

Inclusion: Because All Kids Belong

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- ◆ "Will My Child Have Friends?": What Adults Can Do to Help



In this issue of the CNY ECDC Bulletin, we will share some of what we know about making inclusive environments work. This issue focuses on some very basic reasons for supporting inclusion and on some things you can do to help children thrive in inclusive settings. As always, we welcome your questions and feedback, and we hope to provide tools that will help you make a positive difference in the lives of all children.

People who care for young children, especially young children with disabilities, are spending a lot of time thinking and talking about "inclusion." So what is inclusion, and why is it so important? "Inclusion means serving children with disabilities together with other children who are developing in a typical way." It means "children with disabilities can go to child care and preschool programs where other kids their age go. They have the same teachers, the same classrooms, and the same chances as other children to grow up as part of their communities."¹

Put this way, it seems obvious that inclusion is a good thing. Our hearts tell us that all children should have the same opportunities to learn, laugh, and play; to have friends and explore the world around

them. First and foremost, we know that children—regardless of ability—are children. Fortunately, research is on our side. We can prove what we have known in our hearts: that inclusive environments are good for kids.

So, why do we need to keep talking about it? Why can't we "just do it"? Because, as a whole, the community of people who teach and care for children is just beginning to understand how to "do inclusion": how to serve children with many different abilities

so that all children can benefit. We are coming to understand "that programs, not children, have to be 'ready for inclusion.'"² Luckily, research and experience have worked together to help us understand what it takes for early childhood programs to support the development of all

children, with and without disabilities, together.

The CNY ECDC is fortunate to be located in a region with a rich history of inclusive practices. With our area's growing commitment to serve children in settings where typically developing kids are found, we find more and more preschool-aged

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"Children should have the same opportunities to learn, laugh, and play; to have friends and explore the world around them."

Jacob's First Day

We share the following story, excerpted from the University of Kansas's Circle of Inclusion website, to lay a foundation for supporting inclusion—to focus on the universal characteristics that unite children, rather than categorizing by difference.

On Jacob's first day at school I was really concerned because he is so tiny and so obviously handicapped, and I know his teacher was very nervous, so I tried not to be nervous and to help her not to be nervous. His teacher took him to the circle, and I turned around to say something to the school director, and when I turned back around to watch, I couldn't find him. They were all lying around on the floor doing their exercises that they do to loosen up and get relaxed and ready for the

day. And I couldn't find him! I had to go completely around the circle before I finally found him lying there looking at the boy next to him. And that little kid was telling him, "Stretch, stretch." They were stretching, and Jacob had his arms out like everybody else. My heart was in my throat. I had to leave; I couldn't stay and cry. Jacob was with his peers and he was fitting in. If anyone had walked in at that point, they would not have been able to tell that there was anything different about him. It was amazing. But, you know, he is just like everybody else—he's just a little boy.

*by Ramona, Jacob's Foster Mom,
from the Circle of Inclusion website*

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children with disabilities in family- or center-based child care, nursery schools, and preschools. At these locations, children with disabilities receive services from special educators and related service providers (e.g., occupational, physical, or

speech therapies). From our extensive conversations with special service providers and general education practitioners, we have learned that children make the most progress—and adults feel the most successful—when children’s strengths and needs are understood by the adults around them. With this understanding, adults are more

likely to work *together* to embed learning activities into daily routines.

This realization led to the Preschool Inclusion Project of Central New York (PIPCNY) which is described on page five of this bulletin. We are thrilled to see this project continue this year. We will keep you updated on the project’s progress in future bulletins.

What Do We Know About Preschool Inclusion?

If you answered E to the question at right, you are absolutely correct. We now know that including children with disabilities in activities and learning environments with their peers benefits *all* children, families, schools, and communities.

We have seen that children with disabilities have better developmental outcomes and improve both their social competence and communication skills in inclusive settings. Children benefit from knowing that they are a part of a community that is rich and varied. They have opportunities to socialize with all kinds of kids. They can also practice the skills they learn in a natural environment, rather than only at home or in a specialized classroom.

Typically developing children benefit from inclusive practices as well. The process of making changes to an environment to meet special needs reinforces what we know to be best practice: building activities based on the individual interests and strengths of each child. All children, with or without disabilities, learn to accept differences, solve problems creatively, and develop a wide range of friendships.

Through the creation of inclusive environments, families raise their own and others’ awareness of a variety of disabilities. Inclusion reinforces the important role of all families in a community and creates opportunities to teach acceptance of difference. Inclusive environments create pathways for support and information between families.

