

The Benefits of Inclusion

By Erin Aguilar

Why Inclusion?

The benefits of inclusion are numerous, not only for children with special needs and their families, but for **all** children. When we include all children in our programs, they learn acceptance of other people, and that each person has unique abilities. Children learn from *each other*. With inclusion in place, children with special needs are provided equal opportunity to participate in the same types of programs and activities as children without special needs. Some of the benefits of inclusion for children with (or without) disabilities are friendship skills, peer models, problem solving skills, positive self-image, and respect for others. This can trickle down to their families as well, teaching parents and families to be more accepting of differences. Since parents are a child's first teacher and know their child best, it is important to have good communication with families, creating consistency between home and school. Working together and creating a partnership with families is an important part of inclusion, and can help children reach their developmental potential.

Strategies for Successful Inclusion

Strategies that promote inclusion are also strategies that promote meeting children at their individual developmental level. This can benefit all children. Providing a wide range of developmentally appropriate materials and activities lets all children be successful when working and playing. Consistent routines and transitions help children know what to expect and feel comfortable. It is also important to consider the **type** of assistance given to children. It is important to help children learn independence, and give them just enough help to be successful without helping them too much. When planning interventions, start with the least restrictive changes like changing the environment, activity, or materials before providing direct assistance. Provide opportunities for children to have sustained social interactions and participate fully in the program.

Inclusion is for Parents Too!

Inclusion does have its challenges. Teachers often do not know what strategies to use or how much to help individual children. Families can be resistant to the idea, thinking that a child with special needs will take up too much of the teacher's time. However, with careful planning and communication among staff and families it can be successfully done. Time spent observing children, planning for the day, creating modification and adaptations to activities can help inclusion be more successful. For teachers, it is important to talk to families see what they do at home, learn strategies that parents use successfully, and ask questions to the child care team including any resources that the child might receive. Working together with parents and staff, all children can be included.

This article's author, Erin Aguilar, is the Inclusion Specialist for Easter Seals Blake Foundation; she also is currently a member of the adjunct faculty at Pima Community College and holds a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education.