

Tip Sheets

Seven Strategies for Building an Accepting and Inclusive Environment



1. Acknowledge differences.

Young children observe differences. By pointing out

differences in children, we are saying “we all do things differently and that’s okay.”

You can show children how differently they build with blocks—one makes a tower, one makes a straight line. Also, Jack uses a special spoon at lunch time to help him eat his yogurt. It’s a natural part of the day. No big deal.

2. Model appropriate behavior.

Children learn by watching and imitation. They do what we do. Reflect on the words you use and how you treat children. Do you allow all of the children to feed themselves, even though it would be easier to feed a child with developmental issues? Do you praise all children for their artwork, even the child who still “scribbles”?

3. Educate children.

Children learn by doing/interacting with objects through all their senses, and later, discussion. Talk about disability and how it impacts a person. Ask permission from a parent to teach the kids about a disability which impacts their child.

Brainstorm with the children about how they can make adaptations before the new child arrives. Use books/toys that depict disabilities in positive and appropriate ways.

4. Set rules for treating others with respect.

An important goal for children is to learn how to treat others. State the rules clearly. Make sure they make sense to your age group, and help children see how their behavior affects others in the setting.

5. Answer children’s questions honestly, simply, and clearly.

Children will notice disabilities and ask questions. Give them the answers to their questions and be honest.

6. Allow children to explore through play.

Have toys around that depict disability equipment, and help children explore different uses for objects. Teach children that equipment used by children with special needs are not toys, so they need to be respectful, but they also need to be encouraged to learn and be comfortable with something new.

7. Reassure children.

Children may wonder whether they will “catch” the disability. As far as possible, explain how disabilities may be caused, for example, “Robert was born with a short arm.”

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.