



The Association for Community Living-Manitoba

Preparing for Inclusion

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Early Identification for Children with Special Needs ⁽¹⁾

You may be the first to notice that a child in your child care setting has special needs. Perhaps no one has realized that a problem exists or perhaps parents ⁽²⁾ deny that their child has a problem. The family physician may have told the parents that the child will outgrow it. Yet parents need to know if you think their child has special needs. However, it is ultimately the parent's decision to seek help. Taking the following 10 steps can lead to securing help for the child, the family and child care providers — everyone on the team.

Step 1. Observation

Observe the child at different times of the day. Document your observations without interpretation. Provide clear evidence of the child's difficulties and always include the child's strengths. Be concrete. For example: In morning circle, child imitated hand and body gestures to songs. When story was read, got up from circle three times; ECE had to bring child back to the group.

Step 2. Strengths and Needs

Develop a list of the child's strengths and needs. For example: Strengths — enjoys the program; likes water play; plays with cars.

Needs — unable to verbally communicate, grabs toys from other children.

Step 3. Your Consultation

Share your observations of the child with a supervisor. Decide on the best overall approach to help the child and family.

For example: Assign one person to spend more time with the child to help build a positive relationship with an adult and the group of children. That person should play a key role in communicating with the family.

Step 4. Building Rapport

Develop your relationship with the child's parents. Ask about the child at home: favourite toys, communication skills, response to routines. This valuable information can help you better understand the child. Often the parent has the same concerns about their child and is waiting for someone to validate and assist them in accessing help.

Step 5. Meeting with the Family

Arrange a meeting with the child's family. Be specific: "I'd like to set up a time to talk

with you about helping Johnny with his speech." During the meeting, share specific examples of your observations, noting both the child's strengths and needs. Never diagnose or label the child. Put your feedback in the context of the child's ability to manage in a group setting. Come prepared with information about specialized services available to help the child and family.

Step 6. Patience

Allow the parent time to consider their options and make an informed decision. If the parent agrees to involve additional services to help their child, have the parent sign a consent form so you can make a referral to the appropriate service. If a parent chooses not to pursue the issue further, continue maintaining communication with the parent. Gaining a parent's trust takes time. Parents' concerns can emerge gradually. Invite parents into the program to observe and discuss their child's progress.

Step 7. Support Plan

Make a plan to support the child in your program using the expertise of your team. Set one or two specific goals that both ECEs and parents can work on. Make goals achievable. Make a date for the team to review the child's progress.

Set the child and team up for success.

Teach the child skills that he needs.

For example: To facilitate play skills, turn taking and appropriate language, have one ECE sit with the child with special needs and another child from the group.

Step 8. Resources

Involve outside resources to provide support. Your Child Day Care Coordinator can help identify available services such as a consultant who can visit your program, assess the child with special needs and assist in developing an individual support plan.

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Early Identification, cont'd.

Build a partnership between the centre, the family and any outside resources needed.

Step 9. Training

Educate staff about the child's special needs through training by appropriate professionals. Circulate articles and/or videos to help staff better understand the child's particular needs.

Step 10. Policies

Ensure that your centre has an inclusion policy that covers ways to access support for the team. This policy should be included and reviewed with parents upon each child's enrollment. Make all community resource information available to all parents.

Adapted from CCCF Resource Sheet #56.

Notes

1. A child with special needs refers to any child whose behaviour and/or development concerns you.
2. Parent refers to the adult(s) responsible for the child when not in care.

Making Inclusion Real

INCLUSION means that children are welcomed, supported and valued. It means that the activities of playing, learning and growing happen in a way in which all children feel that they belong. It does not mean that there are no challenges — rather it means that the child is in the best environment to experience success. It does not mean that every child does exactly the same thing at the same time. All children have different abilities and aptitudes; an inclusive setting accommodates and builds on those. Effective inclusion is a process.

Download the brochure that can help staff and families committee to inclusion at your childcare program from the Canadian Association for Community Living at www.cacl.ca

Internet Resources Just a Mouse-click Away!

Association for Community Living-Manitoba
www.mts.net~aclmb/

Specialink-The National Centre for Early Childhood Inclusion
www.specialinkcanada.org

All Together Now (an online journal by Partnerships for Inclusion)
www.fpg.unc.edu/~pfi/Pages/Products/ATN.htm

Canadian Association for Community Living
www.cacl.ca

Council for Exceptional Children www.cec.sped.org/

Down Syndrome Webpage
www.nas.com/downsyn/

Geneva Centre for Autism
www.autism.net/

Exceptional Parent Magazine
www.eparent.com/

Cerebral Palsy Canada
www.cerebralpalsycanada.com/

Canadian Institute for the Blind www.cnib.ca

Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse (resources on FAS/FAE) www.ccsa.ca/

Manitoba Children's Special Services www.gov.mb.ca.fs/programs/cfs/fs0cfcs03.html

Linked Information Network for Kids with Disabilities
www.linkd.org

Society for Manitobans with Disabilities
www.smd-services.com/children/



Environments for children with FASD*

Caregivers may suspect that some of the children in their care are alcohol affected even without a diagnosis. Best practices in ECE that benefit all children are also good for children with FASD. Think about your own programs and environments and whether they.....

