



Inclusion

Use this resource to help communicate the importance of inclusion of infants and toddlers with disabilities and other special needs. It will help promote essential program practices to ensure quality in family child care and center-based programs that serve infants and toddlers.

Rationale

High-quality relationship-based care is central to children's early brain development, emotional regulation, and learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2012). One of the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) six essential program practices for promoting this type of care is **inclusion of infants and toddlers with special needs** (PITC, n.d., a).

When programs provide appropriate accommodation and support to meet the needs of all children, everyone benefits. Despite several protection laws, many children with special needs and their families continue to face challenges accessing inclusive high-quality early childhood programs. Building a "national culture of inclusion" of children with special needs will take intentional planning and the involvement of all early childhood programs and services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

In infant and toddler care, inclusion means making the benefits of high-quality care available to *all* children, including those with identified disabilities and those who require additional help or support because of behavioral, health, or developmental issues. Including these children, with appropriate accommodation and support, allows all children to have full active program participation (PITC, n.d., b).

Note: Information within this brief was adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs (2015).

Why Is Inclusion Important for Infants and Toddlers?

- ◆ All infants and toddlers have a right to be included in a high-quality care environment.
- ◆ An inclusive infant and toddler program is rewarding for all the children, families, and staff in the child care program (California Department of Education, 2009).
- ◆ Families of infants and toddlers, particularly those with special needs, benefit from high-quality early childhood programs that connect with good community-based resources (Hebbeler et al., 2007).
- ◆ Caregivers increase their skills and knowledge of all children, including those with special needs, when care is individualized for all children and inclusive practices are implemented (Raikes & Edwards, 2009).
- ◆ Meaningful inclusion as a member of society is every person's right from birth, as supported by federal laws including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Head Start and Child Care and Development Block Grant Acts (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2015).



How Does Inclusion of All Infants and Toddlers Support Positive Child Outcomes?

- ◆ Research shows that individualized, high-quality experiences during infancy and toddlerhood support early brain development and peer interactions and provide a strong foundation for development and learning for all children (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).
- ◆ Meaningful inclusion benefits all children and supports children with disabilities in making significant developmental and learning progress (Green, Terry, & Gallagher, 2014).
- ◆ Children who are included in care programs have important opportunities for building peer-interaction, communication, and problem-solving skills (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014).
- ◆ Research on typically developing children shows positive developmental, social, and attitudinal outcomes in inclusive environments (Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004).

Planning to Implement Inclusion in Diverse Child Care Settings

Goal: High-quality infant and toddler programs are inclusive of all children, including children with identified disabilities and children who require additional help or support because of behavioral, health, or developmental issues.

- ◆ Actively enroll children with special needs.
- ◆ Implement written guidance to support the inclusion of infants and toddlers throughout the program. This guidance includes staff and family handbooks that share the importance of, as well as practices for, inclusion.
- ◆ Ensure that all staff understand and meet the legal and ethical responsibilities of providing support and services to infants and toddlers in inclusive settings.
- ◆ Provide access to specialized supports and develop formal collaborations with community partners.
- ◆ Create job descriptions for infant and toddler teachers that include expectations for inclusive practices. These expectations include forming relationships with families and working with early intervention specialists.
- ◆ Attend, create, or advocate for professional development that promotes inclusive practices. Strengthen professional development of caregivers and administrators in regard to inclusion of infants and toddlers with special needs and cultivating partnerships with families and early intervention specialists.
- ◆ Use an intentional review process to continually strengthen the system of inclusive practices across the center or family child care program.



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