CHILDREN WITH DIFFERING ABILTIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



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Children with Differing Abilties in Early Childhood Education

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Children with Differing Abilities in Early Childhood Education

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1: INTRODUCTION

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Children with Differing Abilities

by Sara Horstman

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Academic Excellence, Education, and Human Services Division

Early Childhood Education Program

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Framework for Learning



After reading *Children with Differing Abilities* you should be able to:

- Integrate strategies that support diversity, equity, and inclusion in an early childhood classroom.
- Promote inclusive programs for young children.
- Analyze legal and ethical requirements including ADA and IDEA.
- Explain the process to refer and support children with differing abilities.
- Analyze the abilities of children with physical, cognitive, health/medical, communication and/or behavioral/emotional disorders.
- Analyze the abilities of children with neurodiversity.
- Determine ways to adapt curriculum to meet the needs of children with developmental differences.
- Identify strategies for cultivating partnerships with families who have children with developmental differences.

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2: INCLUSION AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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2.1: Framework for Learning

Opening eyes onto inclusion in early childhood education

Watch the short video below to learn why education is strongest when it embraces diversity.

YouTube Video

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Teachers will have children in their classrooms with diagnosed and undiagnosed special needs, including those who have related health issues. Early childhood programs have legal obligations to provide inclusive programs and inclusion benefits for everyone involved -- children with special needs, their peers that do not have special needs, families, and teachers.

Having a solid foundation in developmentally appropriate practice, which includes the importance of learning about and meeting the needs of each individual child, goes a long way to providing inclusive early education. Support, accommodation, and collaboration are essential to providing inclusive early childhood education programming.

After this chapter, you should be able to:

- define inclusion and explain what inclusion means for children with disabilities
- identify what inclusion looks like in early childhood settings
- define Typical and Atypical/Exceptional childhood development
- understand what people-first and identity-first language means
- discuss some ways programs should be inclusive

- inclusion
- typical and atypical (exceptional) development in early childhood
- developmental milestones
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- People-First Language and Identity-First Language

Source

- Esquivel, Kirscha. Ch.11.3. Summary. The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education (Esquivel, Elam, Paris, & Tafoya) is shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.

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2.2: Inclusion



Image Source: BCgovphtos. Flikr.com. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Fig. 2.2 Mixed race group of preschool children smiling and singing.

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

"Inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few." - Oberti vs. Board of Education in Clementon Schools

According to the Oxford Dictionary inclusion is defined as *the action or state of including or of being included in a group or structure*. When we talk about **inclusive early childhood education**, we are talking about programs that are designed for children and families from a wide range of backgrounds. While a program may serve diverse families, if it is designed from a privileged perspective it is not truly inclusive.

Continue to ask:

- Do the families from different backgrounds in my program, feel welcome?
- Am I forcing them to adapt to a program that isn't designed for them or doesn't take into consideration their social, cultural, and/or racial contexts?

Inclusive program design means that everything is considered from an inclusive perspective -- from the physical space to interactions with children and families. As teachers, we have the incredible responsibility and honor of teaching and caring for children in our classrooms and building intentional relationships with their families.

Early childhood is a time where children are learning their numbers and letters. It is also a time where children are developing their own personal and social identities, learning the cultural beliefs and values of their family, of their classrooms and of society. When we ground our teaching in inclusion we are ensuring the development of the whole child, whatever their abilities.

Defining Features of Inclusion

The defining features of inclusion in high quality early childhood programs and services are:

- **Access**
  - providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments
- **Participation**
  - providing any needed additional individualized accommodations and supports to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers and adults
- **Supports**
  - an infrastructure of system-level supports to those providing inclusive services to children and families
- **Assistive Technology**
  - any tool or device that a child uses to complete a task that they may not otherwise be able to do

Developing a deep understanding of inclusive concepts, provides us with the knowledge and awareness to reflect on our teaching in a meaningful way and actively work at as anti-bias, anti-racist and culturally responsive educators.

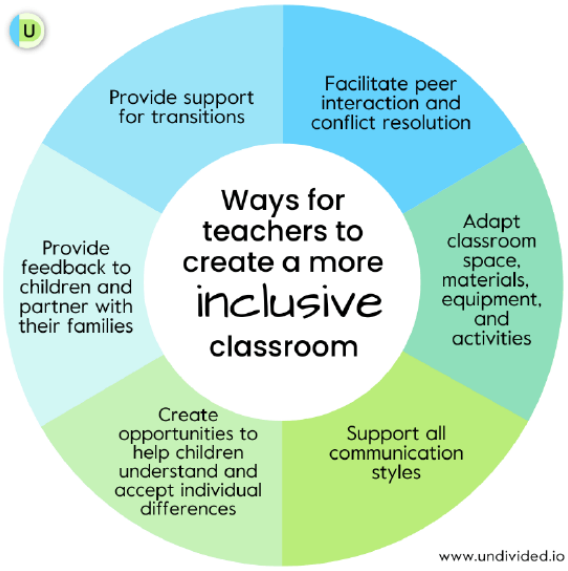


Image Source: How Teachers and Parents Can Facilitate and Model Inclusion. Undivided.io. Website

Fig.2.2 Chart depicting ways for teacher to create a more inclusive classroom as discussed on this page.

Learning About Individual Children with Special Needs

Information about a specific disability may provide a basic framework for ideas about how ideas how to support a child with that disability, but when serving an individual child, you will focus on the child's specific needs, rather than the disability or its label. The possible variations within a single label are vast and nuanced, and no single label or diagnosis provides enough information about any individual child.

- **Example:** a child with the label **cerebral palsy** may
  - walk with leg braces or use a wheelchair
  - have minor physical symptoms or exhibit more extensive symptoms
  - may have no difficulty in communicating or demonstrate a delay in using language

Early childhood educators need to think beyond the label and ask questions with sensitivity and understanding—particularly when talking with parents --and set a tone of welcome and understanding.

- **Scenario:** a family member shares a child's diagnosis
  - a good follow-up question to ask is "And how does that affect _____'s development?"

This approach can help assure a family member that the child care provider is genuinely concerned about the success of their child and is interested in providing appropriate, child-specific care. The response from the parent will determine what accommodations might be needed, what other questions may be appropriate to ask, and whether specialists are involved or

needed as part of the child's team.

Inclusive Classroom Strategies for Children with Special Needs

As each child is unique, so is each early childhood education program. There is no magic formula for making inclusion work beyond the creativity, energy, and interest that most early childhood educators already bring to their work.

Even with the uniqueness of each child, every program is able to successfully include children with disabilities and make it work -- child by child, day by day. An open-minded and willing attitude among the teachers helps provide the necessary energy for developing solutions and adapting to inevitable challenges.

While inclusion is a legal obligation what makes it possible is enthusiastic approach committed to inclusivity for all.

Some children need **small changes** to the curriculum or minor supports in order to get the most out of certain activities. Some examples are

- **simple accommodations**
  - providing a special place or quiet activity for a child who is unable to participate in large-group activities
  - making a special snack available for a child who needs to eat more frequently than the typical meal
    - creating a snack schedule.

Other children may require more **specific adaptations** that might not be readily apparent. To find help in determining what this might look like seek out resources from

- local community or school district
- family, for example, is always the first and most important guide for what a child might need; after that, an
- area specialist or a local workshop might be. Beyond the immediate community, a world of literature in
- books, periodicals, and Web sites devoted to disabilities and inclusion

If a child already has an established diagnosis, **trained intervention personnel** may be available to assist in this process. One of the biggest roles for a care provider is to facilitate a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Several **helpful strategies** are as follows:

- start with the assumption that all children are competent
- adapt the environment so that it is developmentally appropriate, challenging, and fits the needs and interests of each child
- keep the whole child in mind, particularly the child's social-emotional experience, while supporting a child's mastery of a specific skill

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2.3: Typical and Atypical Development

Most children develop in a similar way. Even when cultural backgrounds, geographic locations, and personal characteristics vary, child development can be generalized to a certain extent. This does not mean, however, that all children are the same. Children are living, breathing human beings, and some variation is normal. When a child develops in the way that we expect, we refer to this as **typical development**. From birth - age 5, children should reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, act, and move.

Skills such as taking a first step, smiling for the first time, and waving “bye bye” are called developmental milestones. Children reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, act, and move.

Review the chart below and notice the developmental milestones from birth - age 5.



Image Source: Milestone Moments. Get Free “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” Materials. CDC.gov.

Fig. 2.3. Game board-style chart describing a child's developmental milestones from Birth-Age 5. An online digital version of this checklist is available at the CDC website.

Atypical/Exceptional Early Childhood Development

Exceptional children is an **inclusive** term that refers to children with learning and/or behavior problems, children with physical disabilities or sensory impairments not met by traditional educational programs. It includes children who are at risk for delayed development and those with specific disabilities. Exceptional children are also include those who are capable of performing at higher levels than other children the same age. These children are referred to as gifted and talented and may also experience the need for additional support. Gifted and talented children may also have specific disabilities. In general, exceptional children require modifications in curriculum, teaching methodology and instructions in order to help them fulfill their potential. Developmentally some types of of exceptional variance is referred to as **atypical development.**

Atypical development can slow down growth in other areas of a child’s life. It is atypical development if a child cannot speak any words at all by age 15-16 months.

The ways and speed in which children grow is measured by tools called **developmental assessments.** These assessments inform parents and adults in a child’s life about levels at which their child is developing, where they are struggling, and what they can expect going forward.

Developmental assessments in early childhood settings

- teacher observes the child at play or by playing small games and activities with the child
- teacher records the child's developmental milestones on the assessment and later shares it with the parents

If development is not on track, teachers should speak with parents and connect them with specialists who can help. Specialists will administer another type of assessment that is specially designed to diagnose developmental disabilities. Atypically developing children benefit from early intervention programs that can help them get on track.

The video below explains the importance of early developmental screening and evaluation.

YouTube Video

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Sources

- Typical and Atypical Development *Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Julian)* is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Angela Blums & Sally Nyblad Holloway. LibreTexts, Social Studies Library.
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2.4: Creating Environments for Inclusion

Environment for Inclusion: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

One of the most important components of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is the legal requirement that ***a child with a disability be educated in the least restrictive environment*** unless a different arrangement is necessary to provide a free, appropriate education. Often the LRE is interpreted as the environment in which typical developing children function, with some adaptions for the various needs of different children.

Here's what you should know about this law and how it's implemented in schools. IDEA states that every public agency (including public schools and districts) is required to ensure:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled; and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

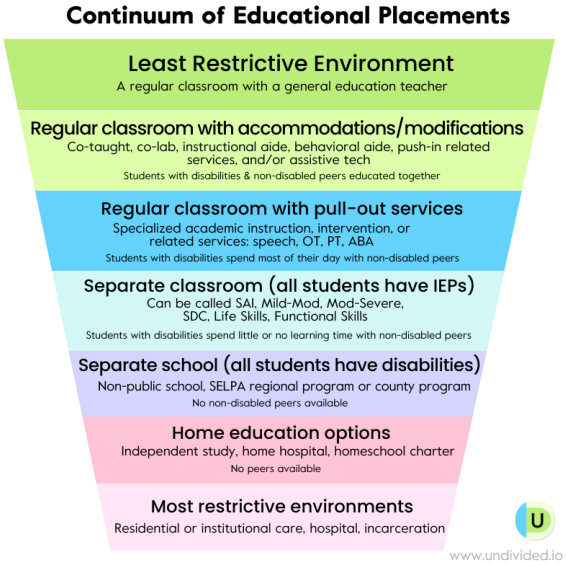


Image Source: Least Restrictive Environment and Placement Options in an IEP. *Undivided.* 2024.

Fig. 2.4. Chart that describes the range of classroom environments from least (regular classroom) to most restrictive environment (residential or institutional care, hospital, or incarceration. In between environments range from regular classroom with accommodations, modifications, and pull-out services to separate classrooms, separate schools, and home education options.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Classroom Strategies

The word “environment” doesn’t necessarily refer to a physical place but to the child’s education resources and services. Instead it refers to the accommodations and modifications that will help children with disabilities learn the same content as their peers but in ways that best suit their abilities.

An LRE classroom will be designed to incorporate

- a variety of ways to present information
  - audio recordings, videos, larger print text, or using visual aids
- seating at the front of the class where there are fewer distractions
- sensory tools like stress balls for fidgety children

- acoustics and special lighting
- assistive technology

Sources

- "Individuals with Disabilities Act. Section 1412 (a) (5)." U.S. Department of Education.
- "Least Restrictive Environment and Placement Options in an IEP." Undivided.io.
- What Programs Can Do to be Inclusive of All Children. *The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education (Esquivel, Elam, Paris, & Tafoya)*. is shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya. LibreTexts, Social Studies Library.

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2.5: Person-First and Identity-First Language

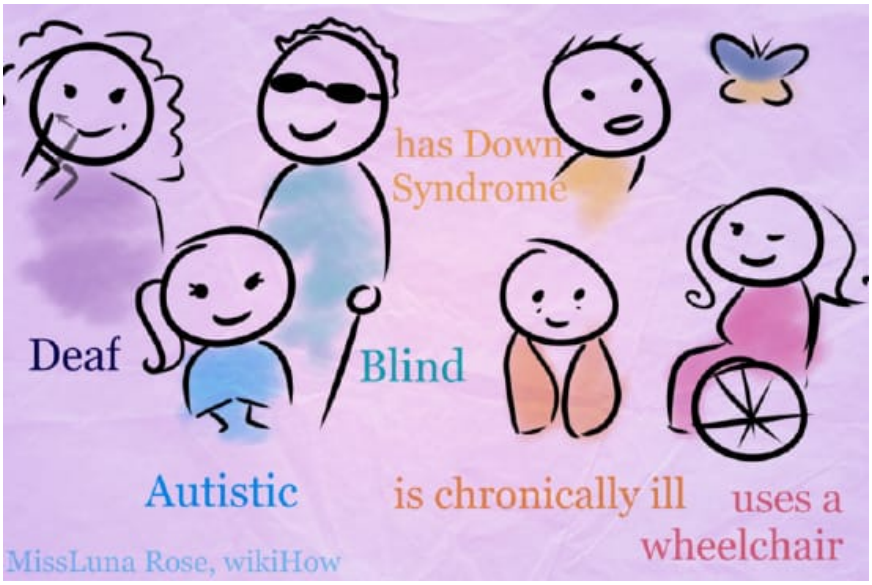


Image Source: LunaRose, WikiHow

Fig. 2.5 Cute cartoon graphic depicting children with various disabilities.

Person-First or Identity-First Language?

Language is a powerful tool that can change perceptions and attitudes, and prevent stereotyping or dismissing people with disabilities

Person-first language recognizes the person before their disability. Person-first language can offset outdated stigmas by emphasizing people with disabilities are first and foremost human beings who happen to have a disability. The use of person-first language prioritizes the same respectful treatment as people without disabilities. In many settings person-first language is the preferred method of referring to individuals with disabilities. Many parents of children with disabilities prefer person-first language, because they do see their child first, and not their child's disability.

Identify-first language recognizes that the disability is an important part of a person's identity and often aligns with a larger community they are part of. Some disability communities, such as Autistic and Deaf communities, will primarily use identity-first language, and may not to consider themselves disabled at all, just neurodiverse. The Deaf community in the U.S. shares a language—American Sign Language—and a culture. Others in the Autism community, including parents of children with autism, prefer person-first language.

Child-Centered Language

In general, when speaking about children who have disabilities, **child-centered language** can help everyone to see and address the child first, rather than their disability. However, disability can be an important part of a child's identity. Take the time to find out how children see themselves or prefer to talk about themselves. This will establish a relationship based on recognition and respect for the individual child.

Inclusion and Language

Inclusion mean respecting the individual person's choice of language they use about themselves.

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2.6: Reflection on Learning



Image Source: Early Childhood Inclusion. *Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.*

Fig. 2.6. Preschool teacher working with young boy playing with linking blocks.

Reflection: Inclusion and Children with Disabilities

All children deserve the right to learn next to their peers in a classroom, which should be inclusive for all children and their families.

