



Inclusive Care

Use this resource to help communicate the importance of implementing inclusive care for 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). The Program for Infant/Toddler Care recommends six essential program practices as a framework for relationship-based care. One of these practices is **inclusive care**—the practice of actively including infants and toddlers with disabilities or delays in group care settings, with appropriate accommodation and support (Lally & Mangione, n.d.).

Inclusive care makes 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. When programs provide appropriate accommodation and support to meet the needs of *all* children, everyone benefits.

The right to access inclusive early childhood programs is supported by a robust legal foundation. Despite this legal foundation, many young children with disabilities and delays and their families continue to face challenges accessing inclusive high-quality early childhood programs. Establishing “a nationwide culture” of inclusive care for infants and toddlers with disabilities or delays 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, p. 3).

Why Is Inclusive Care 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 disabilities and delays, 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 disabilities and delays, when care is individualized for all children and inclusive care is implemented (Raikes & Edwards, 2009).
- ◆ Meaningful inclusion as a member of society is every person's right from birth, as supported by federal laws including Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 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 Inclusive Care for 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 inclusive care benefits all children and supports children with disabilities in making significant developmental and learning progress (Green et al., 2014).
- ◆ Children who are included in care programs have important opportunities for building peer-interaction, communication, and problem-solving skills (Justice et al., 2014).
- ◆ Research on typically developing children shows positive developmental, social, and attitudinal outcomes in inclusive environments (Cross et al., 2004).

Planning to Implement Inclusive Care 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 disabilities or delays.
- ◆ 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, inclusive care.
- ◆ 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 caregivers that include expectations for inclusive care. These expectations include forming relationships with families and working with early intervention specialists.
- ◆ Attend, create, or advocate for professional development that promotes inclusive care. Strengthen professional development of caregivers and administrators in regard to inclusion of infants and toddlers with disabilities and delays and cultivating partnerships with families and early intervention specialists.
- ◆ Use an intentional review process to continually strengthen inclusive care across the center or family child care program.



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State Capacity Building Center, A Service of the Office of Child Care

9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 877-296-2401

Email: CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info

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