



INTRODUCTION

The *Including All Children Trainer's Guide* is a resource for preparing childcare teachers and Family Child Care Home providers to successfully include children with disabilities. It provides a description of the core components of inclusive childcare programs, an overview of the training and assessment materials, and suggestions for using these materials in either a workshop or self-paced instructional format.

The *Trainer's Guide* is part of a comprehensive package designed to help programs care for children with disabilities and respond to the mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

OVERVIEW OF INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

What Does Inclusive Child Care Mean?

Inclusive child care means that children with disabilities are included in typical childcare settings. It is based on the premise that children with disabilities are *children* first. In inclusive childcare programs teams of parents and professionals collaborate to ensure that children with disabilities are involved in the same environments they would be in if they had no disability. With the right accommodations these children participate in everyday program activities in the company of *same-aged* peers, regardless of the level of disability.

Where Does the Concept of Inclusion Come From?

Children with disabilities have historically been viewed as having something wrong with them. Families were told that their children were best served in segregated settings, away from children with typical developmental expectancies. The goal was to avoid having them made fun of, while providing therapy and special education to improve their level of functioning. Once they were “fixed” or “cured” they could return to the mainstream of everyday childhood activities.

But the whole notion of “fixing” these children was based on a faulty idea about how children with disabilities develop. As we know from experience and education, typical children go through phases or stages: at certain ages most children are able to do roughly the same things — for example, sit up at six months, or use words by 24 months.

Overview of inclusive child care (continued)

It was thought children with disabilities needed more time and practice to achieve these same developmental outcomes. Although delayed, they would eventually “catch-up” with others their age. As a result, these children often spent their time in isolated settings practicing skills they rarely mastered. They seldom attended local schools or played with neighborhood children. Because they were so isolated, they often missed the opportunities for incidental learning that are embedded in everyday childhood activities. Rather than helping children become more capable of functioning, participation in segregated settings often caused them to develop behaviors and mannerisms that set them further apart.

Today, disability is no longer seen as something to be “fixed,” but rather is thought of as a type of human diversity to be accepted and embraced. This current understanding requires a new way of approaching children who follow a different developmental course than their peers. Research tells us that regardless of developmental level, children achieve their fullest potential when they grow up in the company of *same-aged* peers.

Early childhood experiences with typical peers not only improve the functional independence of children with disabilities, but provide an invaluable opportunity for promoting friendship and discouraging the bullying or mimicking that characterized the behavior of earlier generations. Children with disabilities are best served in their natural environment, that is, where they would be if they had no disability.

The Law

Federal law (US Department of Education) supports the right of children with disabilities to learn and grow alongside their typical peers. As early as 1975 Congress passed PL 94-142, which stated that all children have the right to a “free appropriate public education” in what is referred to as the “least restrictive environment.” Environments where typical children learn and grow are considered “least restrictive.”

The benefits of this law were extended to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities when it was re-authorized in 1986. The Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990, further protects the rights of children with disabilities. This legislation mandates that environments such as childcare settings, public or private, cannot discriminate against a child with a disability unless the program demonstrates “undue burden.” It further states that “reasonable accommodations” must be provided.

Together these laws led to the formation of integrated childcare, preschool, and after school programs. These early programs were the precursors of inclusive child care as we think about it today. Additional references on these laws are in the Resources section which follows the end of this Introduction.

See Resources for more information on the law.