems from the principle of *normalization*, which maintains that any

service provided to individuals with special needs should be based on circumstances that are as culturally normative as possible.

In thinking about inclusion, mainstreaming, or integration of children with disabilities or other special needs, the words are not important. *It's really about belonging*. Children and families want to belong to their community, they want to be accepted and included regardless of ability, race, creed or ethnicity. Placing children together is not enough. Settings that have had successful experiences report that they didn't see the child with disability as a guest or an outsider, but as a full member of the group. The staff and family worked together, sometimes with assistance from specialists already involved with the child, to adapt activities, modify the environment and support the child in interactions with the other children.

There is substantial documentation in the field of early intervention regarding the right to integration and mainstreaming (Guralnick, 2001) and many programs are working to make inclusion a reality. Additionally, with the passage of the *Americans with Disabilities Act* in 1990, more community programs are including very young children with special needs on their own. The National Association for the

Inclusion, Integration & Mainstreaming: What Are The Benefits?

Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement and program guidelines on developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) supports integration through the stated belief that “high quality, developmentally appropriate programs should be available to all children and their families” (pg. 2). Further, the NAEYC and the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division for Early Childhood (DEC) have developed a joint position statement on inclusion (April 2009).

With the philosophical move to increased integration opportunities, emphasis has been on the benefit to children with special needs. Integration

also benefits their peers who are typically developing, parents of all children and the professionals who work with them. Some of these benefits are listed on the next page.

REFERENCES

- Brault, L. M. J. (1992) Successful Strategies for Integrating Infants and Toddlers: Recommendations for Practice. *Infants and Young Children*, 5 (2), 78-85.
- Bredekamp, S. & Copple, C. (Ed.). (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs. Revised edition.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Guralnick, M.J.(2001). *Early Childhood Inclusion: Focus on Change*, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

This handout was originally developed by Linda Brault in 1992 and variations of it have been used in newsletters, conference presentations and “Including All of Us, the Mainstreaming Project” out of San Diego State University.

EVERYONE BENEFITS

Children with Special Needs

- * Being seen as a child first, with special needs secondary
- * Observing and imitating other children
- * Becoming more independent and self-reliant
- * Learning to cope and problem solve
- * Learning appropriate social skills
- * Building a positive self-concept
- * Making new friends

Children who are Typically Developing

- * Learning to accept and become comfortable with individual differences
- * Increasing self-esteem through helping others
- * Recognizing strengths and abilities in children who are "different"
- * Exploring new ways of being a friend
- * Decreasing fears and prejudices regarding individuals with special needs
- * Gaining new awareness of ability to express caring, concern and compassion

Parents/Family Members

- * Sharing the responsibility for helping their child to learn
- * Expanding the variety of social situations for themselves and their child
- * Increasing awareness of resources for young children
- * Looking at their child's strengths as well as needs
- * Learning about development and observing typical behaviors that occur with each stage
- * Experiencing a connection with a larger group of families within their community
- * Reducing fears and increasing acceptance of people with special needs

Professionals/Care Givers/Teachers

- * Broadening teaching and personal experiences
- * Expanding techniques for individualizing activities
- * Providing a service for children with special needs and their families
- * Helping prepare children for future integrative experiences
- * Learning more about available resources
- * Increasing opportunities to encourage acceptance of individual differences

Specialists

- * Understanding and observing typical development and expectations in children
- * Broadening their understanding of child development and group dynamics
- * Seeing their efforts extended into the child's daily routines and activities

Community

- * Preparing the next generation for life together
- * Increasing individual's ability to contribute to society

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSION FOR...?

<i>Children with Disabilities or Other Special Needs</i>	<i>Children who are Typically Developing</i>
<i>Parents/Family Members (of all children)</i>	<i>Caregivers/Staff Members/ Teachers</i>
<i>Specialists</i>	<i>Community</i>

Talking with Parents

Parents of children with disabilities continue to report rejection when looking for child care programs for their child. Often, as soon as the parent mentions the disability, the conversation ends. After a while, parents are hesitant to even share that the child has a disability or special need until after visiting or even enrolling their child. Keep in mind that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prevents a site from turning a child down on the basis of her disability alone. The interactions with the family should be the same as with any family -- respectful and caring.