Inclusive practices in early childhood settings provide models for building on the strengths of all community members. These practices guide us toward the best allocation

Why should we include children with disabilities in activities, routines, and learning with other children their age?

- A. Because it’s good for them.
- B. Because it’s good for all kids.
- C. Because it’s good for families.
- D. Because it’s the law.
- E. All of the above.

of early childhood resources by judiciously using specialized, comprehensive programs. Most importantly, early inclusion creates a foundation for expectations and practices in our school-age programs.

What Does the Law Say?

The Americans with Disabilities Act says that schools (including nursery schools and preschools), child care providers, and public agencies

- ◆ can’t use eligibility standards to screen out children with disabilities;
- ◆ must identify and remove barriers to a child’s participation in activities with their peers; and
- ◆ are not required to make costly structural changes, but must develop affordable solutions whenever possible.

Schools (including nursery schools and preschools), child care providers, and public agencies *cannot*

- ◆ exclude children with disabilities because providers lack special skills;
- ◆ exclude a child because of intolerance of a disability;
- ◆ refuse to accept a child because of insurance rate increases; or
- ◆ charge extra for a child with a disability.

Talking with Children About Differing Abilities

When young children with different abilities spend time together, they may have questions. A child may ask “What’s wrong with Sam?” It’s important to address a child’s concern. This can be done in a way that is respectful to the child asking the question as well as the child in question.

You can say something like “Are you talking about the way Sam walks? Sam has a condition called cerebral palsy. That means that his legs don’t move easily, so he has to work extra hard to walk. He does some things different than you, and that’s okay.”

What if you don’t know how to describe a child’s condition? Ask. You could say to a parent, “My son asked me why Hanna wears a helmet. I said that when she falls down, she needs to protect her head. Am I saying the right thing?” Most parents will welcome such questions because this helps people understand and respect their child’s particular needs.³

Making Changes to Include All Kids

The adaptations suggested in the table below, and others like them, can be found in the book *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs* by Susan R. Sandall and Ilene S. Schwartz. (Tip: These are great strategies to use with more typically developing children, too!)

If a child...	then you can...	This is an example of...
spreads blocks across the room	make clear boundaries to the block area with a rug or brightly colored tape.	changing the ENVIRONMENT so that children can play safely together.
has difficulty painting with a sponge or does not like to get messy	glue an empty film canister to the sponge so that she can hold the canister instead of the sponge.	changing MATERIALS so that children can do more things for themselves.
avoids the dramatic play area	make a prop box based on a theme the child will find particularly interesting.	tapping into a child's INTERESTS.
seems interested in playing at the sand table, but hesitates to get involved	pair the child with a playmate. Give the two children toys to share, for example, one bucket and two scoops.	encouraging TEAMWORK among children.
insists on playing with a complicated toy, gets frustrated, then throws the toy	join the child in play. Hand pieces to him one at a time. Talk through the strategies for playing with the toy. Show him how to ask for help.	adult INTERVENTION to support the child's learning and play.
is overwhelmed by a project the group is working on	make picture cards to show the steps or parts of the activity.	SIMPLIFYING an activity by breaking it down into smaller parts.

Promoting Play Opportunities for Children with Disabilities

"All children need successful opportunities to play and interact with toys and others," advises the Center for Assistive Technology at the University of Buffalo.⁴ We know that babies and young children learn as they play. Through play, children discover the world around them. They learn about how things work, how to communicate, and how to get along with other people.

Children with disabilities *need* to play, just like children without disabilities. Disabilities can create obstacles that keep children from getting the most out of their play. As adults, we need to support children in overcoming barriers by asking two key questions: First, how can I help the child focus her energy on playing rather than on the challenges presented by her disability? Second, how can I encourage her to interact with a variety of materials and with other children? We can respond to these questions and support the child's play in three key areas: positioning, communicating, and socializing.

Positioning: For children with physical disabilities, positioning is a very

important part of successful play. In deciding how to support a child with physical disabilities, ask yourself these questions:

- What positioning options are available? Which are the most comfortable for the child?
- What supports will she need to maintain that position?
- Will the child need to move around to play?
- If the child is not mobile, how will she make choices during play? Will toys or play routines need to be adapted?
- How will the child be positioned so that she can interact with other children and materials? (Important: make sure she can see other children and play materials.)

Communicating: Many children with disabilities need help communicating during play. Again, asking yourself a few questions can help you support all children.

- How will the child communicate her choices during play?
- What are alternative forms of communication for children who do not speak? (ex. eye gaze, picture boards, and/or simple voice recordings)

- What phrases can you teach a child to help her participate in simple play routines? (ex. "It's my turn." "You can go now." "Come, see.")

