

Why Is Inclusive Child Care Important?

Inclusive child care is important in many different ways to different people.

Parents of children with disabilities might say: "Without child care I couldn't work. Inclusive child care allows me to provide for my family." Acquiring quality child care, thought by many families to be a right, has in effect, been unfairly or illegally denied to many families caring for children with disabilities. One of the biggest stressors for families caring for children with disabilities is the ability to access child care services. Inclusive child care helps to alleviate that stress. Other benefits that families caring for children with disabilities may experience through inclusive child care include:

- **The knowledge that all children have both positive and challenging behaviors.**
- **Time to relax and take a break.**
- **The security of knowing there are other people who can safely care for their child in a nurturing environment.**
- **A chance to share common experiences with other families resulting in lessened isolation.**
- **Acceptance and discovery of their own children's abilities, strengths and needs.**

Children with disabilities might say: "I have the opportunity to make friends and to play with other children." Many children with disabilities spend a good portion of their day with adults such as therapists, teachers, teacher's assistants, doctors and their parents. This leaves little opportunity for the child to spend time and interact with their peers. Child care provides the setting where all children can practice their social skills and interact with each other.

"When children with disabilities have repeated opportunities to interact with typically developing peers, research has shown improvements in communication skills, social skills, functional skills and even improved chances to live a more full and normalized life as an adult. Typically developing children have better attitudes toward individual human differences, show greater patience and tolerance for people and feel better about themselves." Delicate Threads, Woodbine House, 1998.

So, children without disabilities might say: "I learn to see people as people first and not as a label." Inclusive child care is key to helping children learn at an early age that it is necessary to get to know someone before making judgments.

Other benefits that children with or without disabilities receive through inclusive child care:

- **Attend the same program as other children from their neighborhood.**
- **Learn through peer modeling and develop the skills that only children can teach one another.**
- **Lessened isolation and a feeling of belonging for children with disabilities.**
- **Understanding and acceptance of individual differences which children will carry with them into their adulthood.**

Child care professionals might say: "Inclusive child care has provided me the opportunity to enhance my skills to meet the needs of all children in my classroom." The number of families caring for children with disabilities is on the rise nationwide. In 2000-01, The Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) indicated that since 1991-1992 there has been a 31.7% increase in the number of children ages 3-5 who received special education services as defined by IDEA (Special Education laws). With these statistics in mind, it is evident that child care providers throughout the country are being asked to serve more and more children with diverse needs. By being prepared and ready to serve children with disabilities, child care programs are finding that their classrooms are not only fuller, but also offer a an enriched experience to all involved.

Other benefits that child care professionals receive as a result of inclusive programs:

- **Encourages flexibility and understanding.**
- **Enriches their experience because they know and offer services to a larger cross section of their neighborhood.**
- **Gives them a chance to know and appreciate differences.**

Pride in the fact that they are helping all children grow to be caring and compassionate adults.