

The Top Eight Questions Providers Ask About Inclusive Child Care



A Publication of the Alameda County Child Care Planning
Council Committee on Special Needs

This document was developed by the Alameda County Child Care Planning Council's Committee on Special Needs. The Committee's goal is to work collaboratively to develop an infrastructure for inclusive care in Alameda County. Portions of this document are based on several sources, including the Inclusion Fact Sheet from Child Care Plus at the Rural Institute on Disabilities at the University of Montana.

What is inclusive child care?

An inclusive child care program is just like any other child care program. In an inclusive program, children with and without disabilities are nurtured and participate in play and learning activities together. The philosophy of an inclusive program is to acknowledge and support the individual needs of each child and to make sure every child feels welcome.

Children with disabilities engage in the typical day-to-day activities of all children in child care settings. Child care providers in an inclusive program value and celebrate all children as unique individuals – each with special talents and needs. They make modest and often creative modifications to routines and activities so that each child can benefit from participating.

As in all quality programs, caregivers recognize and maximize the benefits of the relationships among all children, families, and staff. High-quality child care programs provide a rich environment for children's social experiences and developmental opportunities, and promote inclusive child care programs that encourage cooperation, choices and a sense of belonging.

Just as with parents of typically developing children, families

of children with disabilities want their children to have relationships with children their own age in a supportive environment that promotes the development of a positive self-concept. Programs embracing inclusive child care often do so as part of an effort towards increasing their overall quality and find that they are often recognized as exemplary programs. ♦

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

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

What does the law require?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal, civil rights law passed in 1990 that provides equal access to public accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

Early childhood programs such as family child care homes and child care centers have a responsibility to comply with the ADA in the following ways:

- Develop admissions policies that do not discriminate against children with disabilities;
- Make reasonable modifications to policies, practices and procedures. This means significant attempts must be made to include the child in the program;
- Provide resources for effective communication between caregiver and child (for example providing large print books, using picture cards or learning Sign Language);
- Comply with physical access requirements (for example rearranging furniture, installing grab bars in restrooms, or setting up a temporary or permanent wheelchair ramp);
- Charge families with children who have disabilities the same rates as those who have typically developing children. The ADA prohibits charging high rates for child care to children with disabilities, unless the charge is for a specialized service like occupational or physical therapy.

In addition to the ADA, California has its own civil rights laws protecting people with disabilities which are even broader. Contact the Fair Employment & Housing Commission (see question #8 for contact information) for more information.

When a parent wants to enroll his/her child with a disability in your program, this is a wonderful opportunity to expand your skills as a caregiver! You must individually assess each child's daily care needs and how your program can make accommodations to include him or her. ♦

Do I need help getting started?

Chances are, you already have many skills and materials that will help you care for children with special needs. In addition to the child's parent and child care provider, many children with disabilities have other people involved in their care. If you need more suggestions or resources, call your local child care resource and referral agency (R&R). They can help guide you step by step to what resources may be available. Resources might include individualized consultation services, special equipment, support and information for changes you might make in your environment or assistance in adapting activities. Special equipment loans for a particular child can be arranged and the R&Rs will know about current local training resources and opportunities.

R&R staff may also have good ideas about talking to parents, or they can refer you to family support organizations to give you even more support for parents. Limited financial support, in the form of tax credits or deductions, is available.

To learn more about the tax credit or deduction, contact the Department of Justice's ADA Information Line at (800) 514-0301. It is important to recognize that families of children with special needs receive no special funding to include children with special needs in child care settings. ♦

Who are my partners in caring for children with special needs?

You do not have to feel alone or isolated in caring for a child with disabilities in your child care. These steps will help you figure out who might be involved and/or how to ask them for help.

- When enrolling a child with disabilities into your child care program, or if you suspect that a child may have a disability, the first step is to ask the parent if there are any special services the child is currently receiving (for example, speech or occupational therapy).

- If there are other agencies involved, ask the parent if you can talk/coordinate with that contact person. Make sure you get written parental permission before talking with them. For samples of permission forms, call your local R&R.

- For very young children (0-3), specialized services can be provided anywhere, including the child care program. For example, a speech therapist may come one time per week to a child care program, and you can get good ideas to further encourage the child's communication. On site services may also be available for preschool aged children.

- If you have a child with a delay or disability and there is no service system helping the family yet, call your local R&R and they can help you with possible referrals.

Frequently, inclusive child care programs are a natural setting for specialists who are working to encourage a child's development in the areas in which the child needs more assistance. Professionals from early intervention or special education programs not only provide direct services to the child, but may also serve as a resource to program staff. The specialist can demonstrate specific strategies to reinforce the child's speech, movement, sensory awareness or social behavior. ♦

Do I need special training to care for children with special needs?

If you are already providing developmentally-appropriate, child-centered care, then you already know most of what you need to know to include a child with a disability. The most important thing to remember is that children are children first and each child is different, regardless of whether or not he or she has a disability.

Inclusion is simply one factor in providing quality child care. While including children with disabilities may require some

new information, offering inclusive care involves the same skills and attention that you would bring to any child care situation. Being conscious of the ways in which children are the same, while being sensitive to the ways in which they are different, are characteristics necessary to provide quality care to all children.

Parents know their children best and can tell you most of what you need to know to care for any particular child. It may be helpful to realize that the parents of children with disabilities had no special training when their children were born. Spend time talking with parents to learn about their child's needs and to find additional resources that may be available in the community.

Many of the accommodations children need in child care are not complicated and can be easily learned. Some characteristics of a disability may be more challenging than others and you may find training and other resources to be very helpful, even necessary. In addition to parents, training may be available from early intervention or special education specialists, from health professionals, from disability organizations, resource and referral agencies or community colleges.