Inclusion means that children should have access to a wide range of learning opportunities and materials; they should be able to participate in daily routines and have support Ideas around inclusion in the early childhood field have evolved steadily over the past few decades, and are continuing to progress. This has occurred in a context of ongoing social change, which has been accompanied by similar changes across a range of social values and ideas.

Effective early childhood educators understand that creating an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to a diverse range of characteristics and needs, can be a challenging. Inclusive education in the early years classroom focuses on children with special needs, such as physical impairment or autism, and for at-risk children in relation to issues of poverty and other socio-economic issues.



Critical Thinking Questions

- Why does inclusion matter in early childhood settings?
- What can educators do to create inclusive early childhood contexts that provide children and families with the opportunity to develop understandings of difference and diversity?
- After reading about inclusion, what does an inclusive classroom look like to you for various ages?
  - What about multi-aged classrooms?
- Does typical and atypical/exceptional development exists in childcare?
  - What are your thoughts on this topic?
- What are your thoughts about Person-First Language versus Identity-First Language?

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3: LEGAL AND ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TEACHING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

3.1: Framework for Learning

3.2: Developmental Disabilities Act (1963)

3.3: Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and Head Start

3.4: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

3.5: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

3.6: No Child Left Behind and President Bush

3.7: Reflection on Learning

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3.1: Framework for Learning

Inclusion: Understanding Legal and Ethical Requirements

Watch the short video below for an overview of the history of Federal Education Laws for students with disabilities. Notice how the laws and the language used to describe them evolves over the years.

YouTube Video

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After this chapter, you should be able to:

- summarize the history of legislation and the disabilities movements
- summarize rights and responsibilities under ADA/IDEA 2004/IEP/IFSP
- summarize the ethical responsibility of Early Childhood Educators

Key Terms and Concepts:

- Developmental Disabilities Act (1963)
- University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1975)
- Economic Opportunity Act of 1964
- Head Start Programs
- Child Find
- Informed Referral Networks
- Local Educational Agency (LEA)

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3.2: Developmental Disabilities Act (1963)



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Fig. 3.2 Graphic with disabilities icons.

Developmental Disabilities Act (1963)

In the first half of the 20th century individuals with developmental disabilities faced exclusion from many spheres of public and private life, including most schools. In October, 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed the law what is now known as the *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act)* which provided *a* fundamentally different vision of what it meant to live with a developmental disability.

"It is a vision rooted in the belief that "disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and ***educational mainstream*** *of United States society."*

Among other things, this law provided federal funds to establish University Affiliated Facilities (UAF) whose focus would be on the needs of people with disabilities The committee suggested developing disability-related programs at universities that would help people with disabilities through research, service, and training. This program evolved and today the facilities are named **University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs)**. UCEDDs have played a major role in disability initiatives in the United States in

- creating, demonstrating, and evaluating intervention and educational programs for children and youth with disabilities and their families
- providing professional trainees with interdisciplinary training
- conducting research related to human development and developmental delays
- establishing university-community partnerships to improve services for people with disabilities



Image Source: University of Cincinnati's Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children With Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

All young children with disabilities should have access to high-quality inclusive early childhood programs that provide individualized and appropriate support so they can fully participate alongside their peers without disabilities, meet high expectations, and achieve their full potential. The responsibility to ensure that young children with disabilities and their families are included in high-quality early childhood programs is shared by federal, State, and local governments, early childhood systems, early childhood programs and providers, local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools.

Sources

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3.3: Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and Head Start

Head Start and President Johnson

For children who live in poverty, **Head Start** has been providing preschool education since 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Program development was supported by using research that highlighted the connection between poverty and education.

Head Start is a federally funded program that provides free services to support preschool and early learning and development, health and well-being for families that meet certain criteria and have children from birth to age 5, and for those who are pregnant. Your Head Start program may offer additional services beyond those listed below.

- **early education**
  - full-day preschool for birth-age 5
  - learning through play, creative expression, and guided activities
  - language and literacy development, early math and science concepts
  - positive attitudes toward learning
- **health, nutrition, and wellness**
  - promote physical development both indoors and outdoors
  - serve breakfast and lunch, as well as healthy snacks
  - nutrition support for families
  - provide medical, dental, hearing, vision, and behavioral screening
- **parenting support and family well-being**
  - social services and self-sufficiency goals (employment, training, parenting)
  - evidence-based

- **pregnancy**
  - connection to community resource for support with accessing food, housing, mental health and other resources



Image Source: Discover What Head Start Programs Offer. (Download PDF). *HeadStart.gov*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Fig. 3.3 Chart that lists services provided by Head Start - pregnancy, health and wellness, nutrition, support and engagement, and early childhood education.

Highlights in the History of Head Start

1964

The **Economic Opportunity Act** of 1964 is enacted and includes programs such as: Job Corps, Urban/Rural Community Action, VISTA, **Project Head Start** and many more.

"*As a former teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Texas, President Johnson believes strongly that* ***education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty.*** *Moreover, child development experts have found that* ***early intervention programs*** *could significantly affect the cognitive and socio-emotional development of low-income children.*"

1972

Services to Children with Disabilities: Congress amends the Economic Opportunity Act, calling to expand Head Start program opportunities for handicapped children. Head Start collaborates with other federal programs through the **Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Program (EPSDT),** to provide comprehensive prevention and treatment services for children.

1975

Head Start Program Performance Standards: Head Start publishes first performance standards that detail guidelines for serving children ages 3 to 5. Revised in 1998 that requires at least one teacher in each classroom to have an Associate degree, includes flexibility for full-day, full year services and develops measures for academic skills.

1980

Children with Disabilities: Mainstreaming preschool children with disabilities is a major effort throughout the late 1970s and early 80s. The Head Start Bureau funds and publishes a series of manuals designed to help programs integrate children with disabilities into their classroom. This includes children with health impairments, children with speech and language impairments, children with hearing impairments, children with orthopedic handicaps, children with mental retardation, and children with emotional disturbances.

1987

McKinney-Vento Act: Congress passes the **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** (renamed in 1990) that requires educational and social services for families. Head Start and Early Head Start programs use the definition of homelessness in the Act to automatically enroll eligible children. Programs must make efforts to locate and recruit **children experiencing homelessness** and to maintain their attendance.

1991

Multicultural Principles: The Head Start Bureau publishes the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs. Its purpose is to stand as a challenge for programs to focus efforts on **individualizing services so that every child and family feels respected and values, and is able to grow in accepting and appreciating difference.**

2002

The Department of Health and Human Services implements a national training program with the goal of training the nearly

50,000 Head Start teachers in early literacy teaching techniques.

2012

Tribal Language: OHS releases a Tribal Language Report, which details the successes, progress, and challenges faced by tribal communities in various stages of preserving, revitalizing, or reclaiming their tribal language. Recommendations highlight the efforts of Head Start agencies required to support children's and families' cultural and linguistic diversity.

2020

COVID-19 suspends most in-person services: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) deeply affected Head Start and Early Head Start programs, enrolled children and families, and communities. Most programs stopped in-person services, offering instead a mix of virtual or remote child development services, combined with other family supports. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided $750 million to support programs and maintain service delivery to children and families. Head Start programs that continued in-person services were examples to all early childhood programs on how to be safe while serving essential workers.

Sources

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- Head Start Timeline. *Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center*. U.s. Department of Health and Human Resources & the Office of Administration for Children and Families. Website.

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3.4: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)



Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

During most of the 20th century, children with disabilities frequently faced discrimination in public education either through the lack of appropriate accommodations or complete exclusion from local schools. At the start of the 1970s, only about 20% of children with disabilities attended a public school. Often, instead of attending local schools, children who were blind, deaf, had physical disabilities like cerebral palsy, or had intellectual disabilities like Down syndrome were sent to institutions with little to no educational instruction. Parents and disability activists at the time called for an end to forcing children with disabilities into separate learning facilities.

The legislative history of educational reforms began with the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965**, which was *the first time the federal government allocated direct aid to states for public education.*

Education reforms continued and in 1975, the United States Congress passed the **Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)**. In 1990 it was renamed and is as the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** The most recent amendment is **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004),** a federal law that ensures children with disabilities have access to a **free and appropriate public education (FAPE):**

The stated purpose of the IDEA is:

- to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living
- to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected
- to assist States, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities
- to assist States in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families
- to ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services;
- to assess, and ensure the effectiveness of, efforts to educate children with disabilities

The key components of this law are also outlined in the short video below.

YouTube Video

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Child Find: Identify|Locate|Evaluate |Provide

Legally, public schools have a duty to *educate every child*, from early childhood through high school, within the district and are obligated to meet each child *where they are at* by providing special education and related services regardless of the severity of their disability.

Child Find is a provision within **Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA**) that ensures local public school districts are **identifying students in need of special education services** in order to provide them with a **free appropriate public education (FAPE).** In addition, **Part C of IDEA** provides for an **Early Intervention Program** for all young children with disabilities and their families.

School districts are required to locate, identify and evaluate children with disabilities within their attendance area. To assist in this child find process, districts have developed **Informed Referral Networks**. An Informed Referral Network is comprised of community partners working together to serve young children and their families. Relationships with community partners have proven to be the most effective practice in identifying children with disabilities. These partnerships provide an opportunity to learn more about screening young children and providing information about community resources. This community network refers children who may have a disability and a need for special education. **Local educational agencies (LEAs)** must comply with certain state and federal special education notice requirements by placing the following notices in newspapers or other media.



Image Source: Michigan Alliance for Families

Fig. 3.4 Child Find Chart that states Identify. Locate. Evaluate. Provide.

Sources

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- Early Childhood: Child Find. *Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.* Website.

- Ross, Nathaniel. "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1975)." *Embryo Project Encyclopedia*. Arizona State University. Copyright Arizona Board of Regents Licensed as Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

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3.5: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)



Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Public Education

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** was signed into law in 1990, and is an important piece of **American Civil Rights Legislation.** The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, state and local government, including public schools (Title II), public accommodations (Title III), commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications.

ADA - Title II Regulations

Title II of the ADA prevents local **public organizations** from discriminating against people with disabilities. This means organizations like the **local school system,** public train, public housing, and other city and state government buildings.

For example, Title II is the reason your local school and library is required to have a ramp or elevator, and public housing must accommodate service animals, even if pets are not permitted.

ADA - Title III Regulations

Child care programs are considered **public accommodations** and are therefore subject to **Title III regulation**s.

Title III requires that child care programs, regardless of size or number of employees, not discriminate against persons with disabilities on the basis of their disability. Therefore, children with disabilities must be provided with equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of the child care program, including learning activities, services, outdoor spaces, etc. The only exception to this rule is when the program is under the direct management of a religious agency such as a church, parochial school, temple, mosque, etc.

The ADA asks programs to make **reasonable modifications** to their **policies, practices or physical space** to integrate children with disabilities into their programs, unless doing so would require a fundamental alteration or undue burden (e.g., adding an elevator to a building to accommodate a child with a wheel chair, etc.).

In the video below, the kids of *Undivided* break down the importance of the Americans with Disability Act and the impact it made in promoting all-around inclusivity.

YouTube Video

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View this YouTube Video online

Undivided is a trusted partner, supporting parents in helping their children with disabilities dream bigger and achieve more

through technology, collective knowledge, and comprehensive resource support

Source

- Understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). *Child Care*. Wisconsin Department for Children and Families.

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3.6: No Child Left Behind and President Bush

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002)

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** of 2001. This legislation governs elementary and secondary education in the United States. It is important legislation for students with disabilities because it ensures that they also reach high academic standards, just like other children in America's public schools today.

The No Child Left Behind Act contains **four basic education reform principles** –

- stronger accountability for results
- increased flexibility and local school system control
- expanded options for parents
- an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (evidence-based)

The accountability for results principle has the potential to significantly improve the educational results demonstrated by all children with disabilities.

What is the difference between IDEA and NCLB?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifically **governs services** that are provided to students with disabilities. It provides individual accountability through Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) developed on the basis of each child's unique needs.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)complements the provisions in IDEA by providing **public accountability** at the school, district, and state levels for all students with disabilities. It builds on IDEA law, which requires the participation of students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments.

The accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind hold schools accountable for the educational results of all children – including those with disabilities. Too often in the past, students with disabilities were excluded from assessments and accountability systems, and the consequence was that they did not receive the attention that they deserved. Access and exposure to the general curriculum for students with disabilities often did not occur, and there was no external measure to indicate whether they were learning enough to attend post-secondary educational institutions or enter the workforce.

The No Child Left Behind accountability system is defined in terms of **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**, a way to measure the improvement in achieving standards for all students each year. All students are to be assessed and included in accountability determinations for No Child Left Behind, and results must be reported for all students

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is good for students with disabilities because it ensures that schools are held accountable for their educational results, just as the schools are held accountable for the educational results of students without disabilities.

Every Child Success Act (ESSA) (2015)

The **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** was signed by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015. This bipartisan bill reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The previous version of the law, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Over time, NCLB's requirements lacked flexibility and parents, educators, and elected officials across the country recognized that a strong, updated law was necessary to expand opportunity to all students; support schools, teachers, and principals; and to strengthen our education system.

ESSA requires the same academic content and achievement standards for all students (except alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities). . All assessments must be developed, to the extent practicable, using principles of **Universal Design for Learning (UDL).**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- provides flexibility in the ways information is presented
- in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills
- in the ways students are engaged
- reduces barriers in instruction
- provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges
- maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient

Sources

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- ESSA: Key Provisions and Implications for Students with Disabilities. *Council of Chief School Officers (CCSO).* U.S. Department of Education,
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3.7: Reflection on Learning



Reflection: U.S. Laws and Children with Disabilities

Many different laws have been written to support not only children with disabilities but also their families.

- These laws protect individuals with disabilities not only in education but also in public places.
  - 1963 - Developmental Disabilities Act
  - 1964 - Economic Opportunity Act and Head Start
  - 1975 - Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Individuals Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004)
  - 1990 - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Tilte II and Title III
  - 2002 - No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act
  - 2015 - Every Child Succeeds Act



Critical Thinking Questions

- What do you notice about the progression of legislation starting in 1963?
  - What was life like for children with disabilities before these laws were enacted?
- How does Head Start address the needs of preschool children and their families.
  - How has it evolved since 1965, and what impact has it had on early childhood education across diverse communities in the United States?
- What are the key provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and and Individuals Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004)?
  - How do they ensure educational access and equality for children with disabilities?
  - Why are "Least Restrictive Environment" and "Free Appropriate Public Education" important in this context?

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4: CATEGORIES OF DISABILITIES

4.1: Framework for Learning

4.2: Emotional Disturbances

4.3: Speech and Language Disorders

4.4: Deaf and Hearing Impairment

4.5: Blind and Vision Impairment

4.6: Intellectual Disabilities/Cognitive Delays

4.7: Orthopedic Disabilities

4.8: Autism

4.9: Reflection on Learning

This page titled 4: Categories of Disabilities is shared under a CC BY 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Western Technical College.

4.1: Framework for Learning

Understanding the Categories of Disabilities

Watch the short video below to learn about 14 categories of disabilities discussed along with some specific strategies you can use in the classroom.

YouTube Video

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View this YouTube Video online

Defining Categories of Disabilities

Disability is an overall term defined by the **World Health Organization (WHO)** and incorporates these 3 components:

- impairment to:
  - body functions (sensory or cognitive functions)
  - body structures (organ or limb functions)
- activity limitations
  - carrying out daily activities such as self-care, mobility and learning.
- participation restrictions
  - challenges participating within the family and community environments or settings

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** defines a child with a disability as having

- an intellectual disability,
- a hearing impairment (including deafness)
- a speech or language impairment
- a visual impairment (including blindness)
- a serious emotional disturbance
- an orthopedic impairment
- autism
- traumatic brain injury
- other health impairments
- a specific learning disability
- multiple disabilities (e.g. deaf–blindness)

The Limitations of Categories

Be aware that naming and describing categories of disabilities you stay open to the reality that each child with a disability a unique. As Dr. Stephen Shore an autistic professor once said -- *“When you meet one person with Autism, you’ve met one person with Autism”*.

This could be said of children with all disabilities as well. The child may be challenged not only by their disability, but also by experiences common to all students, disabled or not. The same disability may pose more problems in one child or situation than in others. For example, a student with a reading difficulty may have trouble in a language arts class, for example, but not in phy-ed or a student with a hearing impairment may have more trouble "hearing" a topic that he dislikes compared to one that he likes.

