How Can I Include My Young Child with ASD in Preschool and Community?  
A Family Forum on Evidence-Based Practices  
National Autism Conference 2018

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Goals of this Session

• Participants will increase understanding of:
  • What “Access, Participation, & Support” looks like in an IEP
  • Implementing Goals in an Inclusive Preschool Classroom and Community
  • Applying Adaptations, Modifications, & Supports
  • Identifying Helpful Resources & Tools

Introductions

• Who are we?
• Who are you?
Almost 30 years of research and experience (have) demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by... having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom... and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children... (and by) providing appropriate special education and related services and aids and supports in the regular classroom to such children, whenever possible. (P.L. 108-446, Part B, Sec.682 [c] Findings [5])
Definition of Early Childhood Inclusion

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 desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.

The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.


Preschool Inclusion Nationally

In 2013, over half (54.3%) of preschool children with disabilities received education services in a separate setting from their non-disabled peers.¹

Percentage of preschool children with disabilities educated alongside their non-disabled peers in general education preschools has remained relatively unchanged over the last three decades.²

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Family Perspective and Share

- When do I know if and when inclusion is ‘right’ for my child?
- What would inclusion look like for my child? Will she have friends? Will she be able to follow instructions? What if she has a meltdown? What will other families say?
- What is my role in promoting inclusion?
- What are your dreams?
- What are your concerns?

Common features

Including ALL children

Access  Participation  Supports

Sense of belonging

Vision Statement

As a parent I envision a world where Ehlaam with a diagnosis of ASD is able to maximize her quality of life with the highest level of dignity by providing her with equal opportunities to play, socialize, learn and enjoy in the community as kids without a diagnosis do.
How things were:
• Diagnosis at age 3
• Grieving phase
• Getting services in place
• Drifting away from family, friends and community events because of challenging behaviors

Applying the vision
• Preparing yourself for a tough road ahead
• Sharing the vision
• Building community connections and natural supports
• Team work
• Starting small
• Focusing on activities with a higher degree of motivation
• Identifying strong reinforcers.
• Celebrating success and learning from failure.
ACCESS

Providing a wide range of activities and environments for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.

Access:

Goal

Providing Ehlaam with opportunities to visit places in the community that promote learning and development by removing the physical barriers that would otherwise make it challenging.

• Stroller and wheel chair accessible entrances with automatic door openers
• Sensory sensitive rooms
• Special sensory sensitive days
• Hand stamps to leave the building for a break
• Handicap parking
• Special programs and rates for kids with disability
• Companion pass/ discounted tickets for support staff
PARTICIPATION

Using a range of instructional approaches to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every child
Participation:

Goals
Providing Ehlaam with environments and programs that have additional accommodations and supports so that she can participate in a meaningful way with peers and adults in the community.

Amusement parks and other fun places
- Certified Autism centers e.g. sesame place
- Sensory guide created in conjunction with IBCESS
- Designated quiet rooms
- Adjustable lights
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Sensory wrist bands

Sesame Place and Inclusion
Kids can meet Julia, the Sesame Street character who is autistic. Kids can stop by and say hello and take photos with Julia.
Sensory guide

• This sensory guide, developed by IBCCES, is intended to make it easier for parents to plan activities that satisfy their child's specific needs and accommodations by providing insight on how a child with sensory processing issues may be affected by each sense for each attraction.
Movie Nights
Local Festivals and Community Events

Ehlaam enjoying dancing with friends at a local festival
Birthday parties were always a great struggle and one of the biggest challenges to overcome. Now with more and more family and community interactions, Ehlaam has transitioned from a non-participant to an active participant at a birthday party.

**Birthday Parties**

**SUPPORTS**

Refers to broader aspects of the system such as professional development, incentives for inclusion and opportunities for communication and collaboration among families and professionals to assure high quality inclusion.
Grocery Store and Shopping Malls

Recreational Activities in the Community
Eating out in the community

Interaction with Family
Tools to Support Staying Focused
On a Vision
Charting the LifeCourse

Guiding Principles

Core Belief: All people have the right to live, love, work, play and pursue their life aspirations just as others do in their community.

Services and Supports are Evolving

Everyone exists within the context of family and community.

Traditional Disability Services

Integrated Services and Supports within context of person, family and community
Collaboration, Communication and Professional Development

- Scheduled team meetings to build relationships and increase communication
- Daily communication checklist or journal between home and preschool
- Considering professional development needs and opportunities for staff
Collaborative teaming...

- Increases engagement, development, and learning of children
- Critical component of quality inclusive early childhood education
- Unifies and integrates educational, communication, and social supports
- Share a vision of full social and educational participation of your child
- Regularly scheduled opportunities for members of the educational team, including family, to share expertise, identify common goals, build plans of support, and determine responsibilities


Communication

Establish a method for communicating
- Face to face
- Notebook
- Phone
- Technology

Parents are the Most Important Team Member

- Informed Decision Maker:
  - Learn what is or could happen throughout the day
  - Ask to observe
  - Request information to answer your questions
- Work effectively with the team and share your perspective on:
  - Your child’s strengths and interests
  - Strategies and supports that have worked in the past
  - Approaches that have not been effective
  - Concerns about possible barriers to participation and learning

Kasa, Christi & Julie Causton-Theorharis: "Achieving Inclusion: What Every Parent Should Know When Advocating for Their Child" produced by The PEAL Center
The Goal: Use the least intrusive adaptation. If an adaptation is not having the result you want, try the next least intrusive adaptation.
What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

IDEA, 2004: Assistive technology = devices and services

Device: "Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities."

