

## Inclusion in Early Childhood

### Value of Inclusion in Early Childhood

Children are naturally drawn together. In every society, in every culture and community, children just want to play and make friends. We know that this attraction to other children, and strong desire to play and explore new things, is a natural part of human development. Children learn through play and they learn best by interacting, watching and sharing with others.

Inclusive play and social activities offer valuable opportunities for children to learn social skills, develop language and communication skills, exercise fine and gross motor muscles and to develop skills that will help him or her be more independent. Social play opportunities in early childhood help to break down barriers in later years. The children that your child learns and plays with in the early years will be the friends, teammates, coworkers and employers he or she comes in contact with as he or she grows up!

People are never more accepting, welcoming of others or more enthusiastic to try new things, than in the early childhood years! Often the times that inclusion occurs most naturally are when families participate together in community events or encourage their child to take part in typical childhood recreation and social programs.

### Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood

- Children learn many new skills in all areas of development by observing and interacting with other children their own age, or older.
- Children learn the “rules” of social play, i.e. turn taking, sharing, helping others, etc.
- Children develop a sense of pride, self-confidence and belonging.
- Children and families develop relationships with others in the neighbourhood.
- Children learn to try new things, overcome challenges and adapt to changes in their environments.
- Others (children and adults) naturally develop an increase in acceptance.
- Others develop greater recognition of the child’s capabilities, skills, and talents.
- Children develop greater and more valued roles as they grow up.

## **Tips to Promote Inclusion in Early Childhood**

- Believe that your child can and should participate!
- Model for your child and others. Through your actions demonstrate that you expect that he/she will participate and offer strategies to make things work. Show your child how to interact with others then “wait and watch” as he/she starts to engage independently.
- Promote independence – support and encourage independence by offering your child opportunities to try, opportunities to explore, and allowing him/her choices.
- Know your child’s rights. They are the same as any other child’s!
- Discover your child’s strengths, gifts, interests – offer new experiences for him/her to explore new interests and skills.
- Find inclusive places in your community – the library, EarlyOn programs, Parks, Recreation Facilities, Cultural Centres, Church/Temple, etc.
- Attend and be actively involved as a family in community events and local celebrations. (i.e. Waterfront Festival, Bread and Honey Festival, Farmer’s Market, Santa Claus Parade.)
- Register for children’s recreation programs – T-ball, Soccer, Sparks/Beavers, Swimming Lessons, Kinder-Gym, Music and Movement Classes, etc.
- Host neighbourhood gatherings: – Play-dates, Birthday Parties, BBQ’s, Christmas Carolling, etc.
- Connect with the people in your community who are “Gate Keepers”. (Another parent whose child participates in a group, a Beaver leader, a Sunday school teacher, the sociable child at the top of the street, etc.)
- Volunteer! Be a “helper”; share your ideas and strategies for success. You know your child best!
- Try to put past negative experiences behind you and focus on potential and future success. If something doesn’t work the first time, try again later. Try something new or different. Most children prefer some types of activities over others and need many opportunities to explore new experiences.