Official descriptions of "categories of disabilities" do not factor in the inherent nuance and complexities in individual circumstances and experiences. Categorizations risk stereotyping the real, live humans to whom they are applied. Categories (or "labels") can be useful as a starting point to provide teachers, parents, and other professionals with a basic language or framework for talking about disabilities. Use the categories as a starting point for awareness, understanding, and learning, but be mindful of the uniqueness of each individual child.

After this chapter you should be able to define and explain these Categories of Disabilities:

- Emotional Disturbances
- Speech and Language Disorders
- Deaf and Hearing Impairment
- Blind and Vision Impairment
- Intellectual Disabilities and Cognitive Delays
- Orthopedic Disabilities

Key Terms

- Autism
- Blind, blindness
- Deaf, deafness
- Developmental delay

Sources

- Categories of Disabilities and Their Ambiguities. *Educational Psychology (Seifert and Sutton)*. LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library.
- Disability. *World Heath Organization (WHO)*
- Individuals with Disabilties Act (IDEA). *IDEA History*. U.S. Department of Education.

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4.2: Emotional Disturbances

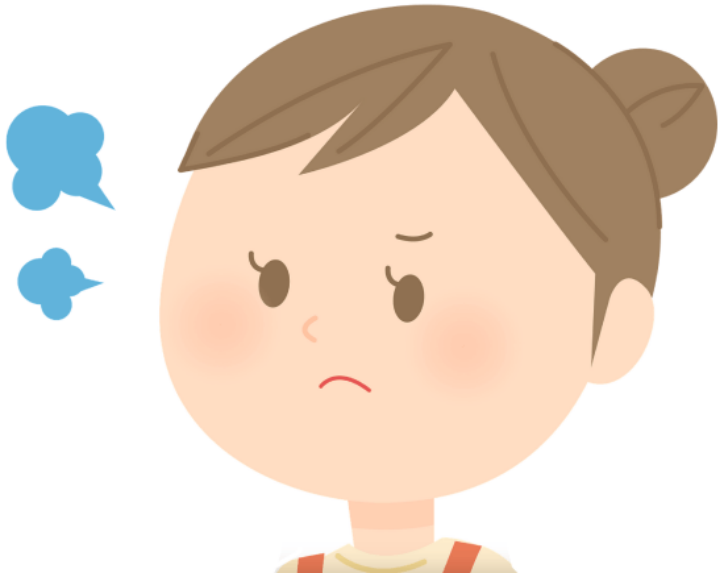


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Emotional Disturbances in Children

The term **emotional disturbance** is used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Other terminology includes **emotional disability** and e**motional or behavioral disorders**. These terms refers to psychological disorders that impact a child's behavior, emotions, and moods.

Background

- Before the 20th century, people with serious emotional and behavioral disorders were often institutionalized and segregated from society.
- During the 20th century came the development of professional organizations such as the **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** and the **American Orthopsychiatric Association,** which advocated for the rights of people with emotional and behavioral disorders.
- In addition, mental health interventions for children with emotional and behavioral disorders became increasingly available through programs such as Project Re-ED: A Project for the Re-Education of Emotionally Disturbed Children," to address the need for affordable and effective mental health services for children at the time.
- in 1997, the reauthorization of the IDEA meant that emotional disturbance was finally included as a disability classification. Before this time, students with emotional and behavioral disorders were not eligible for special education or related services.

Defining Emotional Disturbance (IDEA 2004)

The **Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004)** describes "emotional disturbance" as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Defining Emotional Disturbance (CCBD)

The **Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD)** is a Special Interest Division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The CCBD is an advocacy group for children with emotional and behavioral disorders. They use the following characteristics to define students with emotional disturbance:

- Hyperactivity (short attention span, impulsiveness)
- Aggression or self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting)
- Withdrawal (not interacting socially with others, excessive fear or anxiety)
- Immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills)
- Learning difficulties (academically performing below grade level)



Image Source: Pixabay

Fig. 4.2. Young girl painting at an easel.

Inclusion Strategies for the Classroom

- establish co-teaching relationships and collaboration with service providers
- establish positive relationships with students and their families in culturally relevant ways
- create a safe, supportive, and equitable classroom environment
- develop clear and consistent behavior management plans that involve everyone who works with the student
- implement proactive social-emotional and/or therapeutic learning programs
- promote self-care

Sources

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- Re-ED 101: Three Big Ideas that Changed Everything. Psychology and Methodology. Positive Education Program (PEP)
- Sec. 300.8 (c) (4) IDEA Individuals with Disabiltiies Act. U.S. Department of Education.
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4.3: Speech and Language Disorders

Students with Communication Disorders: Speech and Language

Communication is the expression of thoughts, including ideas, feelings, and opinions, between two or more people using language and speech. **Communication disorders** may be caused by congenital conditions such as Down syndrome or acquired after birth, for example, a traumatic brain injury.

Communication disorders are classified as **organic** or **functional**.

- **organic** communication disorders result from an abnormal structure or neuromuscular malfunction in the speech organs (e.g., cleft palate)
- **functional** communication disorders have no organic cause but are presumed to result from environmental risk factors.

Language as a concept is a rule-governed system of symbols that people use to communicate. Language may also be expressed using sign languages such as American Sign Language. In addition, language also includes nonverbal cues such as gestures, body posture, proximity, eye contact, and facial expressions. Communication requires using both verbal and nonverbal components of language. A language disorder is characterized by difficulty conveying meaning using speech, writing or even nonverbal gestures.

Speech is the **physical ability** to **articulate language.** A speech disorder is characterized by difficulty with speech and sound production, voice, resonance, or fluency (the flow of speech).



Image Source: Freepik

Communication Disorders

A **communication disorder** is an impairment in the ability to receive, send, process, and comprehend concepts or verbal, nonverbal, or written systems. A communication disorder may show up in a child's hearing, language, and/or speech. Many children will experience a temporary delay in speech and language development. While most will eventually catch up, still other will continue to experience difficulty with communication.

Communication disorders

- may range in severity from mild to profound
- may be *developmental* or *acquired*

- may demonstrate only one or have a combination of communication disorders
- may result in a primary disability or it may be secondary to other disabilities
- can adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Stuttering

Fluency is the natural "flow" or forward movement of speech. Stuttering is the most common type of fluency disorder. Stuttering happens when there are an abnormal number of repetitions, hesitations, prolongations, or blocks in this rhythm or flow of speech. Tension may also be seen in the face, neck, shoulders or fists. The cause is likely linked to underlying neurological differences in speech and language processing. Other names for stuttering are **stammering** and **childhood-onset fluency disorder.**

Speech Sound Disorders

A child with a speech sound disorder is unable to say all of the speech sounds in words. This can make the child's speech hard to understand. For most children, the cause of the speech sound disorder is unknown, but other speech sound disorders can be linked to cleft palate, problems with the teeth, hearing loss, or difficulty controlling the movements of the mouth.

Voice Disorders

The voice is produced as air from the lungs moves up through and vibrates the vocal folds. With voice disorders, the voice may be harsh, hoarse, raspy, cut in and out, or show sudden changes in pitch. Voice disorders can be due to vocal nodules, cysts, papillomas, paralysis or weakness of the vocal folds.

Resonance Disorders

Resonance is the overall quality of the voice. A resonance disorder is when the quality of the voice changes as it travels through the different-shaped spaces of the throat, nose and mouth. Depending on the resonance issue, a child may sound "stopped up," sound overly nasal, or sound muffled and quiet.

Receptive Language Disorders

- difficulty understanding words and/or sentences
- difficulty attending to the speech of others
- difficulty with following directions and learning

Expressive Language Disorder

- difficulty using the right words when talking
- difficulty combining words to make sentences
- limited vocabulary
- difficulty putting sentences together correctly

Inclusion Strategies for the Classroom

Consult a Speech Language expert concerning each child with a communicative disorder in your class and work with him/her throughout the class. A Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) works with other members of the multidisciplinary team, such as parents and psychologists, to determine how the disorder may impact other areas of a child's life. They may also conduct observations in different classroom settings, during different activities, and with different conversational partners to assess the impact the communication disorder has on the child's ability to learn and identify the appropriate interventions.

- treat the student with a disability as you would any other student
- speak to the child naturally
- create a classroom atmosphere conducive to easy and good interactive communication
- stay up-to-date on the child's accomplishments in speech therapy

- give the child the opportunity to speak in class
- be a good listener
- patiently give the child time to express themselves without interrupting or trying to fill in gaps for them
- use a peer-buddy system when appropriate

Sources

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4.4: Deaf and Hearing Impairment



Image Source: Bjorn Knetsch. Infant with cochlear implant . Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 4.4. Baby with cochlear implant.

Deaf or Hearing Impairment

Definitions of deaf and hard of hearing are based on the type and degree of hearing loss. Hearing depends on a series of steps that change sound waves in the air into electrical signals. Our auditory nerve then carries these signals to the brain.

Degree of hearing loss is described on a scale from slight to profound and is based on decibels (dB).

- mild hearing loss - can hear sounds only at 30 dB
- moderate hearing loss - can hear only sounds closer to 50 dB
- profound hearing loss - can hear sounds only at 90 dB

Age of onset is also used to describe hearing loss. Children's hearing loss may also be described based on *age of onset*.

- **congenital hearing loss** had hearing loss *at birth*
- **adventitious hearing loss** experienced hearing loss *after birth*
- **prelingual hearing loss** occurs *before the development of speech and language*
- **postlingual hearing** loss occurs *after the development of speech and language*

Defining Deaf and Hearing Impairment

The IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) uses the term **hearing impairment**. Some people in the Deaf community consider this term offensive because it focuses on what a student cannot do. This term should not be used to refer to a student who is deaf or hard of hearing.

The IDEA defines deafness and hearing impairment as the following

- deafness means a hearing impairment so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child's educational performance
- hearing impairment means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section

Wisconsin State Law

Deaf and hard of hearing means a decreased ability to detect sound in one or both ears with or without amplification, whether permanent or chronically fluctuating, which adversely affects a child's educational performance. This includes academic performance, speech perception, speech production, or communication including language acquisition or expression. A current evaluation by an audiologist licensed under state statutes shall be one of the components for an initial evaluation of a child with suspected hearing loss. A licensed teacher of the deaf or hard of hearing must be a member of the IEP team when determining eligibility for services.

The American Speech–Language–Hearing Association (ASHA)

A hearing disorder is the result of impaired auditory sensitivity of the physiological auditory system. A hearing disorder may limit the development, comprehension, production, and/or maintenance of speech and/or language. Hearing disorders are classified according to difficulties in detection, recognition, discrimination, comprehension, and perception of auditory information. Individuals with hearing impairment may be described as deaf or hard of hearing.

- **Deaf** is defined as a hearing disorder that limits a child's aural/oral communication performance to the extent that the primary sensory input for communication may be other than the auditory channel.
- **Hard of hearing** is defined as a hearing disorder, whether fluctuating or permanent, which adversely affects a child's ability to communicate. The child relies on the auditory channel as the primary sensory input for communication



Image Source: Learning Sign Language. Wikimedia Commons

4.4.1. Two young girls communicating via sign language.

Inclusion Strategies for the Classroom

Adjustments in teaching children with hearing loss are relatively easy to make but require deliberate actions or choices by the teacher and by classmates. Interestingly, many of the strategies make good advice for teaching all students!

- **Take advantage of the student's residual hearing.**
  - seat the child close to you or key classmates when children are working in a group.

    - keep competing noises (unnecessary talking or whispering) to a minimum to avoid distraction for the child with hearing loss
    - keep instructions concise and to-the-point
    - check in with the student child occasionally to see if they understand
- **Use visual cues liberally.**
    - use images, charts or diagrams wherever appropriate to illustrate what you are saying
    - look directly at the child when you are speaking tot hem to facilitate lip reading
    - gesture and point to key words or objects (within reason, not excessively)
- **Include the student in the community of the classroom.**
    - recruit one or more classmates to assist in "translating" verbal comments that the student may have missed.
    - if the child uses American Sign Language (ASL) at home or elsewhere, learn a few basics signs yourself -- "Hello" "thank you" "How are you?")
        - teach these basic signs to the class

Sources

- Deaf and Hard of Hearing *Special Education Disability Categories*. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
- Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairments. *Educational Psychology (Seifert and Sutton)*. . Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairments is shared under a CC BY 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Kelvin Seifert & Rosemary Sutton (Global Text Project) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.
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4.5: Blind and Vision Impairment

Blindness and Low Vision

Blindness and low vision have many different causes affecting different parts and functions of the eye. Vision relies on an interaction between the eye and the brain. Electrical signals travel from the retina through the optic nerve to the brain. The brain then turns the signals into images.

Typically, children with vision loss that can't be fixed with glasses, contacts, or other methods have a visual impairment. Examples of vision impairment in children may be

- amblyopia (Lazy eye)
- strabismus (crossed eyes)
- eye or brain injuries
- birth defects.



Image Source: PxHere. CC0 Public Domain

Fig. 4.5. Toddler boy wearing glasses.

Definitions

IDEA

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) uses the term *visual impairment* and defines it as the following.

- Visual impairment including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness (IDEA, Part B)

Educators and clinicians should note that while the IDEA definition uses the term **partial sight**, the more commonly used term is **low vision.**

Wisconsin State Law

State laws often include definitions for blindness. Legal definitions are used for determining eligibility for government services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation for adults) rather than eligibility for special education and related services.

Blind and visually impaired means even after correction a child's visual functioning adversely affects educational performance. The IEP team may identify a child as blind and visually impaired after all of the following events occur:

- A licensed teacher of the blind and visually impaired conducts a functional vision evaluation which includes a review

of medical information from an ophthalmologist or optometrist, formal and informal tests of visual functioning, and a determination of the implications of the blindness or visual impairment on the educational and curricular needs of the child.
- An licensed orientation and mobility specialist evaluates the child to determine if there are related orientation and mobility needs in home, school, or community environments. A child may meet the criteria under this subdivision even if they do not have orientation and mobility needs.

Visual Acuity

These laws are associated with **visual acuity.** Typically, a standard distance of 20 feet is used as a base measure of visual acuity. For example, an individual with 20/20 vision must be able to identify letters or objects at a distance of 20 feet. Visual acuity of 20/200 means that an individual can identify letters or objects at a distance of 20 feet that a typically sighted individual could see at 200 feet.

In addition, these definitions take into account the use of corrective lenses and the eye with the best vision using corrective lenses.


little girl learning braille

Image Source: American Foundation for the Blind

Fig. 4.5.1. Toddler girl learning braille.

Inclusion Strategies in the Classroom

- **Take advantage of the student's residual vision.**
  - if the child still has some useful vision, place him or her where he can easily see the most important parts of the room (you, classmates, storybook. whiteboard, video screen, etc.)
  - seat the student in a well-lit area - good lighting makes reading easier with low vision).
  - use handouts, books, and other reading materials that have good, sharp contrast
- **Use non-visual information liberally.**
  - explain visual things clearly - the layout of the classroom, the appearance of photographs in a textbook or of story lines in a video.
  - use hands-on materials wherever they will work - maps printed in three-dimensional relief or with different textures
  - allow the child to use Braille (an alphabet for the blind using patterns of small bumps on a page) if they know how.
- **Include the student in the community of the classroom.**
  - take care that the child is accepted into the social life of the class, as much as possible
  - recruit classmates to help explain visual material when necessary.
  - learn a bit of basic Braille and encourage classmates to explore it as well

Sources

- Blind and Visual Impaired. *Special Education Disability Categories*. Wiscosnin Department of Public Instruction.
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4.6: Intellectual Disabilities/Cognitive Delays



Image Source: Andrea's Photography. Flickr. August 2008. CC-BY 4.0

Fig. 4.6. Preschool girl with Down's Syndrome playing with toy.

What is an Intellectual Disability?

Intellectual disability is a term used when a person has certain **limitations in mental functioning and skills** (communicating, taking care of themselves, and social skills). These limitations will cause a child to learn and develop more slowly than a typical child. It is not a disease, it's not contagious. It's also not a form of mental illness. While there are no cures for intellectual disabilities, most children can learn to do many things given the time, effort, and encouragement.

