What is Inclusion?

Philosophy, Practice & Benefits
Our program welcomes children and youth of all abilities.
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What is Inclusion?

Inclusion is

a philosophy,

a practice,

and a community.

In child care and youth development programs, attitudes, beliefs, policies and resources influence how inclusion is viewed and put into practice.
Philosophy of Inclusion: It’s about Belonging

Inclusion is an attitude and a way of thinking that welcomes and respects all children and families. Inclusion is about belonging, participating, and reaching one’s full potential in a diverse society. Adults with a shared way of thinking about inclusion value children of all abilities being together and view ability difference as a form of diversity. They share the fundamental belief that all children and youth belong. Inclusion upholds civil rights and ends the “us/them” mentality.

Inclusion means being open to all, where all children and youth belong together.
Practice of Inclusion: Making Accommodations

Inclusion is a practice that supports the participation of children with and without disabilities in community programs. Inclusive programs make accommodations to their policies, practices and procedures to support individual children and families.

**Accommodations are the types of changes that allow children equal access to child care and youth development programs.**

They are made on a case-by-case basis and focus on the unique needs of each individual. Accommodations provide individualized support for youth so they can learn, play, and connect with others in a natural environment.
Community of Inclusion: Meaningful Participation

Inclusion is a community where youth with and without disabilities are respected as active members. Inclusion is much more than a placement. It is a community where everyone belongs and is seen as a capable and important member.

Inclusive communities focus on what children and youth can do. Everyone contributes to the community in a way that compliments their strengths and abilities. Although individual participation in a program may look different, participation is always meaningful. Individuals of all abilities are respected, valued, and appreciated for their contributions to a diverse program community.
The practice of inclusion is influenced by many factors. The key elements of an inclusive program can be thought of in terms of **access**, **participation** and **support**.

**Access**

Access in a child care or youth development program means access to the **environment**, **materials**, **activities** and **social connections**. With varying levels of support, all children and youth have equal access to an inclusive program. An inclusive program has space that is accessible for youth who use wheelchairs and other types of mobility supports.

**Children can move about easily and get from one area to another without much help from adults.**

There are a variety of materials for different abilities and children can reach and use them
independently. Programs are designed for youth with and without disabilities and staff make sure that individual children have access to the daily routine and activities. Every child and youth, regardless of ability, has opportunities to learn, play and connect with other kids. When needed, accommodations are provided to maximize those opportunities.

**Participation**

In an inclusive program, youth with and without disabilities are engaged in learning, play, and social activities. *Youth may have different roles and responsibilities in a given activity, but they are all included in a way that makes sense for them.* Program staff make changes to materials
and activities to support children who learn and play differently, so they have an opportunity to meaningfully participate. Staff also consider differences in the ways children communicate and help them make connections with their peers. Program staff acknowledge similarities and differences among children and explain them in ways that children can understand.

**Support**

Overall program support is a large piece of successful inclusion. **Staff in inclusive programs have a “can do” attitude and look for solutions to challenges.** They work together, collaborate with families, and use available resources, all of which require backing from the overall program. Inclusive programs build a system that supports the efforts of individual staff members to include all
children and youth. Inclusive programs encourage a shared philosophy of inclusion through staff training and administrative support.
Benefits of Inclusion

Inclusion offers benefits to children & youth, families, and child care & youth development staff. Recent research supports the benefits of inclusion for youth, families and professionals.

INCLUSION

promotes acceptance
strengthens families
builds confidence

Studies have shown that training can change attitudes toward inclusion and it often has a lasting impact on staff beliefs and assumptions about children and youth with disabilities.
For Kids: Diversity & Acceptance

Children with and without disabilities benefit from an inclusive program. Researchers have found that all children make important developmental gains in inclusive settings.

Children with and without disabilities learn from each other and contribute as equals.

Inclusion teaches children to respect differences, to demonstrate acceptance and have a better understanding of diversity. Children in inclusive settings show less prejudice and more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities. They develop a wide sense of ability differences and grow up seeing disability as a natural part of life.

For Families: Support & Resources

Many families of children with disabilities experience stress and a period of adjustment.
Families that have access to resources typically have less stress and a shorter period of adjustment.

The well-being and progress of a child with disabilities is also closely tied to the parents’ supports and resources. Support from professionals impacts the family as a whole, as well as how they adapt. Research shows that families with access to resources, such as child care and youth development programs and supportive professionals, usually adjust well.
For Staff: Training & Experience

In studies that look at staff attitudes and beliefs, staff with training and experience are more positive about inclusion. When staff have training, they feel more comfortable and willing to serve youth with disabilities. They also feel more proficient working with all children. Experience also plays a role. When staff have experience including a child with a disability in their program, they tend to feel more confident making accommodations for any child.
Put simply, inclusion is **belonging**.

Compare your program philosophy to the main points of inclusion below.

**Inclusion is...**

- A shared way of thinking where every child has value and can participate in a meaningful way.
- A belief in every child’s inherent right to contribute to his or her community.
- An approach where individualized accommodations promote access to child care and youth programs.
- A community where program staff and families work together and are supported by resources and training.
- A space where youth with and without disabilities acknowledge and value differences.
Find these inclusion tools online at KITonline.org/checklist

Inclusive Program Messages Assessment

Inclusive Program Goals Checklist
The KIT Online Learning Center Offers:

- Webinars
- Articles
- Booklets
- Tip Sheets
- Instructional Videos
- eLearning Course Modules
- Support Center Information

Earn CEUs and Certificates of Completion!
References


Visit our Online Learning Center to access resources on topics including:

Behavior
Partnering with Families
Autism Spectrum Disorders
Inclusion and Accommodations

Log on to KITonline.org to create a FREE account.

Earn CEUs & Certificates for Professional Development!

Every child’s life is enhanced through shared experiences and friendships with peers of all abilities.

Thank you for making a difference.

KITonline.org

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