



10 TIPS FOR INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN CHILD CARE

By Jane Voorhees Sharp

1. **View all children as more alike than different.** All too often we respond to stereotypes instead of individuals. It is important to remember that a child is a child, not a disability.
2. **Learn as much as you can about the particular child and the disability.** Make decisions on your ability to serve each child on a well informed, individual basis.
3. **Contact agencies in your state that offer assistance with inclusion and/or information about disabilities.** Try your state licensing agency, disability organizations or division on civil rights. Public schools have ADA compliance officers. Hospitals, public health nurses and local colleges may also provide training or assistance. Contact NJSACC, SPAN or your local Unified Child Care Agency for phone numbers and assistance.
4. **Review your policies, procedures and practices to look for areas that may need to be modified to accommodate the child.** For example: you may need to move equipment, change some routines, or update your medication policy.
5. **Meet with the parents and any other professionals who work with the child prior to starting the program to share expectations and concerns.** Set up a system of regular communication with staff, parents and professionals to deal with any issues quickly and effectively.
6. **Share general information about the disability and any specific plans for the child with the staff, but keep personal information confidential.** You should discuss the process for sharing information with the parents and may want to use a release of information form.
7. **Educate children and other parents about diversity, acceptance and inclusion.** Use “people first” language. (ex. Children with Down syndrome instead of Downs children)
8. **Invite the parents and child to visit the program for a “dry run” to meet staff and children.** Review any modifications to see if they are realistic and appropriate.
9. **Network with other child care providers who have successful inclusion programs for helpful suggestions.** Call 1-800-332-9CARE for suggestions.
10. **As with all children, there will be good days and bad days.** When this happens, remember that humor and hugs go a long way.

Originally produced for the Office of Early Care and Education, NJ Department of Human Services, you can now reach Jane Voorhees Sharp at EIRC, (856) 582-7000 ext. 161. May be reproduced without permission.