Children with intellectual disabilities (sometimes called *cognitive disabilities*) may take longer to learn to speak, walk, and take care of their personal needs such as dressing or eating. They are likely to have trouble learning in school. They *will* learn, but it will take them longer. With ongoing support, the child's functioning can be improved but there may be some things they cannot learn.

What Causes an Intellectual Disability?

Doctors have found many causes of intellectual disabilities. The most common are:

- **Genetic conditions**.
  - abnormal genes inherited from parents, errors when genes combine, or other reasons.
  - examples: Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome, and phenylketonuria (PKU).
- **Problems during pregnancy**. An intellectual disability can result
  - when the baby does not develop inside the mother properly
  - examples: problems with the way the baby's cells divide as it grows, infections such as rubella during pregnancy, alcohold or durg use while pregnant
- **Problems at birth.**
  - problems during labor and birth
  - example: not getting enough oxygen
- **Health problems.**
  - diseases: whooping cough, measles, or meningitis

- extreme malnutrition
- inadequate medical care
- exposure to poisons like lead or mercury

Definitions

There are three primary definitions of intellectual disabilities.

1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning
  - defined as a score on a standardized intelligence test below 68 (significantly below an average score of 100)
- exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior
- manifests during the developmental period - between birth and 18 years of age
- adversely affects a child's educational performance

2. American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)

- characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills.
- originates during the developmental period, defined as before the age of 22

3. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association

- includes both **intellectual and adaptive functioning deficits**
- **three criteria** must be met for a child to be diagnosed with an intellectual disability
  - **deficits in intellectual functions** - reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, and learning from experience,
  - **deficits in adaptive functioning** that result in failure to meet developmental and sociocultural standards for personal independence and social responsibility.
  - **onset** of intellectual and adaptive deficits **during the developmental period**
- **four severity levels of intellectual disability**: mild, moderate, severe, and profound
  - diagnosed on the basis of adaptive functioning
    - educators and clinicians provide appropriate interventions for students.

Adaptive Behaviors

Adaptive behaviors are **"learned behaviors."** These behavior's encompass the child's conceptual social and practical behaviors - the skills and tasks needed to function in everyday life.

The purpose of definitions is provide criteria to support the identification of students with an intellectual disability. However, it is important to recognize that **adaptive behaviors are malleable** and with appropriate ongoing interventions and supports, children with intellectual disabilities can improve their adaptive behaviors.

Conceptual skills:

- memory
- language
- reading
- writing
- math reasoning
- acquisition of practical knowledge
- problem solving
- judgment in novel situations.

Social skills:

- empathy
- awareness of others' thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- interpersonal communication
- friendship abilities
- social judgment

Practical skills:

- learning and self-management across life settings
  - personal care
  - self-management of behavior
  - school tasks



Image Source: Christi Warren. Santa Rosa Preschool Celebrate World Down Syndrome Day. *Press Democrat*. 2018

Fig. 4.6.1. Preschool boy with Down's Syndrome and preschool girl coloring with markers and laughing.

Inclusion Strategies for the Classroom

- **Give more time and practice than usual**
  - Students with mild intellectual disabilities may be able to learn the basics of what's being taught, but may need more time to accomplish goals than other students. Giving extra help takes time and perseverance, and can try the patience of the student (and of you, too). To deal with this problem, it may help to reward the student frequently for effort and successes with well-timed praise, especially if it is focused on specific, actual achievements. Giving appropriate praise is easier if you set reasonable, "do-able" goals by breaking skills or tasks into steps that the student is likely to learn without becoming overly discouraged.
- **Embed activities into the context of daily life or functioning where possible (adaptive and functional skills)**
  - Select activities that relate to the learning goals in the child's everyday life and activities, just as you would with all students. For example, try encouraging the student to learn words that are especially useful to the student's own life such as naming things or pointing to the named thing: foods, clothing, furniture parts of their body, animals, shapes, colors, etc. Often the student, not you yourself, is the best person to decide what these words actually are.
- **Include the child both in social and in academic activities, rather than just one OR the other**
  - **The key word here is inclusion**: the child should participate in and contribute to the life of the class as much as possible - playing a group game, singing, clapping, outdoor play, etc. The changes resulting from these inclusions can be positive for everyone and foster acceptance and helpfulness toward the child with the disability. Classmates learn that school is partly about providing opportunities for everyone. This type of inclusion also stimulates the child with

the disability to learn as much as possible from classmates, socially and academically. These group activities can give the student chances to practice "belonging" skills— how to greet classmates appropriately, or when and how to ask the teacher a question.

Sources

- Definitions of Intellectual Disabilities. *The Psychology of Exceptional Children (Zaleski). LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library.* Definitions of Intellectual Disabilities is shared under a CC BY 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Diana Zaleski (Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)) .
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4.7: Orthopedic Disabilities



Image Source: Tracy Lee Carroll. Flickr. CC-BY-ND 4.0

Fig. 4.7. Preschool boy with arm cuff crutches and leg brace.

Orthopedic and Physical Disabilities

A physical disability is a condition that impacts a child's ability to use their body.

Each physical and health disability category has a unique history. It was not until the 19th-century that physicians began to understand the underlying causes of disorders that resulted in physical and health disabilities. Before Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), many children with physical and health disabilities were denied access to a public education or segregated from their peers. Most school buildings could not accommodate wheelchairs or students with limited mobility. However, in 1975, the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act guaranteed a **free and appropriate public education** for children with disabilities in the United States.

Physical disabilities are **conditions that affect movement** and can interfere with a chid's basic motor control (walking and standing) as well as fine motor control (writing, holding, or manipulating small objects using the hands.) Not all physical disabilities are orthopedic impairments. Children with physical disabilities may have **orthopedic impairments** which involves the skeletal system-bones, joints, limbs, and associated muscles, or they may hae **neuromotor impairments which** involves the central nervous system, and affects the ability to move, use, feel, or control certain parts of the body.

While they are two distinct and separate types of disabilities, they may cause similar limitations in movement.

Children with orthopedic impairments make up one of the most diverse groups of exceptional children due to the many types of diseases and disorders that interfere with the normal functioning of the muscles or bones. The range of medical services, educational placements, and therapies is equally diverse and highly specific to the person and their needs. They often require highly specialized interventions to optimize their potential.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Definition

Orthopedic impairment: “means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance." This includes impairments due to the effects of congenital anomaly, disease, or injury

- **congenital anomalies**
  - clubfoot or other limb defects
  - hip dysplasia
  - brittle bone disease (osteogenesis imperfecta)
  - scoliosis
  - cerebral palsy
    - caused by abnormal brain development or damage to the developing brain and affects a person's ability to control their muscles
  - spina bifida
    - an opening in one or more of the spinal column vertebrae that cause mild to severe physical and intellectual disabilities
  - muscular dystrophy
    - a group of muscle diseases caused by mutations in a person's genes that result in muscle weakness and decreased mobility.
- **diseases**
  - polio
  - bone tuberculosis
  - connective tissue disorders
- **injuries**
  - amputations
  - fractures or burns



Image Source: Disability Rights Maryland

Fig. 4.7.1. African American and white preschool boys with preschool Hispanic girl with leg braces seated in a small wheelchair.

Inclusive Strategies in the Classroom

There can be many educational challenges related to a student's mobility impairments and you might be wondering...what are some things we can do in the classroom for kids with orthopedic impairments?

Typically input from, the child's doctor's input will play a huge role, but also, the child's IEP team will have a plan in place based on the child's ability in the classroom. There may also be the need to modify the classroom so the child. has equal access to the same education as their peers.

Every child will be represent a unique situation, depending on the degree of severity of their disability and their functional limitations. For example, a child who uses a wheelchair could potentially have trouble maneuvering around the classroom so modifications and accommodation will be made depending on the individual child.

Here is list of ***possible*** accommodations for students with orthopedic impairments:

- extra time or extended time to get to class or complete an activity
- preferential seating in class if a child has a wheelchair or walker (close to the door)
- accessible transportation
- special arrangements for navigating the building in general (hallways, bathroom, etc.)
- frequent breaks
- adjustable furniture

Sources

- Accommodations for Students with Orthopedic Impairments. *The Adapted Classroom*.

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4.8: Autism

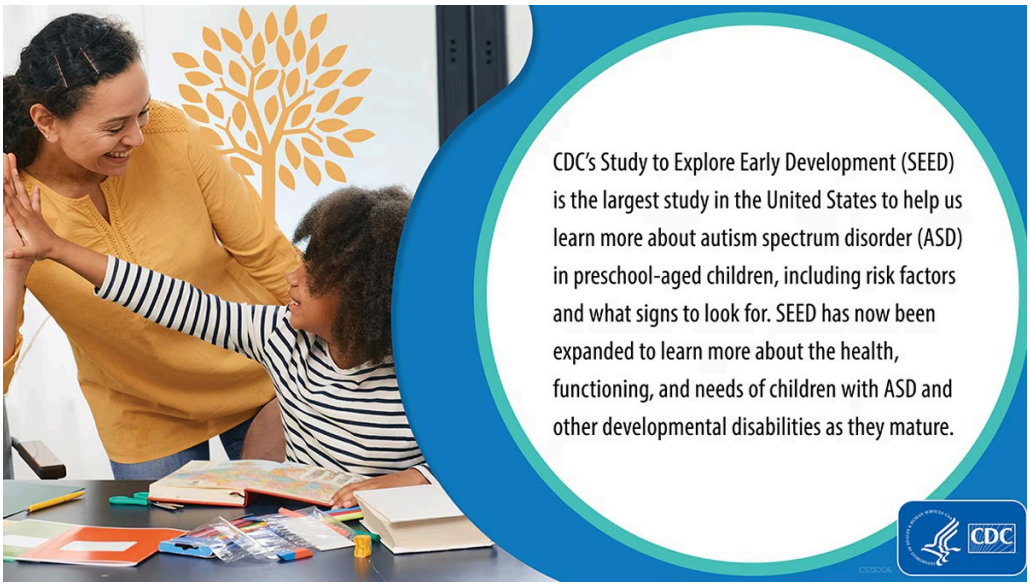


Image Source: Past, Present, and Future Impact of SEED. *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).* CDC.gov.

Fig. 4.8. Chart that describes the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Study to Explore Early Development (SEED) - about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in preschool age children, inlcuding risk factors and what signs to look for.

Exploring Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- CDC's Study to Explore Early Development (SEED) helps us learn more about **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**, risk factors, and developmental characteristics.
- SEED has now been expanded to learn more about the health, functioning, and needs of children with ASD and other developmental disabilities as they mature.

Autism spectrum disorder is probably the most misunderstood and puzzling of the neurodevelopmental disorders. Children with this disorder show signs of s**ignificant disturbances in three main areas:**

- **deficits in social interaction**
  - inability to make or keep eye contact
  - decreased facial recognition
  - limited ability to share interests or achievements
  - difficulty initiating social interactions or maintaining friendships
  - may turn away when spoken to
  - may prefer to play alone
- **deficits in communication**
  - delayed language development
  - no speech
  - limited speech
    - saying "yes" or "no" when replying to questions or statements that require additional elaboration
  - making up words (neologisms)
  - echolalia - the repetition of words and phrases, echoing the speaker
  - palilalia - a child repeats their own words
  - echopraxia - the repetition of others' gestures and movements
  - inability to reciprocate others comments

    - oversimplified speech patterns for their age
- **repetitive behaviors (stimming)**
    - rocking back and forth
    - hand flapping or wringing
    - twirling or jumping
    - pacing back and forth
    - repetitively dropping an object then picking it up
    - twirling or pulling hair
    - humming or tapping
    - sorting objects
- **sensory sensitivities/hypersensitivities**
    - heat or cold
    - scratchy clothing
    - loud noises and sound
    - smells, tastes, textures
    - visual stimuli - bright or flickering lights
- **special interests**
    - obsessively intrigued by a specific topic or interest (dinosaurs, maps, animals)
    - fixated by a single object or toy
    - obsession with a specific topic
    - distressed with any changes to routines, routes, organization, etc.

Deficits in **executive functioning skills** that enable planning, focusing attention, and remembering may contribute to these types of behaviors.

YouTube Video

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004)

In 1990, the IDEA included autism as a disability category but did not define it. They referred to autism as a *developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a child's educational performance*.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) Definition

The APA in th4 DSM-IV abd DSM V significantly changed the diagnosis of autism and related disorders over time. The examples below represent some of the characteristics of children with autism as manifested currently or by history, but are not exhaustive lists.

- **Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.**
    - deficits in social–emotional reciprocity
        - abnormal social approach
        - failure of normal back-and-forth conversation
        - reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect
        - failure to initiate or respond to social interactions
    - deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from
        - poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication
        - abnormalities in eye contact and body language
        - deficits in understanding

        - use of gestures
        - total lack of facial expressions
        - nonverbal communication.
    - deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
        - difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts
        - difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends
        - absences of interest in peers
- **Restrictive, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.**
    - stereotyped or repetitive motor movements
        - use of objects - lining up toys or flipping objects
        - simple motor stereotypes - stimming, hand flapping
        - use of speech - echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases
    - insistence on sameness and ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior
        - inflexible adherence to routines
        - extreme distress at small changes
        - difficulties with transitions
        - rigid thinking patterns
        - greeting rituals
        - need to take the same route to school or some other place
        - need to eat the same food every day
    - highly restricted, fixed interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
        - strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects
        - excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests
    - hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment
        - apparent indifference to pain/temperature
        - adverse response to specific sounds or textures
        - excessive smelling or touching of objects,
        - visual fascination with lights or movement

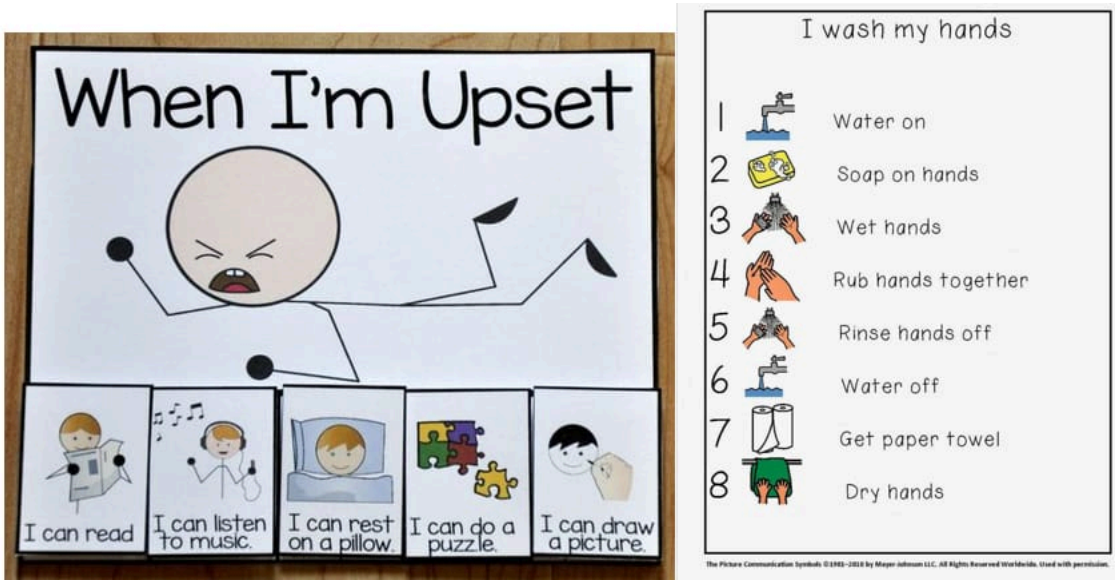


Image Source: Katherine McFarland. "Ten Tips to Help Children With Autism in Your Preschool." *Learning Links.*

Fig. 4.8. Visual charts that a child can point to describe their activities or feelings.

