

• A FACT SHEET TO COPY AND SHARE •

Children with Special Needs: The Need for Child Care

Who are the children with special needs?

An estimated 10% of children have special needs that require some level of additional supports and/or consultation and training to assure their full participation in community-based, “regular” child care programs. These children are characterized as having disabilities, delays or disorders in the areas of physical, social, intellectual, communicative, emotional, and/or behavioural development.

Why do they require child care?

For the same reasons as do all other children.

➤ **Healthy child development**

All children grow and benefit from high quality child care environments. Regular child care settings are often the “early intervention program of choice” for children with special needs.

➤ **Parental labour force participation or training**

Mothers of children with special needs have disproportionately lower labour force participation rates than do mothers of typical children. The lack of access to community-based, “regular” child care programs for their children with special needs is the major reason for this discrepancy.

➤ **As a resource for families**

Families of children with special needs require, as do other families, the range of services offered by high quality child care programs.

Why inclusion?

Segregation is *never* appropriate.

➤ **Legally**, interpretations of the Charter of Rights and provincial human rights codes will soon mandate inclusion.

➤ **Morally**, segregation on the grounds of disabling conditions unfairly excludes one group from the culturally normative setting, and is thus never appropriate.

➤ **Effectively**, children with special needs benefit from inclusive settings. So do typical children.

➤ **Societally**, children need to get along comfortably with a wide variety of people. An inclusive setting encourages tolerance, understanding and cooperation in all children.

SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion

P.O. Box 775

Sydney NS B1P 6J1

Tel: (902) 562-1662 1-866-902-6333

<http://www.speciallinkcanada.org> speciallink@ns.sympatico.ca

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What does the research say?

Inclusion works.

- **Positive outcomes**
Typically developing children have shown only positive developmental and attitudinal outcomes from inclusive experiences in high quality programs.
- **For children with all levels of disability**
There is no evidence that children with even severe levels of disability are poor candidates for inclusive programs. Demonstration projects have shown that children with severe disabilities can be successfully included.
- **Better skill retention**
On measures of how well children maintain skills after initial teaching, segregated settings have been shown to have poor outcomes. Children tend to be much more likely to use their newly-learned skills in inclusive settings.
- **Superior social outcomes**
All studies that assessed social outcomes for children in inclusive settings versus segregated settings found the inclusive settings to be superior.

What are the principles of inclusion?

The principles of inclusive child care are:

1. **Zero reject:** no child will ever be excluded for reasons of level or type of disability.
2. **Naturally occurring proportions:** program includes children with disabilities roughly in proportion to their occurrence in the general population.
3. **Same range of options:** children with special needs must not be limited to shorter child care days, or excluded from home-based or school-aged care.
4. **Full participation:** necessary supports must be provided, so that all children can participate, in some way, in all activities.
5. **Parent participation:** parents participate to the maximum extent of their comfort level.
6. **Advocacy:** staff and parents promote “inclusive, accessible, affordable, quality child care” for all — at the centre, in the community, and as public policy.

Who benefits?

Everyone benefits:

- **Children with special needs**
- **Parents**
- **Society**
- **Typical children**
- **Staff**

References: Strain, P.S. (1999). Least restrictive environment (LRE) for preschool children with special needs: What we know, and what we should be doing. A version of this paper was originally published in the *Journal of Early Intervention*, 14(4), 1990. Irwin, S.H. (1993). *Integration of Children with Disabilities into Daycare and After-School Programs*. Ottawa, ON: Health and Welfare Canada. (Available from SpecialLink.) Staub, D. (1996). On inclusion and the Other kids. Ideas that work www.edc.org/urban.

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