**For *all* children:
Play is active.
Play is directed by the child.
Play is FUN!**

Socializing: While most young children love to play with their parents or other adults, it's very important for them to play with other children. There are a number of things you can do to help this happen:

- Take the child to parks, centers, or other places where children gather and play together.
- Help the child understand the "rules" of playing with other children, and practice these with her often (ex. taking turns, playing safely with toys, asking "nicely").
- Teach children songs, poems, and rhymes that they can recite together.

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Promoting Play Opportunities
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- Create environments that encourage children to play with each other. For example, provide props that suggest familiar routines, like going to the grocery store, the library, or the zoo. Children’s past experiences with these activities will help them get involved in the play.

For each of these three areas, special educators, related service providers, and clinicians are key resources. These specialists can show you how to best support a child’s development during regular daily activities. Most importantly, remember that play for children with disabilities is *still play*: It is active, directed by the child, and fun!

Will My Child Have Friends? What Adults Can Do to Help

For parents of children who receive special education support in community settings, “friendship is the ‘bottom line.’ All people need friends, companionship, encouragement, and support. Friendships add richness to children’s lives.”²⁵

At some point, most parents worry about their child’s friendships, yet prefer

to see their child make friends on his own. Children with disabilities, however, often face extra challenges when it comes to developing meaningful friendships. In these situations, rather than taking a hands-off approach, parents and other adults can play a positive role. Adults can help children—with or without disabilities—build friendships by being “connectors.” They can help children learn to respect differences and understand each other as individuals. It’s important to realize that this involves commitment and ongoing attention. There are no quick fixes or magic solutions.

There are several things you can do to support children’s friendships:

- Believe that *reciprocal friendships* are possible and important for everyone. Reciprocal friendship means that both children enjoy and benefit from the friendship. Adults are often tempted to encourage friendships by designating children to be “helpers” for a child with a disability. This helping relationship, however, is rarely reciprocal. The child who is “helped” can be seen as benefiting from the relationship more than the child who helps.
- Use a child’s area of interest as a foundation for learning to develop friendships.
- Be willing to “invite” children to play together. Pick a natural opening to introduce something you know about each child. You could say for example, “Annie, I

see you’re playing farm. Ben just told me that he spent the weekend at his uncle’s farm. Would you like to hear about it?”

- Be willing to be part of a team that can observe, problem-solve, persevere, and create new ways to overcome challenges. Try designating a team leader who can coordinate (yet not be responsible for) the inclusion of the child.
- Have an intuitive sense about how friendships grow. Recognize when it’s time to fade into the background and not get in the way. This may mean letting children work through problems themselves and not jumping in right away to play mediator.
- Always highlight the strengths and capacities of children in your own interactions with them. What we show children through our actions has a powerful impact on their lives.



Reading Connection: Using Stories to Help Kids Understand Different Abilities

Reading books aloud is a great way to help children learn about disabling conditions and others’ experiences with disabilities. Story-time with a trusted adult is often a “safe space” for kids: it provides an opportunity for them to talk about feelings, fears, or concerns without the fear of doing or saying “the wrong thing.” When sharing books with children, remember to be creative. For younger children, you can paraphrase the words of the story and focus on the pictures. You can ask children to tell you what they see in the pictures and talk about it. A few suggestions:

Be Quiet, Marina!

by Kirsten Debear, Laura Dwight

A noisy little girl with cerebral palsy and a quiet little girl with Down syndrome learn to play together and eventually become best friends.

Dad and Me in the Morning

by Pat Lakin, Robert C. Steele

A young deaf boy awakens to the light of his special alarm clock, puts in his hearing aids, and tiptoes to awaken his father.

My Brother, Matthew

by Mary Thompson

Though David knows frustration and resentment at times, he feels he understands his disabled little brother even better than his parents; and together the two boys experience a great deal of joy.

Ian’s Walk: A Story About Autism

by Laurie Lears, Karen Ritz

A young girl realizes how much she cares for her autistic brother Ian when he gets lost at the park.

My Friend Isabelle

by Eliza Woloson, Bryan Gough

Isabelle and Charlie are friends. They both like to draw, dance, read, and play at the park. They both like to eat Cheerios. They both cry if their feelings are hurt. And like most friends, they are also different from each other. Isabelle has Down syndrome. Charlie doesn’t.

The Night Search

by Kate Chamberlin, Dot Yoder

Heather, who is blind, resists using her white cane until she tries to find her puppy outdoors at night, an experience that helps her accept her cane as a valuable helper.