Inclusive Strategies in the Classroom

- **Accommodate executive function challenges**
    - break tasks down into small and easy steps

    - teach instructions with a song
    - use picture checklists
- **Provide low sensory areas**
    - weighted blankets
    - soft toys
    - noise reducing headphones
- **Create nonverbal opportunities for communication**
    - use emotion regulation visuals to help children with calming down strategies
    - encourage children to draw how they are feeling
- **Behavior supports**
    - use and model a calm low key tone of voice do de-escalate emotions
    - maintain the child's dignity to help the child feel more secure and trust in their carers
        - incorporate the child's own thoughts and ideas into any plans,
        - prevent other children from teasing or goading the child into reacting
        - don't label the child's behavior as naughty or bad
        - separate the child from the challenging behaviors
        - respect the child's privacy by being careful how you discuss the child's behaviour in front of others
        - give support strategies time to work

Sources

- Autism. Cincinnati Children's.
- McFarland. Katherine."Ten Tips to Help Children With Autism in Your Preschool." *Learning Links*. © Learning Links 2025
- Past, Present, and Future Impact of SEED. *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*. CDC.gov.
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4.9: Reflection on Learning



Image source: Child with spina bifida. Health Hub Heroines. *Four States Living. 2024*

Fig. 4.9. Toddler boy wearing leg braces using walker.

Reflection: Categories of Disabilities

Children with disabilities or other special needs refers to children with a specific diagnosis, as well as children who do not have a diagnosis but whose behavior, development, and/or health affect their family's ability to maintain child care services. The disability or special need may be as mild as a slight speech delay or as complex as a mixed diagnosis of motor challenges, vision impairment, and cognitive delays. Special health care needs can also include a variety of conditions such as birth defects, neurological disorders, orthopedic disorders, injury, and chronic illnesses that can be life threatening or impact daily living (e.g., cancer, sickle cell disease [or anemia], cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, AIDS, diabetes, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis). In addition children may experience a range of learning disabilties and emotional disturbances.

Having a solid foundation in developmentally appropriate practice, which includes the importance of learning about and meeting the needs of each individual child, goes a long way to providing inclusive early education. Support, accommodations, and collaboration are essential to providing inclusive early childhood education programming.



Critical Thinking Questions

Consider the following questions when adapting an activity for a child with special needs :

- Does the child have an opportunity to be in control of the learning experience?
- Is there a balance between adult-initiated learning and child-initiated learning?
- Can the child make choices while learning the skill?
- Is the child able to initiate his/her own efforts to practice the skill, with support given by the child care provider?
- Is the child gaining self-confidence and showing the joy of accomplishment while learning?
- Is there room in the activity for the child to make discoveries?

Source

- Esquivel, Krischa, et al. Families of Children with Special Needs or Special Health Care Needs. *The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.

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5: DIVERSITY AND ANTI-BIAS

5.1: Framework for Learning
5.2: Diversity and Anti-Bias Practice
5.3: How to Check Personal Bias
5.4: What Does a Diverse Classroom Look Like?
5.5: How to Teach Children About Different Disabilities
5.6: Reflection on Learning

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5.1: Framework for Learning

Understanding Diversity and Anti-Bias

The short video below by a past president of NAEYC discusses the value of anit-bias education in early childhood settings.

YouTube Video

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The concept of **diversity** means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of:

- race or ethnicity
- gender or sexual orientation,
- socio-economic status
- age
- physical or cognitive abilities,
- religious or political beliefs
- other ideologies.

Diversity is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

Diversity is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is extremely important to support and protect diversity, to value individuals and groups without prejudice, and foster a climate where equity and mutual respect are intrinsic.

Teachers can do many things to help increase equity in classrooms including using anti-bias curriculum and keeping in mind the cultural context of their students and families when designing curriculum and planning activities.

After this chapter you should be able to:

- define anti-bias and reflect on personal bias
- identify diversity in the context of children with special needs
- identify what diversity looks like in a classroom
- how to teach children about different disabilities

- diversity
- anti-bias
- explicit bias
- implicit bias

Source

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5.2: Diversity and Anti-Bias Practice

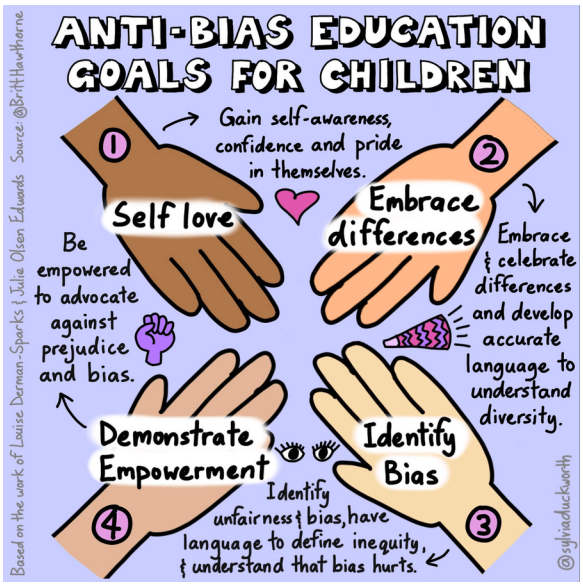


Image Source: Sylvia Duckworth. Flickr.com.

Fig. 5.2. Chart depicting anti-bias education goals for children asSelf-Love (gaining self-awareness, confidence, and pride in themselves); Identify Bias (use of language that defines inequity); Embrace Differences (use if language to understand and clebrate diversity); Demonstrate Empowerment (be an advocate against prejudice and bias).

What is the Difference Between Diversity and Anti-Bias?

- **Diversity**

Diversity --- describes the characteristics of people within a range of backgrounds and identities.

Diversity is a set of conscious practices that involves:

- understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.
- practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own.
- understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing;
- recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others;
- building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

- **Anti-Bias**

Anti-Bias --- actively challenges biased and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors about members in diverse groups and support inclusive and safe environments for everyone.

The Oxford Dictionary **defines anti-bias** as: t*he practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social or ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.*
The **"etc."** is where you will find children and families with disabilities.

Anti-Bias Awareness in the Classroom

The **anti-bias approach** urges educators to

- critically analyze what is being taught and communicated om the classroom
- critically analyze the learning materials available in the classrookm
- recognize the connections between ethnicity, gender, religion, and social class
- recognize the connections between power, privilege, prestige, and opportunity
- teach children about acceptance, tolerance and respect

Anti-bias curriculum provides activities that build a strong sense of self, empathy, a positive attitude towards people different from oneself, and healthy social interaction skills, students may be guided towards the path of social justice.

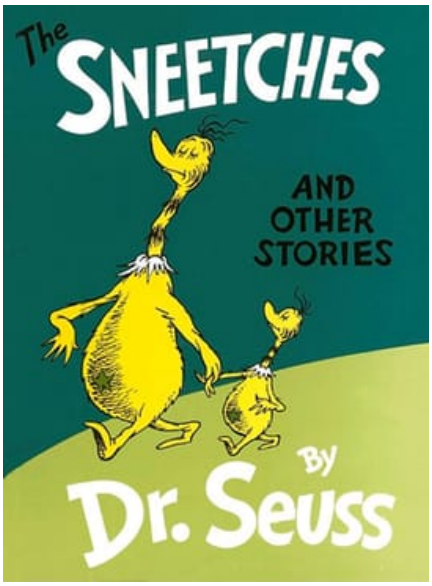


Image source: Wikipedia

Fig. 5.2.1. Cover image of the book "The Sneetches" by Dr. Seuss depicts a large and a small star-belly sneetch walking with their snoots in the air.

Classroom Strategies: Anti-Bias Curriculum

Anti-bias curriculum embraces the lived experiences of different groups of people. Children are products of their environment and their families are their first teachers. When children are enrolled in school, they bring with them what they have learned from their home environment. Children also absorb the societal beliefs they see in the community and media and so can be consistently exposed to bias, prejudice, and discrimination. School is a place where these views can be challenged. It is important to teach them to appreciate differences during their developmental years rather than allowing them to internalize society's biases. This is an essential step towards achieving real change in our society.

The preschool years are foundational in terms of a children's development of a strong sense of self, empathy, and positive healthy attitudes towards difference. Lessons learned in the classroom can help offset the bias and discrimination that exist in our society and promote healthy development. Through anti-bias activities and with the help of educators, even young children children can learn to resist various forms of bias. What they learn in the classroom can teach them how to support others. Children can be taught to be allies. This means that they are willing to stand up when they see bias occurring. Children's experiences in early childhood shape how they will approach differences throughout their life.

The Anti-Bias Curriculum, developed by a multi-ethnic group of early childhood educators, promotes the following goals:

- to nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity.

- to promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.
- to foster each child's critical thinking about bias.
- to cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the face of bias

These principles should be a topic of discussion and a part of primary activities to be effective. It is necessary to discuss and define principles and ideologies regarding prejudice with children from a young age.

Start with concrete examples and working towards the more abstract when working with young students.

- role-playing activities and contextual conversations to help children learn the concepts of race and prejudice
- the Dr. Suess children's book, *The Sneetches,* is particularly useful in explaining that what is on the outside doesn't matter
- give each child a flesh-colored bandage and prompt them to notice how the bandages matched very few of the students' skin tones
- plan experiences that allow children to compare accurate representations to their inaccurate understandings
- facilitate dialogue about the feelings and ideas about these situations about skin color, or what makes a family, etc.

Source

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5.3: How to Check Personal Bias

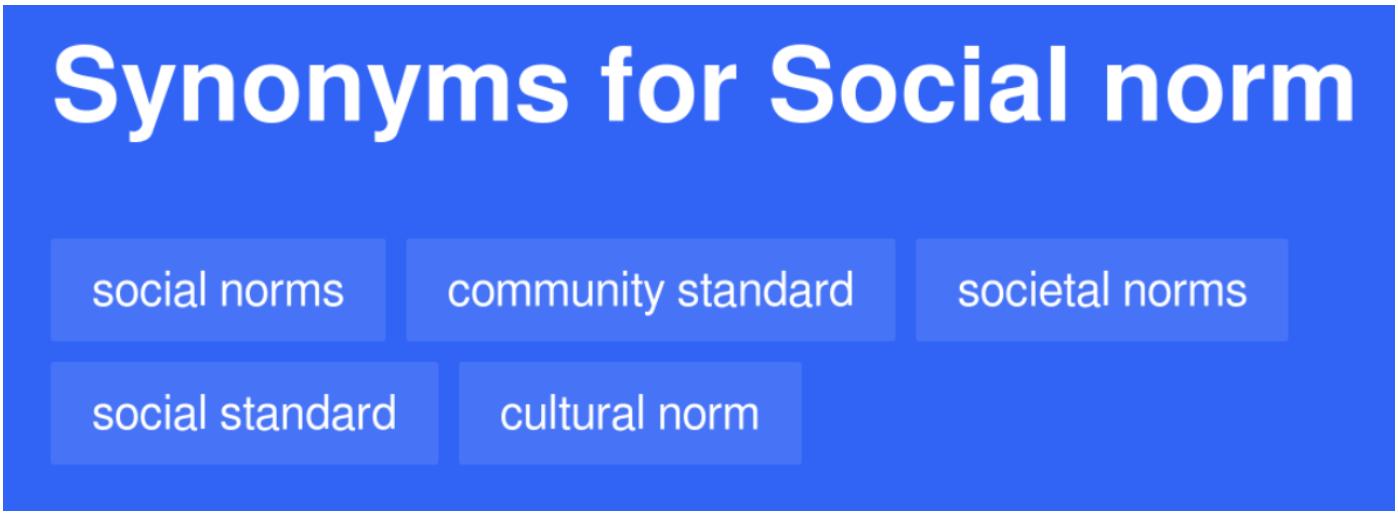


Image Source: Power Thesaurus

Fig.5.3. Chart that list synonyms for social norm including social norms, community standard, societal norms, social standard, cultural norms

Social Norms

Social norms are the shared expectations and rules of behavior that are considered acceptable or appropriate in a given social situation. They govern how people interact with each other within a group or culture.

Social norms are learned and accepted *from an early age by observing the behaviors of those around them - parents, siblings, other family members, friends, classmates, as well as people in the community.*

Humans are generally social creatures and as a result, tend to behave in such a way that gains acceptance in the group and avoids punishment or isolation from the group.

Development of Biases

Biases, prejudices, and **stereotypes** are also learned *from an early age by observing the behaviors of those around them - parents, siblings, other family members, friends, classmates, and people in their community.*

Even children as young as 5 years old absorb the biases they see practiced and go on to develop negative biases about people based on their age, race, physical appearance, and social status. Once established, biases become ingrained and are can be extremely difficulty to overcome.

Biases and stereotypes become **negative social norms** when they lead to the creation of **social categories,** and **social categorization** that creates **"us" vs.“them”** mentalities and **in-groups** and **out-groups**, or **majority** and **minority groups**.

The social psychologist, John Bargh, once described stereotypes as **cognitive monsters** because they activate harmful impulses and dangerously influence social judgment.

Implicit Biases

Implicit (unconscious) **biases** are ingrained, based on the social norms we learned early in life. Everyone has these biases

and uses them as mental shortcuts for faster information-processing. Our unconscious brain is constantly processing and sifting through vast amounts of information looking for patterns and combinations that are familiar. We draw on social norms for this processing. All of us have biases, no matter what our profession, no matter where we live, or where we're from. We are all exposed to a society that is full of implicit biases—biases of all kinds. In fact, research shows that while explicit bias has decreased in our country over time, implicit bias has remained stable. And it is instilled in us at very early ages.

Example of Implict Bias: Nearly 98% of early childhood educators are women so the common **assumption** is that early childhood educators are all women. Our unconscious brain automatically equates the term "early childhood educator" and "woman" and stops thinking beyond that social norm. However, when a male early childhood educator enters the room the unconscious brain is challenged to process something that feels far less "normal." How we respond, the judgments or decisions we make about male early childhood educator will be based on how well we have recognized and managed our biases.

YouTube Video

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How to Check Your Personal Biases

Bias is a universal human condition, we all have them, even if we think we don't! One part of being **anti-biased** is recognizing your own personal biases. We cannot cure our unconscious biases but it's possible to manage them. This video will provide you identify your personal biases. You are encouraged to try this lesson so you can be more aware of your personal biases and take the necessary steps to reduce their impact on your life.

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Common Ground: Education and Intergroup Contact

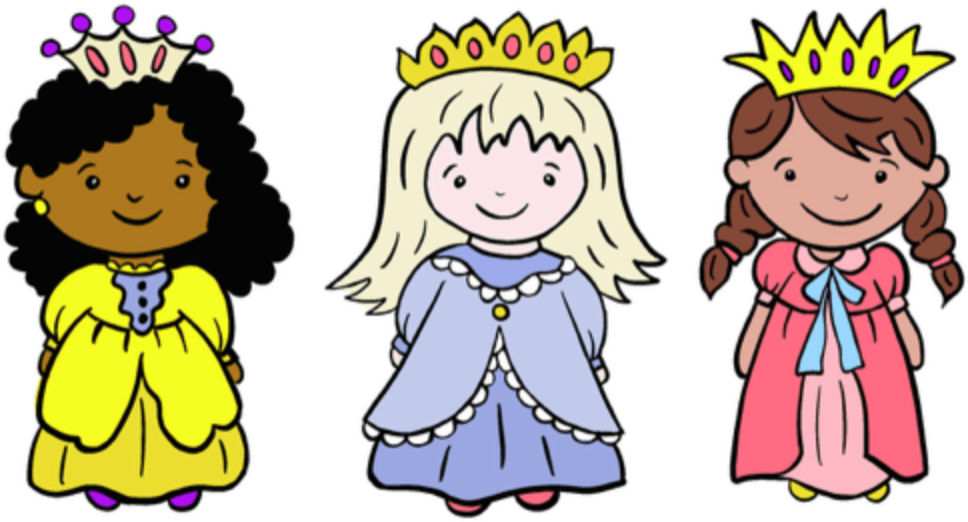
Because the influence of social norms is so ingrained, long-lasting changes in beliefs about difference will occur only by expanding the concept of social norms. Children bring to the classroom ideas they have absorbed about "others" that may be supported in the materials in their homes, communities, and even the classroom.

Education teaches us to be curious about the social norms of other racial and cultural groups and value of their social norms along side of our own. Seeing and appreciating our common humanity, understanding that people as more similar to us than different from us, creates feelings of kinship and empathy. When we focus more on the individuals within groups, we begin to see that there is a great deal of variability among the individuals within the group and learn that our stereotypes are actually not that informative or accurate.