In some instances, training may be required to administer certain medical procedures. Currently, child care providers are permitted to administer finger-prick tests for children with diabetes and nebulizer treatments for children with asthma. While these procedures are relatively simple, Community Care Licensing requires that providers document that they have received training on how to perform these procedures from a parent or health professional.

R&R staff can assist you in finding current community resources and training opportunities to support your inclusive child care program. ♦

How do I talk to parents?

It's always important to have open communication with parents in any situation. Many parents are eager to share tips and strategies for including their child in your program. Parents want their child care arrangements to be successful. Your reassurance and expressed interest in their child's healthy development will encourage a greater degree of openness and trust. Reinforce the message that you are always there to provide support, but in some cases their child may need additional help. Let parents know that you will help them find out how to access any special services their child might need.

Offer parents encouragement to follow-up by sharing your observations of the child's strengths and needs. Encourage parents to talk to their child's primary health care provider. Continue to work and communicate with parents as you create a nurturing environment for their child. For more ideas, talk to R&Rs or the Family Resource Network. ♦

Who do I call for help?

Quality connections you make with other professionals involved with the family will make it easier for you, the child, and the child's family. We've compiled a list of key contacts for you below.

ALAMEDA COUNTY COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

How to Find Out More About Inclusive Child Care

Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (R&R's)

Inclusion Services at each R&R assist families with special needs in finding appropriate child care.

- **BANANAS, Inc. (North County)** (510) 658-0381
- **4C's of Alameda Co. (Mid County)** (510) 582-2182
- **Child Care Links (Tri Valley)** (925) 417-8733

Legal Issues Related to Inclusive Child Care

Child Care Law Center

Provides legal assistance on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, California's civil rights laws, and other child care legal issues. A Free Information & Referral Line is available Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday 12-3 Pacific Time at (415) 394-7144.

Department of Justice

Department of Justice Hotline (between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST weekdays) at (800) 514-0301 or (800) 514-0383 (TDD). DOJ Disability website: <http://www.usdoj.gov/disabilities.htm>. "Commonly Asked Questions About Child Care and the ADA" at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/childq%26a.htm>.

Fair Employment and Housing Commission

The Mission of the Department of Fair Employment and Housing is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations, and from the perpetration of acts of hate violence. (800) 884-1684, <http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/>

Help in Making My Child Care Program More Accessible for Children With Special Needs

Every Child Counts/Alameda County First Five Child Care – Early Care & Education Department

(510) 875-2400

Provides professional guidance to early childhood educators to improve the quality of child care, and administers the Child Care Fund that provides loans, grants and business training to licensed center and family child care providers.

Resource and Referral Agencies (See above)

Agencies That May Be Involved with a Child Who Has Special Needs

Regional Center Of The East Bay (RCEB) (510) 383-1200

Provides services for those with developmental disabilities (all ages). The "Early Start" program at RCEB provides services for 0-3 year olds with or at risk for developmental disabilities.

- **Early Start** (510) 383-1355

Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs)

Provides services through local public schools for students with special needs (ages 3-21).

- **Alameda/Albany/Berkeley/ Emeryville/Piedmont** (510) 525-9806
- **Oakland** (510) 879-8223
- **Castro Valley/Hayward/San Leandro/San Lorenzo** (510) 537-3000, x1220
- **New Haven/Newark/Fremont** (510) 659-2569
- **Dublin/Livermore/Sunol Glen/Mtn. House Elem./Pleasanton** (925) 426-9144

California Children's Services (CCS)

(510) 208-5970

Provides specialized medical care for children with eligible medical conditions (ages 0-21).

Family Resource Network (FRN)

(510) 547-7322

Provides free information, referral services, advocacy and parent-to-parent support for children with disabilities or special health care needs (ages 0-22).

Asian Community Mental Health Services

(510) 451-6729

Developmental Disabilities Unit provides culturally competent case management, parent support groups, consultation, and community integration services for Asian and Pacific Islander disabled clients and their families in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

Friends of Children with Special Needs (FCSN)

(510) 468-9797

A comprehensive program and support network that serves families, children and adults who have special needs. They provide services in Chinese and English languages.

La Familia Counseling Service Developmental Services

(510) 887-0661

Provides intensive case management, advocacy and training to primarily Latino individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Help for Parents Who Have Questions About Their Child's Health, Development or Behavior

The Child's Pediatrician/Primary Health Provider

The child's pediatrician may serve as a valuable resource for questions and referrals.

Alameda County Public Health Clearinghouse

(888) 604-INFO(4636)

Provides health-related referrals in Alameda County.

Child Development Warmlines

Provides advice and information on child development and health issues.

- **BANANAS, Inc.:** (510) 658-7353
- **Child Care Health Program:** (510) 923-9513

Help In Knowing How To Talk to Parents About Concerns Related to Their Child's Health, Development of Behavior

Resource and Referral Agencies (See above)

Family Resource Network (FRN) (See above)

Alameda County Development Disabilities Council

(510) 267-3261

Acts as a catalyst for collaborative efforts, offers advice, assists in policy planning, promotes best practices, and advocates for services for persons with developmental disabilities of all ages. Holds monthly informative meetings.

Help for Parents Who Are In Crisis Due To Their Child's Special Needs

Family Paths

(800) 829-3777

Serves parents, caregivers and children needing support, legal services, or crisis intervention.

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care (ACCESS)

(800) 491-9099

Provides evaluations and services for those with mental health, drug or alcohol problems (all ages). Individuals can call to receive information and referrals for mental health services. ACCESS can support speakers of English, Spanish, and many Asian languages. ♦

Questions about this document should be directed to:

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www.acgov.org/childcare/index.shtml

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