

Tip Sheets

Creating an Inclusive Child Care Environment

All children are

more alike

than

different

Child care educators can and should create an environment of acceptance for all children.

Through this acceptance, the development of all children will be enhanced.

Every child needs:

- Safe, nurturing environments that will foster optimal growth and development.
- To develop positive self-esteem.
- To be valued for their personal uniqueness and abilities.

The Reality Is...

Children with disabilities and their families often face the lifelong challenge of adapting to the limitations caused by disability.

Children with disabilities and their families must:

- Be given the same opportunities to play and learn that are provided to all other children.
- Have opportunities to participate in activities with other children and adults in the family, school, neighborhood, and community.
- Be supported in the care of their children and to be informed of available services.

Child Care and the Law

Child care should give these families greater access to the communities in which they live. Yet, children with disabilities are often denied opportunities for equal participation. For more information, see our [Tip Sheet on the ADA](#) and [ADA.gov](#).

The Challenge of Finding Child Care

It is often a challenge for a child with some behavioral disabilities to be consistently enrolled in child care programs. The belief that some children do not need access to community child care results in the young child being denied the experiences needed to make friends and learn. The basis for this limitation is often misinformation and fear of the unknown.

[A report from the American Center for Progress](#) (Jan 2020) states: "... the share of families unable to find care was similar across families with nondisabled children and families with disabled children, a larger proportion of parents with disabled children experienced at least some difficulty finding care (34 percent vs. 25 percent)."

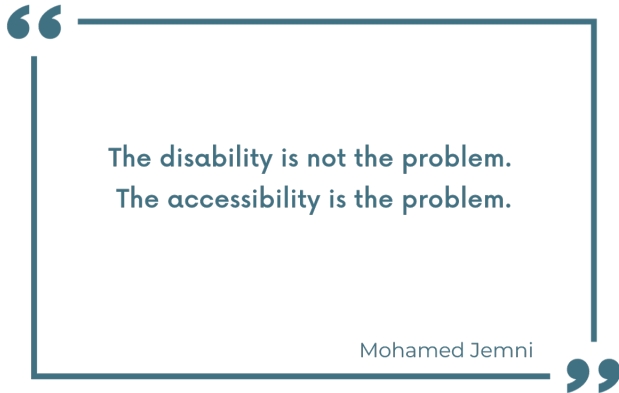
Changing the Landscape

Child care in America is sorely in need of investment and reform. For the full participation of children with disabilities and their families, policymakers must ensure that this care is accessible and appropriate.

Belonging

For families, inclusion in child care is not just an event, but a way of seeing all children as belonging in their communities alongside peers—typically and not typically developing. It is a feeling of "we belong."





The disability is not the problem.
The accessibility is the problem.

Mohamed Jemni

The Educator Role

It is imperative that child care providers establish an environment that encourages exploration, successful interactions, and respect for all children. Each child must have equal opportunities to learn. Special adaptations or the need for assistance should not take away from their sense of competence and confidence.

Strategies for Creating an Inclusive Climate

We must treat all children equally, talk positively about all children, and help them develop nonbiased feelings. The most effective way to help children accept a child with a disability is to create a positive atmosphere of acceptance of all children. The following are strategies to help.

Acknowledge Differences

Young children observe differences, so point them out. By acknowledging differences, we are saying, “We all do things differently, and that’s okay.”

Model Appropriate Behavior

Children also learn by imitation. They do what we do. Reflect on the words you use and how you treat the children in your program. For example, do you allow all of the children to feed themselves?

Treating Others Respectfully

An important goal of toddlers and preschoolers is to learn how to treat others. State the rules clearly and do not allow them to be broken.

- For example, “We do not call people names that may be hurtful. That is not allowed here.”
- Help children to see how their behavior affects others (careful not to use shaming language).

Educate Children

Talk about a disability and how it impacts a person’s life. If a child with a disability is enrolled in your program, ask the family if you can talk about the disability. If possible, have the child or family member demonstrate any special equipment to the class.

Answer Children’s Questions

Young children are always asking why. Answer their questions and be honest. If you do not know the answer, say “I do not know.”

Conclusion

The attitudes and beliefs of early care and education professionals have a significant impact on how children with disabilities and their families are accepted by other children and families.

During the first five years of their lives, children are more receptive to differences. This is a critical time for turning the tide of stereotyping and discrimination into a climate of inclusion and the appreciation of diversity.

Additional Resources

ADA.gov | Commonly Asked Questions

<https://www.ada.gov/resources/child-care-centers>

PACER Center | ADA Q&A: Child Care Providers

<https://www.pacer.org/ec/child-care>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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