The idea that **intergroup contact** will reduce prejudice, known as the **contact hypothesis**, a theory developed in the 1950s, is simple: If children from different ethnic groups play together prejudice among children is reduced.

Working With Young Children and Stereotypes

When working with young children, educators and caregivers need to be really aware of who is represented (and who is not) in the materials in the classroom.



Anti-Bias Case Study

Rakesha, Emma, and Annie all choose the dramatic play area as they make their plans for the day. Each of them has noticed the shiny new crowns their teachers have added to the dress-up clothes shelves since yesterday.

"Look at me. I'm a princess," says Annie as she twirls in front of the mirror with a crown on her head.

“Me, too,” adds Rakesha, choosing another of the crowns. “Mine has jewels.”

Emma, who has light skin and light hair and often takes the lead in assigning dramatic play roles, looks at both girls and states emphatically,

“NO!”

She turns to Rakesha, who has darker skin and darker hair, and says,

“You can’t be a princess because you don’t look like one. *You have to look like the one in the princess book.”*

Rakesha protests,

“I can, too, be a princess! Everybody can be a princess.”

The three girls continue to argue loudly about who can be a princess, and Ms. Denisha comes over to help them work out their disagreement. She sits down on the rug and motions to all three girls to sit down around her. She observes,

“You girls look and sound pretty upset. What is the problem? Rakesha, why don’t you tell us first what made you feel so upset?”

Rakesha repeats Emma’s assertion that Rakesha can’t be a princess. Emma and Annie both add details to the story of the argument. Ms. Denisha listens, asks questions, and restates the problem.

She then tells them,

“It really hurt Rakesha’s feelings when you told her she couldn’t be a princess. Rakesha was right. People with any skin and hair colors can be princesses and other special characters. We can find books about many kinds of princesses. Now, I will stay and help you think of some ideas for your play this morning.” [

Developing a **culturally responsive understanding** of child development is key to making sure child behaviors are not categorized as negative when they are actually rooted in race, ethnicity, and/or gender.

Research has shown that implicit bias, plays a large role in the negative connotation given to normal child behaviors. For example, little boys of color, particularly Black, Latino and Native American boys are seen as much older than their actual age and have unfair expectations placed on them that goes well beyond their abilities. They are suspended at much higher rates, even from preschool and are more harshly labeled as being aggressive, loud and disrespectful.

Educators must acknowledge that goals and beliefs about children’s development vary across different cultural contexts (the cultural context of the many adults in the child’s life: parents/caregivers, extended family, practitioners, teachers).

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5.4: What Does a Diverse Classroom Look Like?

What Does a Diverse Classroom Look Like?

Diverse classrooms are inclusive of all cultures, abilities, and individuals. When set up correctly the environment becomes another teacher.

- shelves are low and far apart to support a child who might have a physical disability
- shelves are labeled with both pictures and words, including words in a child's native language or in Braile.
- pictures and posters that make children to feel welcome
- represent different cultures in their native garb but also in normal street clothes
- include pictures of children with differing abilities interacting with peers as well as on their own.
- a classroom routine customized to support children with differing abilities



Image Source: Stockcake. Storytime with Kids. Public Domain.

Fig. 5.4. Photo of children of multiple ethnicities sitting on preschool story rug looking at books.

Classroom Strategies - Understanding Fairness and Respect for Others

"That's not fair!" expresses a preschooler's concern for fairness, and the child's growing sensitivity to others' feelings also contributes to this concern. Efforts to act fairly can be manifested in taking turns, sharing, and cooperating.

Teach children how classroom rules help to maintain fairness by

- explaining the rules (and the reasons for them) and how they emphasize fairness
- explaining and modeling the need to cooperate with what matters to someone else
- use words to help children understand each other's emotions, viewpoints, and goals
- teach that "fair" doesn't mean "same" --- fair means doing what is needed for each individual child
- teach children to notice each others different capabilities ---
    - notice when one child may need an adult's help to do something (e.g., hold the jar steady) but another child has the skill and may be asked to do it without help

You can support children's understanding of fairness and respect with the following interactions and strategies:

- maintain a culturally inclusive environment
- be mindful of the social expectations of children's home cultures
- model respect and care in everyday interaction
- listen attentively to children's ideas and feelings
- use language that promotes concern and care for the community (e.g., our class, our room).
- discuss WHY fairness and respect are so important
- talk about the feelings that happen in certain situations like not sharing
- use situations in which children need adaptations to talk about differences and fairness
    - using simple language
    - relatable examples
    - visual aids
    - interactive activities
- teach social skills, such as patience and generosity, by using social stories and role-play experiences
- provide activities that help children see multiple perspectives
    - describe another child's feelings and needs and how they are different from another's
    - offer suggestions for appropriate responses
- coach children during their interactions with peers
- intervene and address negative interactions immediately to ensure an environment where all children feel safe and secure
- use picture to enhance children's understanding of ways to express feelings and build peer relationships

Sources

- Esquival, Krischa. eta al. The Beginning of Bias. *The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. LibreTexts, Social Studies Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.

- Esquival, Krischa. eta al. Going One Step Further with an Anti-bias Classroom. *The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. LibreTexts, Social Studies Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.

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5.5: How to Teach Children About Different Disabilities



Image Source: Audrey Moser. Disability History and Awareness Month Poster Contest. Delaware.gov

Fig. 5.5. Colored pencil drawing/poster reads "Together We Are Able" - silhouettes of children holding hands, one child in a wheelchair, one child with an artificial leg, another with glasses. Adults holding hands in foreground one with artificial hand and the word "Acceptance" written on the arm.

Teaching Children About Different Disabilities

Children of all ages and stages have their limits. In children with special needs, these limitations are often magnified because of the physical or sensory issues associated with certain conditions.

In a classroom setting, there is often a mix of children who do and don't have disabilities. Some children may be unsure how to respond to classmates with special needs. For many kids, encountering someone with special needs may be confusing or frightening. As a teacher you have an opportunity to model loving and respectful behavior for the children in your classroom. Teachers can help students form positive feelings about peers with disabilities, instead of fear or awkwardness.

Educate Yourself

- To help children develop healthy and age-appropriate understanding of students with special needs in the classroom, it's important to educate yourself first. However, it's not necessary to become an expert.
- Small children aren't looking for a lecture or to be overwhelmed with facts, they are simply looking to you to help them understand what's going on and how to treat their classmates with compassion.
- Cultivate an understanding attitude toward behaviors of children so you can appropriately guide them if they are making fun of or becoming scared of classmates with disabilities.

Watch the short video below to learn from other teachers on how they provide inclusive environments for children with disabilities.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

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Educate Your Students

- Embracing each others' differences is an essential life skill.
- Seek out opportunities for the children in your class to interact with a variety of classmates
- Keep in mind that because every child is different, they will process information differently
    - younger children may become easily overwhelmed or confused if given too much information

Know it's okay to be confused at first

- Let them know its okay to be unsure or confused at first about the best way to include or speak to kids with disabilities
- Let them know that the feeling will go away when they play with their classmate

Focusing on Similarities

Another great approach for explaining disabilities to students is to focus on similarities. Instead of only explaining the differences, point out shared interests or traits between people with disabilities and everyone else. You could talk about similarities like:

- favorite songs, colors, or foods
- common hobbies, games, or toys
- favorite books or stories
- common feelings and emotions

As kids realize what they have in common with people with disabilities, it becomes easier to relate to them. This practice can help with empathy development, encouraging kids to experience someone else's point of view.

Teach patience

- Another thing to help a child understand is that children with special needs can often do the same things as their peers — it just takes them a little bit longer. Patience goes a long way toward building friendships and including others. If a child understands their classmate's disability, it will be easier for them to display patience if they move slower or take longer to understand a game or activity.
- When young children notice another child is different from them teach them, help them shift their focus to how they are alike rather than different.

Play

A child who has a disability or physical limitation is still a person who enjoys activities and engaging with others their age. They want to be loved and accepted by their peers, but may simply require special accommodation to do so.

Encourage children to invite their classmates who have special needs to join in playground games and extracurricular activities when appropriate. If they aren't sure what's okay or of their friend requires special accommodation, teach them how to best include and assist their friend. Let them know it's better to ask questions than make incorrect assumptions and leave people out. Teach children how to introduce themselves, be curious, and ask if it's okay to ask questions.

- teach children to interact with peers with disabilities just the same way they would with other classmates

- play is a valuable tool for understanding and connecting
- teach children the importance of giving all students a chance to participate in activities

Recognize Boundaries and Limitations

- teach children to understand that their classmates may have boundaries and struggles
- teach children to be sensitive to their classmates needs:
  - many autistic children or children with sensory issues don't like to be touched
    - model how to for how to respond to meltdowns or outbursts that are simply part of the child's disability
  - think of the wheelchair as an extension of their classmate's body so it's not okay to lean on it or ask for a ride, or push it without permission
  - conversation may be challenging with classmates who have hearing loss teach the class some basic signs
    - engage and interact during playtime
  - talk to nonverbal classmate to show an interest in them
    - say "hello" and ask how they are
    - tell a brief story about something they did

Everyone Wants to Have Friends

If children don't know any better, they may assume that a classmate who has difficulty communicating verbally does not want or need friends. Even children who are unable to communicate their needs or participate in certain activities want love and acceptance. Continue to remind children how important it is to focus on the things they have in common, rather than their differences. Remind them that everyone wants to have friends and be included. Even if their body doesn't allow them to walk, run or speak, they are still human, and they love having friends who care for them.

Make Sure Kids Ask Before Helping

Many kids like to be helpers at school. However, it's important to teach your students to ask before trying to aid a child with a disability. If they try to help before getting permission, it could worsen the situation. For instance, a student might want to comfort an upset child with special needs. The student might think a hug would help the child, but in reality it might make them feel more uncomfortable.

Teach your students to ask before jumping in to help. Asking a quick question like "Is there anything I can do to help?" can empower people with disabilities to set boundaries and accept the help they need. This will help them feel more comfortable within the classroom.

Resources to Learn More

A great way to help young children understand disabilities is to make use of your **local library.** There are many great children's books that talk about people with special needs and teach children how to engage with them. You can also look for online videos or television shows that positively portray people with special needs. Sesame Street does a great job of this and can be a great video resource for younger children.

One thing parents often forget is that videos and books are more effective if you take the time to talk about them with your child after they read or view them. Ask what they think, how they feel and how they can apply what they learned in everyday situations. If your child has a classmate with a disability, this is a great time to make the connection between the material they just encountered and the individual they see every day.



Image Source: Six-level Communicator. *EnablingDevices*

Fig. 5.5.1. Photo shows a six-level communicator that can be used by a child who is nonverbal. This image shows cards depicting 6 different toys each with a corresponding button. For example, a child may be asked, "Which is a teddy bear?" The child responds by pushing the button that corresponds to the teddy bear.

Explain Adaptive Equipment

You can also discuss adaptive equipment with your kids. Explain how people with disabilities use extra tools to help them. While you describe the equipment, you could provide common examples, like:

- Hearing aids
- Wheelchairs
- Crutches
- Scooters
- Canes
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices
    - tools used by those who are non-verbal

In addition, you could talk about other helpful tools for people with disabilities, like designated parking spaces or wheelchair ramps.

By teaching kids to recognize adaptive equipment, they can be more understanding when seeing it in the future. You can also explain how to treat people that use the equipment. You can explain that the equipment is helpful for kids with disabilities and that you should treat it with respect.

Have Adaptive Equipment and Assistive Technology in the Classroom

Some of this may depend on each students' individual needs, but having the appropriate adaptive equipment and assistive technology available in the classroom goes a long way toward effective instruction. Using assistive technology in the classroom empowers children and ensures that those with varying levels of ability can be included in many different activities.

With the proper support, children who have special needs can thrive in the classroom environment. For more than three decades, Enabling Devices has worked with parents, teachers and individuals with disabilities to develop exceptional, high-quality products that help individuals with special needs succeed in the classroom, the workplace and at home.

Our ultimate goal is to help everyone we work with to live a full life and experience the joy of being able to fully engage in the world around them. Ready to help your child or student thrive in the classroom?

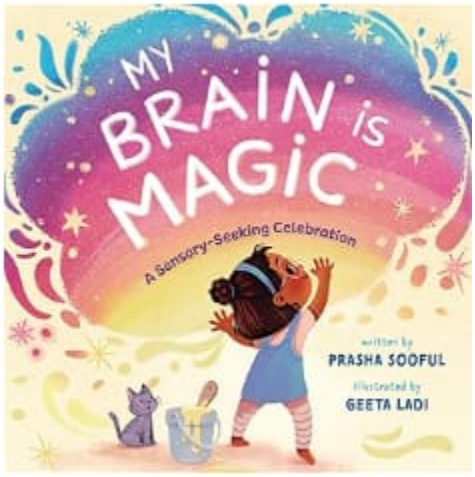
Books that Teach About Different Disabilities

There are many children's books that cover different topics when it comes to disabilities. This is where we as educators need to know the class we have and their developmental level. Here is a list of a few books to choose from:

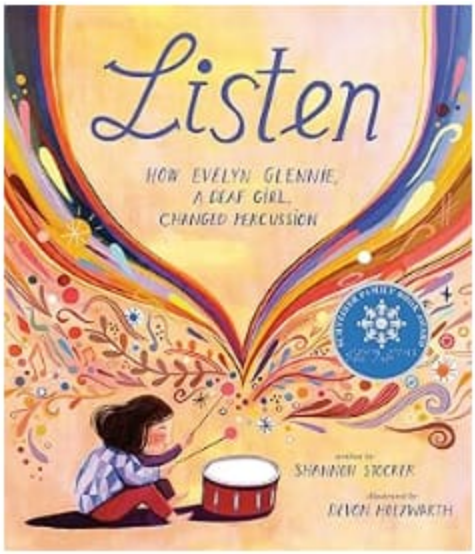
We Move Together by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos



My Brain is Magic: A Sensory-Seeking Celebration by Prasha Sooful, Geeta Ladi



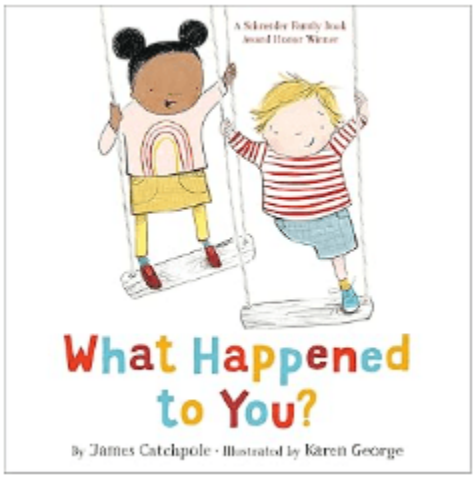
Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl Changed Percussion by Shannon Stocker



This Little Wonder: A No-Limits Primer by Joan Holub



What Happened to You? By James Catchpole



Source

- How to Include Students With Disabilities in the Classroom. *EnablingDevices.com*

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5.6: Reflection on Learning

Reflection: Anti-Bias Early Childhood Education

Anti bias education is an approach to teaching designed to increase understanding of differences and their value to a respectful and civil society, and to actively challenge bias, stereotyping and all forms of discrimination.



Image Source: The anti-bias approach in early childhood education. *Care for Kids*. ©2025 Care For Kids New Zealand

Fig. 5.6. Photo of 4 children of different ethnicities embracing and smiling.

In early childhood settings, this means development of an inclusive play-based learning curriculum which reflects and celebrates diverse experiences, perspectives, and teaching practices to advance the learning of all children in a respectful and inclusive fashion.

The founding principle of anti-bias education is that bias is learned and that this learning starts from the earliest days of life, when children start to receive messages about their own identity and the identities of others. This learning may be explicit or subtle, and picked up unconsciously from family, friends and the media, but it can have a significant and lasting impact on a person's self-image and world view as well as their view of others.

Critical Thinking Questions



- Why is it helpful to not make any assumptions about a child's experiences, world view, or background?
- Why is it important to create awareness of bias and stereotypes?
- How does anti-bias education help children develop the language to describe and understand bias?
- How can we integrate anti-bias in all parts of the early education and care environment?