Services: "Any service that directly assists a child with the disability in the selection, acquisition or use of an assistive technology device."

OSEP Part C Clarification Letter

"AT must serve a developmental purpose" by supporting the child's ability to participate in everyday activities.

There are no prerequisites for using AT.

(Dugan, et al., 2006; Wilcox, et al., 2006; Wilcox, et al., 2006)
AT and learning opportunities are embedded within a child’s everyday routines and activities to support:

- Behavior and Socialization
- Communication
- Early learning
- Mobility
- Play
- Positioning
- Self-care

**Assistive Technology**

Examples of Assistive Technology

- Switches, chairs, pictures, communication devices, software programs
- Adapted toys
- Items found within your home and/or educational setting used with a specific purpose and function
- Training for child care staff and parents
- Assistance from an early intervention or school staff so that the family may locate potential funding sources

**When do you consider AT for a child?**

*It is never too early and it is never too late!*
Keep in Mind That...

• AT for infants and toddlers looks different than AT for students and adults
• AT for infants and toddlers is used to support a child’s development
• Many changes occur as young children grow which requires dynamic use of AT

AT Supports Socialization

• Interact independently
• Build friendships
• Explore environment
• Reduce frustration
AT Supports Independence

Low Tech Assistive Technology

- **Visual Supports** (i.e. visual schedule, choice charts, first/then boards, routine activity sequences, cue cards, stop signs, timers, social stories)
- **Communication Supports** (i.e. Low tech- pictures, Switches, buttons, Tablets/devices, apps)
- **Sensory Supports** (i.e. Bumpy seats, Rocking chairs and ball chairs. Weighted blankets and weighted lap buddies, Quiet space, Headphones and ear plugs)
Why Visual Supports?

- Support communication
- Prevent challenging behaviors
- Enhance memory
- Remain static
- Assist in knowing expectations
- Assist in self-monitor

Visual Supports

Communication Supports

- Low tech- pictures
- Switches, buttons
- Tablets/devices, apps
Communication Supports: AAC

Sensory Integration Supports
• Bumpy seats
• Rocking chairs and ball chairs
• Weighted blankets and weighted lap buddies
• Quiet space
• Headphones and ear plugs
What Are the Benefits of AT?

• Enhance communication
• Increase independence
• Broaden life opportunities
• Increase participation
• Promote development
• Enhance learning
• Boost self-esteem

Lending Libraries and Short Term Loans

1. PaTTAN’s AT Short Term Loan Program
2. Pennsylvania’s Assistive Technology Lending Library (ATLL); contact Pennsylvania’s Initiative on Assistive Technology (PIAT), Institute on Disabilities at Temple University
3. PA Assistive Technology Foundation
   a) Low Interest Loan Program
   b) Mini-loan Program

Other Resources

www.eita-pa.org
Other Resources

www.paedforall.org
Service and Resources

The PEAK Center
Helping Families of Children with Disabilities and Special Health Care Needs

www.pealcenter.org

Other Resources

www.earlylearninggps.com/

Other Resources

http://thearcpa.org/

http://includemepa.org/
WE ARE EACH UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL, BUT TOGETHER WE ARE A MASTERPIECE!

Sadia Batool
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Formerly a Pediatric resident and a medical insurance officer
Research assistant with Progeria Research Foundation
Currently working as a full time mom to help my child get INCLUDED
Message of Hope
You will look back at therapies, appointments, meltdowns, sleepless nights, triumphs, milestones, ignorance, struggle, strength and you’ll say with certainty
It was absolutely worth it!

Chou Hallegra Gabikiny
- P3D Parent Leader
- C2P2- EI Graduate
- Inclusion Consultant
- Person-Centered Thinking Trainer
- Certified AutPlay Therapy Provider

Message of Hope
“My kids are constantly exceeding my expectations and have taught me so much about life and love. Now I always presume that they CAN because they always find a way to outdo themselves.”
Chou Hallegra
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I am a wife and proud mother of three boys, ages 22, 17, and 5. Currently serving as The Keystone STARS Manager for ELRC 15, Delaware County. 2018 Graduate of C2P2 EI

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Former Adult Services/Developmental Disabilities Assistant Director
Michaela, 8, Abby, 6, Charley, 4

Message of Hope

Inclusion can result in amazing things. You, as the parent, know when to give it a try. Trust your gut and take the leap! I promise — you will be amazed at the growth you see in your child!

Naomi Galman
Allison Maurer
A Mom, behavioral therapist, C2P2 EI grad, BA in Mathematics, NSW in May 2020

MESSAGE OF HOPE

when the world says give up
hope whispers try one more time

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