



## The Inclusion Collaborative-Santa Clara County---What is inclusive Childcare?

### What does an inclusive program look like?

An inclusive program has the same characteristics as any other child care program. In an inclusive program, children with and without disabilities participate in the same routines and play experiences. Providers in inclusive programs learn to recognize children as distinct individuals with special strengths and needs. They continually make creative modifications to routines and activities so that each child benefits from participating.

### Do all inclusive child care programs look *the same*?

Child care programs and the providers who work in them are as different from each other as each child is different from another. Child care settings that retain their individuality enable families to choose the program that best suits their particular needs.

### How are child care programs different from specialized programs for children with disabilities?

Specialized programs (such as special education preschools or therapy services) provide treatment or training specific to a child's developmental, physical, or medical disability. Child care programs, on the other hand, provide a natural learning environment and typical day-to-day experiences for children. The settings complement one another, and may blend together at times. For instance, specialized programs may include typical day-to-day routines, and child care programs may have therapists visit to work with some children.

### Does a child care program need special equipment or modifications in *the environment* to include children with disabilities?

It is difficult to anticipate what special equipment or modifications a program might need until a particular child is enrolled. Most typical toys, play materials, and equipment are appropriate for children with disabilities and could be adapted, if necessary. Parents and other professionals who are aware of the child's interests and abilities can help make adaptations, provide other appropriate materials, or assist in modifying the environment for the child.

### Who are *the children* in inclusive child care programs?

Inclusive child care programs include children with and without disabilities. Among all these children, however, there will be a wide variety of needs, strengths, talents, and interests. Not every two-year-old throws tantrums and not every child with a disability uses a wheelchair. Some children with disabilities have needs that are unfamiliar or unique, and they also have the same every-day-little-kid needs as other young children.

### Do providers need *to have special skills*?

Yes and no. As new children are enrolled, there are a few things to learn and new ideas to try. Most of the time, these new "specialized skills" are just slightly different ways to do the things that are already required to meet the needs of all young children. If a child has a need that is unfamiliar, the child's parent is usually a great source for "how to's"- or they can identify someone who can help. An inclusive program is first of all a high quality early childhood program, and the skills that promote inclusion are, basically, the skills of any competent provider. Community colleges provide specialized training and collaborative support for early care providers to work with children disabilities.

## How many *children with disabilities* should be *Included In the program?*

There is no "magic" number. What is important is how and how well each child is included. The number of children with disabilities in a program should reflect a balance between the program's resources and the needs of each individual child. Child care providers should match what their program has to offer with what each child and family needs and wants. Inclusion is more than numbers anyway-it's the conviction that every child should be included.

## What role do parents *and* family play?

If inclusion is going to work, parents must be included as well. Parents understand their Child's strengths, needs, and interests. Collaboration with parents means asking for input and suggestions, sharing expertise, communicating regularly, and building a partnership strong enough to support the excitement and challenges of child care.

## What are some of the *benefits* for children in an inclusive program?

Early childhood programs provide a playful and natural environment for all children to grow and develop. The opportunity for children with disabilities to participate in these experiences with other young children has great value. Children become aware of differences and similarities between themselves and their peers. As they play together, they develop a sense that everyone, regardless of ability or disability, has an important contribution. In addition, children benefit from an environment where emphasis is placed on being responsive to individual strengths and needs.

## Should *the family of a child with a disability pay more?*

No. In most cases, including children with disabilities does not require any more program resources than including other children in the program. Even when children do require accommodations, programs may not charge the family more but may choose to spread the cost (if any) evenly among all the families enrolled. Working closely with families will help providers make financially reasonable accommodations to include each child. Accommodations that pose a tremendous financial burden are not required but expenses may be offset by other agencies.

## What questions *and* concerns do parents have about inclusion?

AH parents have similar questions and concerns about child care. Some common questions are: will my child's specific needs be met; will my child participate fully in the program's daily activities; will another child take time away from my child; and will my child begin to act like the child with a disability? Since parents often mirror provider's attitudes, a child care provider's enthusiasm for and commitment to inclusion can help reassure parents.

## How will I know if *It's* working?

There are many ways to measure success: hearing from more parents interested in the program; getting positive feedback from families and other professionals in the community; seeing enthusiasm and new skills in staff members and volunteers; noticing improvement in one's own ability to respond to the individual differences of the children. These are all important indicators of a quality program. Perhaps the single most important measure is to look at the impact on individual children. When children have the opportunity to grow and develop at their own pace. . . when each child is included in routines and play experiences that are appropriate for the child's interests and abilities . . . when every child is treated with respect. . . it's working!



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