Source

- The anti-bias approach in early childhood education. (2019). *Care for Kids*. ©2025 Care For Kids New Zealand

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6: ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

6.1: Framework for Learning
6.2: Accommodation vs. Modification
6.3: Benefits of Accommodating Lessons and Activities for Children
6.4: Accommodations and Modifications in the Classroom
6.5: IEP/IFSP and Our Roles as Educators
6.6: Reflection on Learning

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6.1: Framework for Learning

Understanding Accommodations vs. Modifications



Image Source: Pencil Grips. *Special Supplies.* (Special Needs Product Retailer).

Fig. 6.1 Preschool girl using a colored pencil with an oval silicone pencil grip which makes it easier for small hands to use a slim tool like a pencil.

Accommodations: HOW a child learns

- **alters the learning environment** by removing barriers in the classroom by providing such things as preferential seating, sensory areas, and assistive technologies that provide every child with *equal access to learning.*

Modifications: WHAT a child learns

- **alters the curriculum** by changing expectations about what a child is taught or expected to accomplish by using things like simpler language, visual vs. verbal materials, modified activity load, and assistive technologies that allow every child to *achieve access to learning.*

Watch the short video below to learn more about the difference between these two important supports for students.

YouTube Video

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After this chapter you should be able to:

- Identify the difference between accommodations and modifications
- Explain how children benefit with accommodations and/or modifications
- Define and explain IEP and IFSP / 504 plans

- Accommodations
- Modifications
- IEP
- IFSP / 504 plans

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6.2: Accommodation vs. Modification

Accommodations and Modifications



Image Source: Talker Buddy Communication Device For Non Verbal Kids. *Special Supplies.*

Fig. 6.2. Photo of a communication device for non verbal children. Used to engage a child in activities where they need to communicate their want and needs. The device is preprogrammed with key words and phrases and he buttons show show images that corresponds to the words. The child selects the appropriate button to communicate.

Accommodating Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delays

Learning disabilities are often not recognized or identified until children begin formal schooling. Children who learn differently or have delays in language commonly manifest special needs through their behavior in group settings.

Most children identified by special education professionals as having a disability have **delays in learning and communication** (over 70% of children from birth-14). What is more important is that learning disabilities are often not recognized or identified until children begin formal schooling.

Children who learn differently or have delays in language commonly manifest special needs through their behavior in group settings. Early childhood educators can provide a language-rich environment and make accommodations based on knowledge of the individual child.

Fewer children have more significant disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, physical and mobility impairments, or multiple disabilities. When children do have significant disabilities, they are likely to be receiving specialized services that may support success in a child care setting.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also known as a **504 plan** is a blueprint for how the school will support a student with a disability and remove barriers to learning. The goal is to give the student equal access at school.

Children who are eligible for and who receive early intervention or special education services have individual plans with goals and strategies for caregivers and providers to use.For children under age three, the plans are called **individualized family services plans (IFSPs)**; for children over age three, the plans are called **individualized education programs (IEPs)**. Early childhood educators can be an important member of an IFSP or IEP team when these plans are being developed. Early childhood educators can provide **modifications** and make **accommodations** based on knowledge of the individual child.

These two words are used interchangeably but are two different techniques that can be used in a classroom with children who have differing abilities.



Fig 6.2. Graph explaining the differences between modification and accommodation. Traci Bender. Is it a Modification or an Accommodation? The Bender Bunch

Fig 6.2.1. Chart listing the differences between a modification (what a child learns) and an accommodation (how a child learnss.) Details are also are outlined on this page.

Supporting Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delays

Many educators enter the profession without training in supporting children with disabilities or developmental delays. The key starting point for all teachers is to *see the child firs*t. Watch and observe to learn about the individual interests and motivations of each child. Simply talking and playing with will build trust and help you make realistic choices and decisions about the child's learning targets, effective strategies, and ways you will monitor and assess their progress. Set learning goals, choose strategies, and assess children's progress.

Another way to support children is develop learning and reflective practices for yourself as an educator.

- regularly check-in with yourself and your beliefs about children and families
- stay current on young child development and education practices
- think deeply about your role in making the learning experience and the classroom for all children
  - engaging and welcoming
  - developmentally appropriate
  - accessible for all
- consult with other members of the child's team for support in adapting the environment or modifying the curriculum
  - special education teacher
  - speech, physical, occupational therapists
  - early intervention coordinator
  - administrators
- trust your knowledge and instincts and rely on your professional expertise and judgment

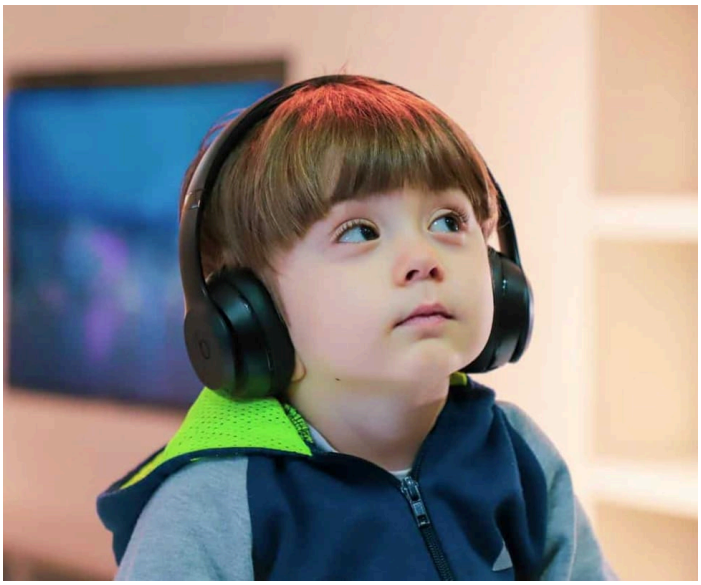


Image Source: Más tecnologías de asistencia para que nadie se quede por fuera de la transformación. *DigiXem360*.

Classroom Strategies: Accommodations and Modifications

Key to effective classroom design is to be mindful of the many ways the space will be used and different needs of individual children. The classroom should be adaptable for a variety of routines and activities.

Be proactive in your approaches to you can best supports children's strengths and can be modified to address individual needs.

- peer-buddy activities that require more than one child's participation to accomplish a task
  - models positive social and communication skills]
  - demonstrates everyday routines
  - welcomes child as part of classroom activities
- dress-up items with multiple ways to fasten them
- find ways to absorb background noise to avoid distractions
  - use sound absorbing materials - carpet, wall-hanging, tennis ball attached to bottom of metal legs, etc,
  - noise-reducing headphones
- break down activities into small manageable tasks
- teach the tasks one by one
- provide pictures or symbols of an area to help children transition to a new activity (inclusive of nonverbal children)
- arrange furniture so all children—including those with visual or physical disabilities—can move around the space by themselves
- make sure materials are within reach and otherwise accessible to all children
  - add pencil grips to crayons and markers
  - glue small knobs to wooden puzzle pieces
- predictable routines with a beginning, middle, and end
- set up easels for children who have a difficult time painting or drawing on table tops
- have board books available
- add jumbo paper clips to regular book pages to make them easier for children to turn for children with motor delays

Sources

- Accommodations and Modifications. *Reading Rockets*.
- Esquival, Krischa. What Programs Can Do To Be Inclusive of All Children. *The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. LibreText. Social Sciences Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.
- Every Child Belongs: Welcoming a Child with a Disability. *Teaching Young Children*. NAEYC. August/September 2017

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6.3: Benefits of Accommodating Lessons and Activities for Children



Image Source: PNGTree

Fig. 6.3. Photo of a smiling college student wearing headphones.

Accommodating All Children in the Early Childhood Classroom Has Life-Long Benefits

Developmentally appropriate programs offer children the opportunity to learn best by supporting their individual needs and allow them to successfully participate in classroom activities. While some children with disabilities will require specific supports from special education professionals, many other children with disabilities will benefit from simple accommodations and modifications.

When we can accommodate children and their unique learning styles, children can learn at their own pace which will have long-lasting impacts on their learning. Children feel welcomed and feel that they belong in the classroom. When children complete a lesson or activity that is developmentally appropriate for them, they have fewer behavioral problems that can disrupt the classroom. The IRIS Center states that *accommodation provides students with opportunities to achieve the same outcomes and to obtain the same benefits as students without disabilities.* (The IRIS Center is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs and located at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College).

Early childhood education can have a significant impact on a child's academic and psychological future. It's important to provide all children with equal educational opportunities, regardless of their physical or intellectual abilities.Accommodating all children in early childhood classrooms can have lifelong benefits, including:

- **social skills**
  - children learn to interact with peers from different backgrounds and abilties
  - improves communication and social skills
- **self-esteem**
  - children feel valued and part of a community
- **sense of belonging**
  - feeling a sense of belonging is important for their development

- **empathy and understanding**
  - children learn to be empathetic and understanding of others.
- **awareness of a diverse world**
  - children are prepared for the diverse world they will live in
- **normalizing difference**
  - children learn that differences are a normal part of life
- **developing friendships**
  - children learn to make friends and maintain friendships

Sources

- Every Child Belongs: Welcoming a Child with a Disability. *Teaching Young Children*. NAEYC. August/September 2017
- What should teachers know about accommodations for students with disabilities? The IRIS Center Peabody College Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN.

This page titled 6.3: Benefits of Accommodating Lessons and Activities for Children is shared under a CC BY 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Western Technical College.

6.4: Accommodations and Modifications in the Classroom



Image Source: PersonFirstinc.

Fig 6.4. Peer support. Young boy without disability engaging with young boy with disability in classroom.

What Do Accommodations and Modifications Look Like in the Classroom?

Appropriate accommodations and modifications for preschool children who may have various developmental, cognitive, and sensory challenges makes learning accessible to them.

Accommodations in the Classroom

Accommodations are changes in how a student learns and demonstrates their knowledge without altering the curriculum's content.

- using preferential seating to optimize learning conditions
- adding grips to pencils or markers to help children grip
- adding Velcro or snaps instead of buttons to dress up clothes
- displaying a daily schedule
- using alternative materials when completing an art project
- using appropriate sized markers when coloring
- providing additional time for completing tasks and activities
- providing short breaks during lessons or assessments to help manage attention and focus
- providing small group or one-on-one personalized instruction to address specific learning needs
- integrating support from specialized staff

Modification in the Classroom

Modifications are changes made to the curriculum or expectations based on the individual child's capacity.

- providing additional time to complete activities and task.
- using extra verbal or visual reminders or cues to to help with task initiation or before transitioning to a new activity or area

- sequencing learning when providing instructions
- adjusting assessment criteria to reflect the student's individual progress and abilities
- modifying content or format of assignments to match the child's skill level
- develop personalized learning objectives based on the child's unique needs and abilities
  Sources:

Sources:

- Ages 3-5 Transition Toolkit. *Partnership for Action, Voices for Empowerment* (*PAVE)*. Washington PAVE. 2025.
- Common Accommodations and Modifications in an IEP For 3-5 year old's. *Partnership for Action, Voices for Empowerment* (*PAVE)*. Washington PAVE. 2025.

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6.5: IEP/IFSP and Our Roles as Educators

IEP/IFSP/504 Plans

Teachers will have children in their classrooms with diagnosed and undiagnosed special needs, including those related to their health. Early childhood programs have legal obligations to provide inclusive programs and inclusion benefits for everyone involved (children with special needs, their peers that do not have special needs, families, and teachers). Having a solid foundation in developmentally appropriate practice, which includes the importance of learning about and meeting the needs of each individual child, goes a long way to providing inclusive early education.

Children who are eligible for and who receive early intervention or special education services have individual plans with goals and strategies for caregivers and providers to use. For children under age three, the plans are called **Individualized Family Services Plans (IFSPs);** for children over age three, the plans are called I**ndividualized Education Programs (IEPs)**. Early childhood educators can be an important member of an IFSP or IEP team when these plans are being developed.



Image Source: Welcome to the Individualized Family Service Plan Page. *California Academy on Transition Studies (CATS).* CalState-LA.

Fig. 6.5. Parents with toddler with disabilities and the child's two older siblings.

Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP)

An **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** is the key to early intervention services. An IFSP is comprehensive plan of action designed to meet the unique needs of an **infant or toddler (under age 3)** with developmental delays or disabilities and their family. The plan is created through a team approach, with input from the child's family, caregivers, healthcare providers, and early intervention professionals. The plan outlines the individualized services, supports, and outcomes that will be provided to the child and their family, and is monitored and updated regularly. The goal of the IFSP is to ensure that the child's needs are met and that they reach their fullest potential.

The guiding principle of the ISFP is that *the child's greatest resource is their family***.** Children are best served within the context of family. Young children's needs are closely tied to the needs of their family. Both must be met to adequately serve the child. The nurturing, love, and commitment of a family cannot be replaced by any array of services. The best way to support children and meet their needs is to support and build upon the individual strengths of their family. **The Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP)** focuses on how the system can support the "whole" family, its cultural values, strengths, and needs.

An IFSP is much broader. It is used for children from infancy through age 2, involves the family more, and

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An **Individualized Education Program (or IEP)** is a written statement for a **child ages 3 and over** with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised by a team of people, including the student's family, that outlines an educational plan for the student. The process begins with the family referring the student for services with the local school district. The local district evaluates the student and works with the family to determine whether special education services are needed. An **individualized education program (IEP)** is the documentation of how each student will receive a *Free and Appropriate Public Education* as required under state and federal special education regulations.

The **major difference between an IFSP and an IEP:**

- IFSP focuses on the child and family and the services that a family needs to help them enhance the development of their child
  - may include professionals from several disciplines in planning for the child
- IEP focuses on the educational needs of the child. It is an education document for students ages 3 to 21
  - focuses on special education and related services in schools

504 Plans

Section 504 is a federal law. It protects the rights of people with disabilities who are in programs that get money from the U.S. Department of Education. This includes public schools. A 504 plan provides accommodations, not modifications.

It is meant to make sure that students with disabilities can fully participate in all activities at the same level as students without disabilities. If a student is eligible for a 504 plan, a plan is written up for that student to access programs and after-school activities.

To be protected under Section 504, a student must meet the following criteria: • Have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities • Have a record of such impairment (medical diagnoses, aptitude or achievement tests, teacher recommendations, physical conditions, social or cultural background, and/or adaptive behavior) • Is thought to have such impairment, and it is not thought to be temporary

IFSP/IEP/504 and Our Roles as Educators

Early childhood teachers can play a role in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in several ways,

- supporting the child AND their family
- enhancing the development and educational needs of the child through observation and feedback
- help children move toward their IFSP/IEP goals by building them into learning experiences
- designing classrooms to accommodate children's special needs.

Sources

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- Esquivel, Krischa . et al. What Programs Can Do To Be Inclusive of All Children. T*he Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.
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- Section 504 Plans. *Children's Wisconsin*.

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6.6: Reflection on Learning



Image Source: IFSP: what is an Individual Family Service Plan? *Undivided.io*.

Fig. 6.6. Smiling preschool teacher watching toddler with Down's Syndrome place small objects in a wooden box.

Reflection: Accommodations and Modifications

All children have needs that are special and we plan for each to help them feel safe, comfortable, and included. As the teachers in the classrooms, you are the person who knows your students best. All children can benefit from some modifications to our lessons but the children who need it will benefit the most. It is also important to make sure that you, as the educator, keep up with your knowledge base around adaptations and accommodations that can be made in a classroom. It is also important to maintain relationships and open communication with families surrounding any plans or programs that the children are involved in or have.

Critical Thinking Questions



- What is the difference between an accommodation and a modification?
- Can you think of one modification and one accommodation that you would make in your classroom?
- What modification are you thinking about for your assignment?
- How do accommodations for a specific child benefit other children or the entire group?

Source

- Stephens, Cindy. et al. Creating an Inclusive Environment. *Principles and Practices of Teaching Young Children*. LibreTexts, Social Science Library. Shared under a CC BY 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Cindy Stephens, Gina Peterson, Sharon Eyrich, & Jennifer Paris (College of the Canyons) .

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7: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

7.1: Framework for Learning
7.2: Role of Educators in an Inclusive Classroom
7.3: Family Engagement and Communication
7.4: NAEYC's Principles and Guidelines for Family Engagement
7.5: Reflection on Learning

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7.1: Framework for Learning

Understanding Family Engagement

Watch the short video below from Head Start and their goals for supporting families of young children.

