Creating an Inclusive Program
Developing Your Philosophy and Policies

What is your philosophy toward caring for children with disabilities?

Developing and following a philosophy around the defining features of inclusion (access, participation, and support) will help to guide the formation of your program policies and the necessary decisions your program will make for how it will support and include children with disabilities. Your program's policies will help ensure that both the families and your staff are aware of and share in your inclusion goals.

Steps for Developing Your Inclusion Policy

1. Think about the defining features/principles of inclusion (see Activities 2, 3, and 4)

2. Consider language (see Activity 5)

3. Write an inclusion policy statement based on the defining features/principles of inclusion

Defining Inclusion

The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a Joint Position Statement in 2009 to help define inclusion. Their definition remains the foremost example for what inclusion should look like. Their definition focuses on three main features/principles:

1. Access
2. Participation
3. Support

Before moving on to the activities below, please read through the Joint Position Statement. It will be important that you both understand the defining features, but also include them in your Inclusion Policy and corresponding procedures and practices.

The following activities will assist you in thinking about and developing your program's inclusion philosophy and policy statement.

Activity 1: Benefits of Inclusion

When all children are meaningfully included, everyone benefits. In the space provided below, write down what you feel are the benefits of inclusion.

Think about how inclusion benefits:

1. The children (both with and without a disability) enrolled in your program
2. The families enrolled in your program
3. Your program and staff

```
Benefits of Inclusion




```

Some key benefits for review:
- Increased understanding and appreciation of individual differences
- Acceptance and respect for those who are different than us
- Learning with and from one another
- Added opportunities to practice important skills
- Increased opportunities for socialization with peers
- Access to child care
- Opportunities to meet and learn from other families

Activity 2: Access

Access means providing the children in your program with a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments. Write down the ways in which your program provides or could provide access to children with disabilities?

Think about the following:
- How is your classroom set up? Are there any barriers?
- Do you make adaptations to activities? Toys? Materials?
- Do you vary the way you teach? The questions you ask?
- Are there multiple ways for children to do things?

```
Access




```

Activity 3: Participation

Participation means using a wide range of teaching approaches that promote engagement, learning, interaction, and a sense of belonging. Even if the activities, materials, etc. are accessible within your program, some children will need additional individualized adaptations or supports to participate fully. What are some ways that you adapt for or support the varied needs of your children so they can meaningfully participate in all aspects and areas of your program?

Think about the following:
- Individual children's interests and abilities
- Scaffolding activities
- The routines and activities of the day
- Peer interactions and relationships
- Promoting a sense of belonging

Participation

Activity 4: Support

Support, in this case, refers to the broader early childhood system and services that assist parents and providers in supporting the practice of inclusion. It also includes the opportunities available for collaborating and for building partnerships. In the space below, describe how you support and involve your families in the care of their child? How do staff participate in and support the decisions you make about the care and education of the children in your program?

Think about the following:
- Family engagement opportunities
- Communication and sharing of information – meetings, conferences, etc.
- Developmental screening and assessments
- Professional development and training opportunities
- Additional time for planning – individualization of child goals
- Collaboration with specialists and professionals

Activity 5: Language

The words you use in a policy can have a significant effect on your program and classroom practices. Make sure you are choosing your language carefully, making sure to be specific in your language and taking the time to explain any word or concept that may be new or easily misunderstood.

> *People First:* The person or child should always come first when discussing or referring to a disability. For example, a child with autism, instead of an autistic child.

> *Inclusive:* Use language that supports your overall philosophy. For example, use words such as "all" or "each" or "every."

> *Strengths-based:* Focus your language on ability over disability; what children can do over what they can't. For example, "We welcome and support children of all abilities" instead of "We welcome children with disabilities."

Look at your current parent and/or staff handbook to see what kind of language you use to discuss your program and the children in your care. What can you change based on the language examples above?

Writing an Inclusion Policy for your Program

Through the activities above, you have considered the three main features of inclusion, thought about inclusive language, and how determined how you could use each to improve the inclusivity of your program. Taking what you have learned, it is now time to draft an inclusion policy statement. Make sure that you include and define the terms access, participation, and support using the information that you wrote down in activities 3, 4 and 5. Here are some examples that may help:

Access examples:
- We accept and welcome children of all abilities.
- Indoor and outdoor areas are arranged so all children can move freely and make choices based on their abilities, interests and needs.
- We make changes to our daily schedule to meet the needs of each child.

Participation examples:
- Opportunities are provided for every child to participate in all aspects of the classroom and day (e.g., daily routines, free play, outdoor time, etc.)
- We believe that each child deserves an environment and experiences that promote growth in all areas of their development.
- We use program approaches and practices that meet each child's and family's individual needs.

Support examples:
- We respect and value input from parents and encourage them to take part in the decision making and goal setting for their child.
- We work with parents and professionals who have valuable knowledge and expertise to share with us and each other.
- I receive professional development in current areas of child development, research, and practice.
- We are committed to learning more about various disabilities and full inclusion as part of our annual training plan.

Draft Inclusion Policy Statement