When a director gets into a conversation and the parent says "My child has _____." (any label such as Down Syndrome, asthma, language delay, etc.) it is important to continue the conversation. Remember to focus on the child's strengths and needs, not the disability label. The label does not provide enough information about the child and will not help to ask sensitive questions. A good follow-up question is often "**and how does that affect his or her development? Tell me more about your child.**"

For example, if a parent calls and says "I'm looking for a preschool for my child. She has cerebral palsy. Is your school good for her?" A first response should be something like: "Our school has many wonderful things to offer. It may be a great place for you and your daughter. I'm sure that you have many questions that I can answer for you. In order to help me address these questions, if I may ask, **how does the cerebral palsy affect her development?** Tell me about your child." This information will allow questions to be asked in order to best meet the child's needs. Offer to have the parent visit, send out additional information, etc. Talk about a mutual trial period; ask the parent if there are any specialists that work with her child that might be able to provide information to you and help you appropriately support the child in your setting.

Sometimes parents of children without identified disabilities will have questions or concerns about a child in your setting. They too are often operating out of fear and discomfort. The following suggestions from Anne Kushner (1999) may be of help:

Parents and children often have very legitimate questions or concerns that need to be addressed. They may want to know more about a particular disability or how the other children are responding to having a child with a disability in their program. Often parents and/or staff members are interested in knowing what to say to other children about disabilities and differences. Any information that is given must not violate a child or family's right to privacy. The best course of action is to plan ahead and ask the family how they would like information shared and what they feel comfortable being shared about their particular child and/or their child's disability. Often parents can be a center's best resource by providing written information, answering questions, or explaining in understandable ways about how their child is like all the other children and how their child is different. During the course of a day staff may be approached by parents or volunteers with a question or concern regarding a child who has a disability. Under no circumstances is it appropriate to share information unless there has been explicit consent provided by the child's family. If in doubt, it is always appropriate to say, "It is our policy that we respect the right to privacy and practice confidentiality for all children and all families. I am sorry that I cannot answer your concern but would be happy to refer you to the child's parents." It is this way, families learn to trust that confidentiality for all families is practiced, regardless of the circumstance.

Kushner, A. (2014). Considerations in Confidentiality for Families of Children with Disabilities. In Brault, L. (Ed.). *BEGINNING TOGETHER Institute Manual* WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies.

Talking with Children about Differences

“What’s wrong with her? She talks funny.” ~ “He’s a baby, right? ~ Big boys don’t wear diapers, do they?” ~ “I don’t want to play with him. He can’t move around fast like me.” ~ “Why does she always get to sit next to you? I want to sit there.” ~ “I don’t like him, Teacher. He always grabs my toys.”

The early years are filled with times that children are learning about who they are and how they are alike and different from others in their world. Many of us have become aware of the need to be prepared to sensitively and honestly respond to questions like the ones above. Children provide us with many opportunities to give positive messages about differences -- messages that will shape children’s attitudes for years to come. Your responses can facilitate belonging for children with special needs or keep them in the category of “visitor”. It is always important to talk with parents of children to see how they might like you to respond to comments and questions like those above. It is easiest when our answers match the ones that the child has been hearing. Eventually these answers will come from the child themselves or their friends! Here are some possibilities you may want to consider:

“I don’t like her, Teacher. She talks funny.” *“It’s hard to understand her sometimes, isn’t it? She really wants to talk to you. When you don’t understand her, maybe you could ask her to show you.”*

“He’s a baby, right? Big boys don’t wear diapers, do they?” *“He’s four years old, just like you. Some big boys do wear diapers. He wears diapers because he is learning how to use the potty. Remember when you learned how to use the potty? There are lots of things to learn, aren’t there?”*

“I don’t want to play with him. He can’t move around fast like me.” *“You’re right, he moves more slowly than you do. His muscles work differently than yours. Can you think of something you can play without moving around fast? There isn’t anyone playing with the farm animals right now.”*

“Why does she always get to sit next to you? I want to sit there.” *“She needs to sit there so that she can see what I am doing. Her eyes work differently than yours and she can see best if she sits close. Would you like to sit on my other side?”*

“I don’t like him, Teacher. He always grabs my toys.” *It’s hard when someone grabs your toys. He is still learning how to take turns and use his words. When he wants to have a toy, you can show him how to stay calm and use words. If you need help, let me know.*

There are many opportunities throughout the day to build understanding and acceptance so that ALL children can belong. Perhaps you could come up with other ideas and share them with others in your site.