

GROWING IDEAS

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

What is Inclusive Early Childhood Education?

"Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society." – *The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) joint position statement (2009).*



- Inclusive early childhood programs are built upon a foundation of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and consider individualized approaches that benefit all children.
- Inclusive programs welcome ALL children, including children with disabilities, and provide opportunities for each child in the group to participate, learn, and truly belong.
- Care and education professionals consider the needs of all children when planning, implementing, and evaluating the program.

What does an inclusive early childhood education program look like?

- Written program materials express a philosophy that welcomes all children and families.
- The physical environment is accessible to all children and families. It supports children's independence and involvement.
- There is administrative support for inclusion to work (written policies consistent with an inclusive philosophy, adequate staffing, training, equipment, planning time, and consultation as needed).
- Families and care and education professionals collaborate and work toward mutual goals.

What do care and education professionals need to know about inclusive early childhood education?

- They are familiar with and use DAP as a framework to plan the environment and curriculum;
- know about and understand laws that promote and support diversity, including the involvement of children with special needs and/or disabilities;
- believe in and design activities and instruction that are based on each child's unique strengths and needs; and
- know about special education or early intervention resources and use these resources to develop learning activities that are developmentally appropriate and designed so every child succeeds.
- Care and education professionals have a "can do" attitude and look for solutions to challenges.

Why is inclusion important?

All children benefit by:

- developing friendships and learning how to play with others;
- learning acceptance, and to be sensitive to individual differences; and
- being provided with opportunities to learn from others with differing abilities.

Care and education professionals benefit by:

- building relationships with families;
- learning about and developing partnerships with community resources; and
- gaining new information and skills to care for and teach every child.

Families benefit by:

- having access to quality child care;
- watching their children make friends with children from diverse groups; and
- sharing hopes, needs, and concerns for their children with others.

How to begin providing inclusive early childhood education:

- Review the Selected Resources and Virtual Toolkit to learn more about inclusion.
- Meet with care and education professionals to talk about and plan for the inclusion of all children in the setting.

What to do when there are concerns about an individual child:

- Observe and document.
- Share your observation information with co-workers to find out if they have similar concerns.
- Talk with the child's family to share and gather more information.
- Provide information to families about state and community resources for developmental, early intervention, health or special services.

- Contact your state child care resource and referral agency or early intervention/special education department for information about available training and consultation to support your program to include a child with special needs.

Where may I learn more?:

- [Inclusive Early Childhood Education – Selected Resources](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/inclusionres/) – <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/inclusionres/>

- [Inclusive Early Childhood Education – Virtual Toolkit](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/inclusionvtk/) – <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/inclusionvtk/>
- [Maine's Expanding Inclusive Opportunities Initiative Early Childhood Settings Inclusion Toolkit](https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/inclusion-toolkit/) – <https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/inclusion-toolkit/>

See the following Growing Ideas Tipsheets from [Program Planning and Administration](https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/program-plan-admin/): <https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/program-plan-admin/>

- Laws that Support Early Childhood Education
- Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Parents and Guardians)
- Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Providers), and
- Confidentiality: Respecting the Privacy of All Families

See the following Growing Ideas Tipsheets from

[Foundations for Inclusive Early Care and Education](https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/foundations/): <https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/foundations/>

- Thoughtful Teaching: Developmentally Appropriate Practice
- Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Parents and Guardians)
- Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Providers)
- Confidentiality: Respecting the Privacy of All Families

“The inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood education is a living reflection of developmentally appropriate practice, wherein diversity, individualism, and the rights of all children to live in the community are valued.” – Delaney, E.M. (2001). The Administrator's Role in Making Inclusion Work. *Young Children*, 56(5), 66-70.



Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

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