- Provide clearly defined play spaces and boundaries
- Are structured but flexible, providing predictable routines
- Have visual clues or pictures to remind children of rules and steps in the routines
- Have limited visual stimulation, some blank spaces on walls, calming colours
- Keep the noise level down and play soothing classical music or nature sounds
- Have soft lighting inside and allow children to wear sunglasses outside
- Provide cozy spaces for children to go to when feeling over stimulated
- Recognize that children may be very sensitive to touch (tactile defensive)
- Are carefully supervised and monitored for safety, both inside and outside the centre
- Teach social skills and provide words for feelings
- Communicate and educate others about the needs of children with FASD

Adapted from What Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers Need to Know About Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (Manitoba Healthy Child & Manitoba Child Care Association).

*FASD= Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

The Environment: Your Partner

The physical arrangement of your program should support your learning goals for the children in your care. It communicates your expectations and provides cues that support child development. These messages have a huge impact on children's interactions with each other and how they play and learn. They foster children's sense of order, exploration and ownership.

Foster a Sense of Order

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ART MATERIALS ARE JUMBLED TOGETHER IN A BOX, OR TOYS MIXED TOGETHER IN A TOY BOX WITH A LID?

The mess makes it hard for children to organize their thoughts around a play theme. They will need to be dumped out for children to find what they are looking for, or children may give up without even looking.

Place materials so that children understand where they are kept and which ones go together. Group same materials by function—stack paper by colour or size, keep glues together in a small basket, scissors in a special holder, coloured pencils in a coffee can. This will help their play becomes more engaging and complex, and they learn something about organization in the process. Children may not be tidy by nature, but they will get the point in an environment that makes it easy and satisfying to put toys away. Matching materials to pictures or words on the shelves, refilling intriguing storage containers, or sorting coloured paper into matching coloured boxes are engaging learning activities themselves.

Invite Exploration

WHAT KIND OF PLAY DO YOU SEE WITH MATERIALS THAT IMPLY ONLY ONE USE? (PUZZLES, SHAPE SORTERS, PEGBOARDS?)

Compare that with children's water exploration or play with a collection of keys. While both kinds of play are important, most children's programs could benefit from more exploratory play.

Interesting, open ended materials and play opportunities invite children to pursue their natural interest in exploring the world around them. Invite exploration by combining materials that have different play themes (large sheets of paper and pencils in the block area soon have children drawing the plans for their city) Add new open-ended materials and collections to your environment. These require imagination and can be played with in many different ways. They heighten children's willingness and ability to explore even in structured settings.

Provide cues that say "exploration is ok here" by combining old materials and gathering new, open ended materials. Try bags of toilet paper rolls, a bale of hay, giant cardboard boxes, seed collections, or metres of fabric remnants.

Create Ownership

Help children feel their sense of belonging to your program. Acknowledge them as important members of your community by enhancing their independence (step stools to reach the sink or water fountain, small steps up to the change table, child size brooms for cleaning up spilled sand, small sponges for table clean ups, etc.) Get them involved in designing the play space, hanging up new posters, watering the plants. Incorporate their ideas through your emergent curriculum.

Take walk through your program. Get down to their level, and think about the messages they receive from your environment. Look at the way children use materials, make choices about what they will play with next, and interact with each other. Use the environment as your partner in children's learning.

The **Association for Community Living, Manitoba** is a provincial not for profit organization dedicated, through the mutual support and cooperation of Local Associations, to the building of dignified lifestyles and the full inclusion in the community of persons who live with intellectual disabilities. ACL-Manitoba includes 14 branches and 92 affiliated groups throughout the province of Manitoba.

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For support in the inclusion of children with special needs in your facility, please call ACL's Early Childhood Consultant, Debra at 204.489-6897 or email at debramayr.shaw.ca

ACL-Manitoba's goal for this newsletter is the enhancement of inclusive environments for young children with intellectual disabilities and stronger partnerships between parents, the association and the childcare community. The goal is to raise awareness and sensitivity to inclusion issues, to foster critical thinking skills and problem solving to ensure children are in fact being included in all aspects of their program. At the ACL-Manitoba annual general meeting held in 1997, members passed a resolution that reads:

Early childhood supports such as daycare and other services must be available to all children. Programs such as early childhood interventions must include the entire family, wherever possible, as the primary teachers of their children. As children grow, supports and services must be provided in an inclusive environment. We must respect individuality and offer all children the opportunity to learn from each other's differences.

Ripples for Change

Heather White of the Southwest Daycare in Brandon took Preparing for Inclusion, Level I last year. All participants received a small shiny rock during this workshop series. They visualized what happens when a rock is dropped into a pool of water-and imagined the ripples spreading ever outward. Advocates for inclusion can have the same impact!

Over the summer, Heather visited the Peace Gardens. She was very moved by the new memorial to 9/11 built on the border of Canada and the US. Various visitors had added their own personal items to the monument. Heather reached into her pocket where her fingers found the shiny rock she had carried around for months. She realized it was time to pass on the rock, and left it there as part of this permanent display.

Workshop Opportunities

Check out the **MCCA** Fall workshop schedule for information about two upcoming inclusion workshops in Winnipeg:

LEADERS FOR INCLUSION-a half day session for Centre Directors on October 28, 2003

INCLUSIVE CIRCLE TIME STRATEGIES-for front line caregivers on November 5, 2003

ACL Manitoba's Preparing for Inclusion Workshops can be delivered right at your centre or networking meeting. Fees are negotiable. Please call Debra at 204.489-6897 for more information. Trainers are available in most regions of the Province.

Westman Region of MCCA hosts Preparing for Inclusion, Level II in Brandon this fall with **Debbie Phythian**. Contact Debbie at 726-8206 for more information.