The Preschool Inclusion Project

The Preschool Inclusion Project of Central New York (PIPCNY) supports general education practitioners who teach and care for young children (age 3-5) with identified special needs. The project is grounded in the belief that the majority of children with disabilities belong in community-based settings alongside their more typically developing peers. For this to happen successfully, general education practitioners—including lead teachers, teacher assistants, child care providers, and family child care providers—must receive support in their efforts to create and sustain environments in which all children thrive. These individuals are an important constant in the lives of children and serve as critical links to families.

Given this perspective, the goals of the PIPCNY are to

- build relationships and communication between special education teachers, related service providers, and general education practitioners;
- support the generalization of specific IEP goals within the child's environment; and
- identify environments and interactions that support inclusion within general education settings.

The PIPCNY will achieve these goals through a multi-dimensional approach that involves targeted collegial interventions, focused workshops, and the collaborative development of a Community Blueprint for Inclusion.

During the 2004-05 project year targeted PIPCNY interventions will be facilitated in ten programs throughout our nine-county CNY region. These ten sites will be called PIPCNY Partners. Preschools, family child care providers, nursery schools, and child care centers can be part of this initiative. Potential programs must express an interest in participation and serve at least one preschool child with a disability. These programs will work with CNY ECDC staff and our partners from the Child Care Coordinating Council of Onondaga County to complete a pre-assessment. The pre-assessment process will lead to identified priorities and a collaborative work plan. Over a three-month timeframe, programs will receive on-site

consulting and mentoring to support the development of inclusive practices and to achieve the goals outlined above. A post assessment will be conducted to evaluate progress toward inclusive best practice.

The PIPCNY will offer three workshops for community members:

- “Guiding Children’s Behavior: Understanding Messages and Choosing Responses” (a ten-part series with a mentoring component)
- “Including All Kids: Am I, Should I, Can I?”
- “Who Has an IEP, How do I Get One, and What Should I Know?”

The PIPCNY is also in the process of developing a publication to support early childhood programs as they embrace inclusion for young children. A resource guide called “The PIPCNY Community Blueprint for Inclusion” will incorporate best practice with the experience of community members who have successfully implemented inclusion in their programs. The “Blueprint” will be available in the spring of 2005.

If you are interested in more information, want to be a PIPCNY Partner, or want to recommend a site for PIPCNY Partner consideration, please call 315-443-4444 or toll free at 1-800-962-5488.



Check the Web

Let’s Play! Projects, University at Buffalo, Assistive Technology Center

<http://letsplay.buffalo.edu/>

This web site provides information on selecting toys for play, toys for children with disabilities, adapting toys to make them easier to use, locating specially designed toys as well as other resources to promote play.

Circle of Inclusion Project, University of Kansas

<http://www.circleofinclusion.org/>

This web site offers demonstrations of and information about the effective practices of inclusive educational programs for children from birth through age eight.



Resources

- Buswell, Barbara & Schaffner, Beth (1992). Building friendships: An important part of schooling. *OSERS News in Print v IV*, n 4, pp. 6-8.
- Kranowitz, Carol Stock (November, 1992). Every body’s different: Talking about special schoolmates. *Exchange*, (special section: Beginnings Workshop: Working with Parents of Children with Differing Abilities) pp. 29-30.
- Odom, Samuel (2000). Preschool inclusion: What we know and where we go from here. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education v 20*, n 1, pp. 20-27.
- Sandall, Susan R. & Schwartz, Ilene S. (2002). *Building blocks for teaching preschoolers with special needs*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Wesley, P.W., Dennis, B.X. & Tyndall, S. T. (1998). *QuickNotes: Inclusion resources for early childhood professionals*. Lewisville NC: Kaplan Press.

Notes

- ¹ Wesley, Dennis, & Tyndall, 1998.
- ² Odom, 2000.
- ³ Adapted from Kranowitz, 1992.
- ⁴ University at Buffalo, Assistive Technology Center
- ⁵ Buswell & Schaffner, 1992.



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WE KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR ANSWERS.



Workshops of Interest

The ECDC can provide information and workshops on a variety of topics tailored to the interests and needs of parents and early childhood professionals. Resources are available on such topics as general child development, developmental issues for children with special needs, coping strategies, and specific disabilities.

Workshops include:

- Including Children with Special Needs in Child Care
- Creating Working Alliances with Families
- Early Childhood Development: The Meaning of Red Flags
- What Are Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education
- Moving On: Children and Families Facing Transition

Who We Are

The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is a regional clearinghouse providing information, referral and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with young children birth to five. We are located at Syracuse University's Center on Human Policy.

ECDC services to families are free and confidential.

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