

# Inclusion in Newcomer Children's Programs

Inclusion goes beyond a celebration of diversity. In a child care setting, its aim is to ensure that all children (including those with special needs) can attend, benefit from and participate fully in the same program. It requires full collaboration between caregivers, families and specialists to ensure that the needs of all children are met.

In this tip sheet we will look at:

- The benefits of inclusion for staff, children with special needs, typically-developing children and parents
- The 6 elements of inclusion in child care
- Working as a team to create an inclusive program

## **Inclusion benefits everyone!**

Inclusive learning environments foster a greater acceptance of individual differences. This benefits everyone concerned, including children with special needs, typically-developing children, caregivers and parents. Over time, inclusion can create a society that is accepting, understanding and inclusive for everyone.

## **Children with special needs feel a sense of belonging and learn new skills.**

In an inclusive quality care environment, children with special needs gain opportunities to observe, interact with and imitate children who have acquired higher-level motor, social, language and cognitive skills. This can be extremely beneficial because children with special needs can often learn skills more readily from other children than from the adults around them. Other children's explanations and demonstrations are often closer to the capabilities of the child. Most importantly though, in an inclusive environment, children

with special needs feel respected and included.

## **Typically-developing children gain greater understanding and respect.**

Meanwhile, typically-developing children who grow up interacting with children with special needs tend to mature into adults with a greater understanding and respect for those who have diverse abilities. These children can also act as peer tutors for children with special needs. This promotes social interactions among all children, acceptable play behaviour and enhanced use of materials. The child doing the tutoring and the child being tutored both benefit significantly.

## **Caregivers hone their abilities.**

In inclusive environments, caregivers hone their skills and become more responsive to the needs of all children and parents. They begin to look at the activities they plan and the environment they create in different ways, finding ways to adapt both to suit the needs of all children.



### Parents see real differences in their children's behaviours.

Parents of typically-developing children find that their children are more accepting of human differences and more comfortable with people who have developmental differences or who behave differently. Meanwhile, parents of children with special needs are gratified that their children are receiving the same opportunities and experiences as other children and that they are a part of everyday children's activities like birthday parties and special events.

### 6 Elements to Supporting Inclusion in Child Care:

1. **A zero rejection policy** - All children are welcomed.
2. **Natural proportions** - Programs should include children with disabilities in rough proportion to their presence in the population.
3. **Full participation** - Activities and routines are modified and adapted to include all children.
4. **Availability of program options** - Parents of children with disabilities have the same options that other parents have.
5. **Maximum feasible parent participation** - Parents are actively encouraged to participate in the child care program.
6. **Pro-action for community inclusion** - Staff and parents promote inclusion in the whole community.

### Work as a team to create an inclusive program.

Nobody can create a truly inclusive program on their own! You will need to take a team approach. You will also need leaders who believe in inclusion, physical environments that are accessible to all children (including those in wheelchairs and those who use other assistive devices), and proper staff training.

To support inclusion in your program, get training on inclusion and as a team, encourage each other to:

- Communicate using inclusive language.
- Recognize and celebrate differences and similarities through words and actions.
- Celebrate even the smallest of accomplishments.
- Set up play situations to include children with varying strengths and abilities; identify each unique action with praise and encouragement.
- Encourage typically-developing children to support the children with special needs.
- Discover each child's special interests, strengths and preferences and incorporate them into your program.
- Understand that inclusion is a "team sport" and everyone needs to participate to ensure it works.
- Create partnerships with parents.
- Advocate and empower parents concerning the rights of children.
- Become familiar with the supports available to parents so that team members can guide parents.

### RESOURCES:

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, "What Do We Mean by Inclusion," Oct., 2004. [www.ccaac.ca](http://www.ccaac.ca)

Ryerson University, School of ECE, GRC Staff, April, 2009.

The National Centre for Child Care

Inclusion, SpeciaLink, 2004-2005, [www.specialinkcanada.org](http://www.specialinkcanada.org)