YouTube Video

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View this YouTube Video online

Early childhood programs serve a diverse array of children and families. Recognizing the value of this diversity and creating relationships with families that provide the context of their culture, will allow early childhood education programs to be inclusive in a variety of different ways and provide educational equity for the children for whom they provide care and education

After this chapter you should be able to:

- understand your role as an Early Childhood Educator when you have children with differing abilities in your class
- understand that family engagement means different things especially when it comes to children with differing abilities
- understand NAEYC guidelines for working with and engaging families in a Family-Centered approach

Key Terms and Concepts

- NAEYC - National Association for the Education of Young Children
- family engagement

Source

- Esquivel, Krischa, et al. 1.4: Summary. *The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.

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7.2: Role of Educators in an Inclusive Classroom

What is Role of Educators in an Inclusive Classroom?

As educators, we go into the field to help children meet their goals; this is just as important in Early Childhood Education as it is in traditional schooling. *Our role as the educators in the room is to make sure that we are arranging our room and completing lesson plans that are inclusive of every child in the classroom*. This could look like low shelving and having the correct materials out for all children of typical or atypical development to use.

Even if children with disabilities are not currently enrolled in an early childhood education program, educators can still promote inclusive practices. One way is to

- have pictures, books, and materials that present children with disabilities in a general setting.
- talk about how people are BOTH alike and different
- use “person-first” language when one is talking about young children with disabilities

The process of exploring inclusion with families, colleagues, and children will suggest other ways to expand inclusive practices.

- plan staff discussions on specific changes in philosophy, attitudes, and practices
- invite adults with disabilities in the community to contribute their knowledge of issues related to inclusion and to disabilities

Key Elements as Educators in an Inclusive Classroom



Image Source: 4 Inclusive Practices to Welcome All Students to Your Classroom. *Teach for America*.

Fig 7.2. Teacher and young students of mixed races playing with animal puppets in a preschool classroom.

1. Personal commitment

Educators need to have a sincere and wholehearted commitment to dealing with a variety of issues in multicultural classrooms and in meeting the challenge of diverse groups of children.

2. Knowledge of what makes a difference

Education provides opportunities to improve yourself, gain knowledge knowledge and competency, and construct meaning.

We learn through the experiences we have, the interactions with others, observing other teachers in action, and applying what we have observed and learned in our courses studies.

This learning includes:

- knowledge which derives from **academic learning and research** (formal knowledge) and the basis from which teachers structure their practice
  - the application of formal knowledge to practical teaching situations
- knowledge gained by **practice** and practical teaching situations
- Knowledge comes from **action or experience**
  - the understanding, reflections, and decisions that teachers make every day in school
- knowledge built **inside local communities**
  - school development, education, or collaborative questioning projects

It is from this gaining of knowledge and engagement in learning experiences (action) that it becomes possible to articulate theory and practice. The teacher learns how to learn and learns how to teach.

Recent research has redefined the nature of our culturally diverse students' educational vulnerabilities. It has destroyed both stereotypes and myths and laid a foundation upon which to reconceptualize present educational practices and launch new initiatives. The study findings for early childhood contribute important knowledge to general instructional organization, literacy development, academic achievement in content areas and the perspectives of children, families, and educators.

Educators should recognize that academic development has its roots in sharing knowledge and experiences through communication. Within the knowledge-driven curriculum, skills are tools for acquiring knowledge, not an essential goal of teaching events.

3. Educational leadership

Educational leadership is needed to

- spread new knowledge
- apply new knowledge to skill development
- engage in childhood development

We need to understand our teaching philosophies and our role in promoting equitable learning environments. The journey is one of progress not perfection. As we interact with the children and families we serve, we become more aware of our role.

The professional identity of teachers includes the following:

- their personal values and beliefs
- their professional values and belief
- their own cultural experiences
  - learned in their childhood
  - have accepted into their daily lives.

This personal reflection affords teachers opportunities to gain deeper understanding of themselves which helps them to understand others. It provides them opportunities to gain empathy and understanding of others that can only be accomplished when we understand ourselves.

Becoming Equity Minded

The journey of gaining knowledge and experience continues after you've graduated and are working in the classroom.. This journey includes taking the path towards social equity. You must continually reflect on the underlying reasons for the way you educate and

care for children so that they, to can grow to become equity-minded.

Teaching is an important responsibility. As a teachers you use what you to create a developmentally appropriate curriculum and build strong mutual relationships with children and families based on their cultural and social contexts. This culturally responsive approach, supports children to become participants in a democratic society and work towards equity themselves.

Source

- Hale, Alice. The Role of the Early Childhood Educator. *Teaching in a Diverse Society*. LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library. Shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Alice Hale.

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7.3: Family Engagement and Communication



Image Source: Family Engagement: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities. *IRIS Center Module*. The IRIS Center Peabody College Vanderbilt University Nashville.

Fig. 7.3 Venn diagram describing family engagement as the intersection of getting to know families, meaningfully involving families, and building positive relationships with families.

What Does Family Engagement and Communication Look Like With the Families of Children With Differing Abilities ?

Family engagement and open communication is important for all families, but especially important when it comes to families that have children with differing abilities. They may require more communication from you than other families and in turn, you may need more family support in activities, such as accompanying the class on a field trip. You may need to send daily notes home to the family to communicate details of the child's progress in a setting other than home.

You will need to ask questions with sensitivity and understanding—particularly in talks with families. Set a tone of welcome and understanding. When a family member shares a child's diagnosis, follow-up question with a "And how does that affect _____'s development?" to establish a shared understanding about the child's needs. You may be need to set a regular schedule of in-person meetings with the families to make sure all the child's goals and expectations are met and understood.

This approach can help assure a family member that the child care provider is genuinely concerned about the success of their child and is interested in providing appropriate, individually tailored care. The response from the parent will help the child care provider determine what accommodations might be needed, what other questions may be appropriate to ask, and whether specialists are involved or needed.



Image Source: Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND). *Early Years Alliance*.

Fig. 7.3.1. Mother holding toddler, grandmother interacting with children in preschool classroom

Collaborating for Inclusion

Culture is complex, continually developing, and can be defined in many ways. It impacts what children and their families value, the way behave, and their identities. Nurturing interactions with children and their families means to as much as possible, learn about the history, beliefs, and practices of the children & families they serve. In addition to being responsive to the cultural history, beliefs, values, ways of communicating, and practices of children and families, teachers should design learning environments to include colorful resources such as pictures, displays, and books that are culturally rich and supportive of a diverse population, focusing on the cultures and languages of the children and families in their preschool. Culturally responsive environments establish a climate of respect when teachers, professionals, and specialists meet and communicate with family members.

Each member of the different groups have important information to share and can serve as valuable resources to support children in a preschool program. Everyone has a role to play and their input enrich efforts at inclusion. The primary role of an early childhood educator is to nurture and support the child's development in a loving and caring manner. Partnerships formed with other adults who are caring for the child—the parents, health-care providers, or specialists—can complement the efforts of all concerned, especially when everyone concentrates on a particular strength.

For collaboration to be successful, the following elements are essential:

- respect for family's knowledge and experience as the first and best resource for the child
  - should be included in all planning and implemented care
- clear and regular communication, with both informal or planned meetings
- scheduled time for collaboration, respecting the time considerations of all involved
- investment and active involvement by the child's team and their family
- collaborative efforts to provide the appropriate assessments and support services for the child

Inclusive Strategies for the Classroom

The family compositions represented in the populations served by early childhood programs are quite diverse. Sometimes problems arise for staff members because the children and families they serve have not yet acclimated to the social changes this diversity represents. For example, Katie is overheard by staff members saying to Martin, "My mommy says I can't play with you because you have two mommies living together at your house." It is unclear whether Katie really understands what she is saying, but the situation represents a teachable moment for the children and the staff. For some families and staff members, this may represent a complex issue in which they are caught between creating a safe and supportive environment for children who have two mommies and respecting the concerns of parents who, for religious or other reasons, promote a different view at home. In

such cases, staff members may need to check with families and meet with them before circumventing what is said at home.

Staff members typically develop strategies for accommodating this diversity.

- emphasize the importance of family
- teaching families represent different ways that adults come together to take care of and love the children they have the responsibility to raise
  - adoptive families,
  - foster families
  - single-parent families
  - multigenerational families
  - families led by a grandparent
  - families with gay or lesbian parents

- books, posters, photographs of diverse families
- intentional storytimes
- persona dolls - add a grandma and grandpa to the dollhouse
- play areas with costume clothing choices from around the world
- allow kids to notice and talk about differences
- invite family members to share in class

A classroom that celebrates differences in all categories will best honor diverse families.

Sources

- Esquivel, Krischa, eta la. What Programs Can Do To Be Inclusive of All Children. *Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childood Education*. LibreTexts, Social Sciences Library. Shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Krischa Esquivel, Emily Elam, Jennifer Paris, & Maricela Tafoya.
- Flavin, Brianna. 8 Ways to Honor Diverse Families in the ECE Classroom. *Education Blog*. Rasmussen University. 2018

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7.4: NAEYC's Principles and Guidelines for Family Engagement



NAEYC's Principles and Guidelines for Family Engagement

How do early childhood education programs meet the challenge of engaging families in their child's early learning and development?

NAEYC's **Engaging Diverse Families (EDF)** project goals sought answers to this question. Their plan was to develop a research-based definition of family engagement, identify exemplary family engagement practices in early childhood programs, and share what they learned by assembling a tool kit of materials to help programs more effectively engage families in children's early learning.

An extensive review of the research on family engagement by **NAEYC** and **Pre-K Now** found that programs with successful family engagement practices encompass the following six principles listed below.

Principles of Effective Practice

1. **Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child.**
   - invite families to actively take part in making decisions concerning their children's education
   - teachers and families jointly set goals for children's education and learning both at home and at school
2. **Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication.**
   - strategies allow for both school- and family-initiated communication that is timely and continuous
   - conversations focus on a child's educational experience as well as the larger program
   - communication takes multiple forms and reflects each family's language preference
3. **Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal**.
   - both programs and families benefit from shared resources and information.
   - programs invite families to share their unique knowledge and skills and encourage active participation in the life of the school
   - teachers seek information about children's lives, families, and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and teaching practices
4. **Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community**.
   - programs use learning activities at home and in the community to enhance each child's early learning

    - programs encourage and support families' efforts to create a learning environment beyond the program
5. **Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts**.
    - programs invite families to actively participate in making decisions about the program itself
    - programs also invite families to advocate for early childhood education in the wider community
6. **Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement**.
    - programs institutionalize family engagement policies and practices and ensure that teachers, administrators, and other staff receive the supports they need to fully engage families

Source

- Principles of Effective Family Engagement. *NAEYC*. 2010.

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7.5: Reflection on Learning



Image Source: Valuing Diversity: Developing a Deeper Understanding of All Young Children's Behavior. *Teaching Young Children*. NAEYC. 2020.

Fig. 7.5 Group of diverse preschoolers gathered in a circle with hands on a globe and smiling at their teacher.

Reflection: Family Engagement

Many types of family structures have been introduced in this chapter. Educators need to be prepared to serve the diverse array of families they will encounter across their careers. Programs should implement policies that acknowledge and respect different cultures and structures of families. Teachers must get to know families and ensure that all children's families are recognized and authentically included in the classroom.

Critical Thinking Questions



- What experiences do you have with diverse family structures?
  - How might your experiences and feelings about diverse family structures affect how you care for children and interact with their families?
- What does family engagement and communication look like with the families of children with differing abilities ?

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8: ADVOCACY

8.1: Framework for Learning
8.2: More Than a Celebratory Day, Week, or Month
8.3: Connecting to Resources
8.4: Reflection on Learning

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8.1: Framework for Learning

Understanding Advocacy

Watch the short video below to understand your role in advocating for children in early childhood.

YouTube Video

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View this YouTube Video online

After this chapter you should be able to:

- understand what advocacy is in the context of children with differing abilities
- how to connect with different resources

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8.2: More Than a Celebratory Day, Week, or Month



Image Source. lftarn. World Down Syndrome Day Badge. *OpenClipArt*.

Fig. 8.2. Clipart. World Down Syndrome Day, March 21, Badge.

Awareness Celebrations

We often hear about advocacy efforts during certain times of the year such as Autism Awareness Month in April, Disability Awareness Month in March and specifically, World Down Syndrome Day on March 21st, but promoting advocacy for important issues also means taking taking action all year round.

Advocacy Defined

- *Advocacy is acting with or on behalf of an individual or group to resolve an issue, obtain a needed support or service, or promote a change in the practices, policies, or behaviors of government agencies, businesses, and others. Advocacy is essential for promoting and protecting the civil and human rights.* - The ARC

Caregiver advocacy is described as a set of behaviors

- obtaining support or services for the child,
- being a voice for a child,
- creating opportunities,
- facilitating change and
- educating the community about the child's needs.

Active engagement in advocacy, including for service development, is valued by caregivers as a constructive way to respond to the difficulties they face on a daily basis.

Changes to laws over the last half century were the results of individuals and their families lobbying politicians to ensure legal equitable treatment of people with all forms of disabilities. Prior to the mid-20th century children with disabilities were often placed in institutions, but it was the advocacy of families who wanted their children to lead fulfilling lives in the community that began the efforts by families, local volunteer groups, national professional organizations and their state and local chapters that led to increased research and the passage of state and federal legislation on behalf of people with disabilities

As a result of the dedicated efforts by families and caregivers, professional organizations and local groups, educators, researchers, and health workers the network of support for families of children with disabilities as expanded.

Learn about the federal and state laws that have been passed as a result of dedicated advocacy. Check local government and the departments of health and/or education in each state to learn more about their resources and services for children with disabilities.

- United States Government (ChiidCare.gov)
  - Services for Children with Disabilities evolved because of the IDEA Act
- State of Wisconsin:
  - Services for Children with Delays or Disabilities
  - Family Support and Advocacy Organizations.

Sources

- Szlamka, Zsofia, et al. The role of advocacy and empowerment in shaping service development for families raising children with developmental disabilities. *National Library of Medicine*. May 29, 2022.
- The ARC. "History." Copyright © 2023 by The Arc, a 501(c)(3) organization.

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8.3: Connecting to Resources



Image Source: Tatiana Syrikova. Mother and Baby Using a Laptop Together. *Pexels.com*. Public Domain.

Fig. 8.3. Mother and toddler sitting on bed while using a laptop.

Connecting to Resources

One of the biggest things that your families might need, especially when their children are first diagnosed, are resources. Connecting to resources benefits you in the classroom and the children and families you serve.

Start by checking with your individual state and local departments of health and education, your local school district, as well as research additional supports that may exist in your local communities.

Get started by reviewing the list of resources below.

Resources

- NAEYC and NAEYC Topics List
- Birth - 3 Programs. Wisconsin Department of Health Services
  - early intervention special education programs
- Early Childhood Inclusion. Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.
- Early Childhood Special Education. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
- Well Badger Resource Center
  - one-stop connection to community, social, health, and government programs — a place to find what you need, when you need it
- Services for Children with Disabilities. ChildCare.gov. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care (OCC).
- WI FACETS - Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training, and Support
  - provides several types of special education support services to help Wisconsin parents and educators support and enrich the lives of children with disabilities
    - one-to-one special education support to families of children with disabilities
    - free online training year-round - webinars on topics related to special education rights and responsibilities, parent support, and disabilities

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8.4: Reflection on Learning



Image Source: Validity Admin. Call to action to protect the right to family life & prevent institutionalization for all children. *Validity*. (International NGO)

Fig. 8.4. Comic-style illustration of diverse children point to a sign that reads "call to action."

Reflection: Advocacy

We need to advocate for issues and policy changes all year round and with all different types of audiences to be effective. Knowing what we are advocating for and how it will impact future students makes the fight worthwhile. We need resources on hand for families in need, which might also benefit us as much as the families in our care.



Critical Thinking Questions

- What is one advocacy effort that you are very passionate about and why?
  - If you don't have one yet research the grassroots efforts for a disability topic that interests you.
- Find a resource (article, podcast, video) that can be a benefit to both families and educators.
- Do you know the best way to locate resources in your area?

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GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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