

BANANAS HANDOUT

Inclusion – Caring for Children with Special Needs

One of the strengths of our community is its diversity. People from different cultural and racial backgrounds, people from different family units, as well as individuals with disabilities all live here. The mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal civil rights law passed in 1990, is to provide people with disabilities access to all community services – including child care. The purpose of this Handout is to help you, the child care provider, include children with disabilities or special needs in your program; this is called inclusion, or inclusive child care.

The Child With Special Needs

A child with special needs is one who, because of physical or emotional reasons, requires some special care. The kinds of disabilities children may have vary greatly, ranging from children with allergies or developmental delays, to a child suffering from a terminal illness. The most important thing to remember is that all children are individuals and should be respected. Following are some basic ideas to keep in mind when caring for children with special needs:

- Children with disabilities are more like other children than they are different. They need the same emotional support all children do and a safe, nurturing environment with caregivers who respect their individual developmental needs.
- All children should be encouraged to help themselves as much as they can. A balance is necessary: allow freedom and choices and offer assistance when needed.
- Children like to follow some kind of routine – include exercise, play, good food, and fresh air in your program.
- All children benefit from an individualized approach while learning to participate in group activities.

A quality program, where staff understand the principles of child development, will have the necessary foundation to meet the needs of all children, including those of children with special needs.

Inclusion

All parents at some time need child care and this includes parents who have children with disabilities. The ADA prohibits discrimination against children with disabilities by any child care center or family child care home. Under this law, a licensed child care provider must evaluate the needs of each individual child seeking to enroll or already enrolled and must make and document every **reasonable accommodation** to include and serve that individual.



When a parent seeks to enroll a child with a disability in your child care program, this offers a valuable opportunity for you to expand your skills as a professional caregiver. As with any child, it is your job to find out (from the parent) the individual strengths, challenges and needs of the child's care. Then, find out and develop a plan for how your program will make accommodations to fully include this child.

Begin by thinking about the main activities of your program, such as snack or mealtime, outdoor play, creative play and toileting. Next, put yourself in the shoes of the child you are enrolling: how inviting or playful is each setting to him or her? You will find that most adjustments or accommodations you need to make are not very difficult, such as rearranging some furniture so that a child with a walker can move freely, or training staff to administer an inhaler for a child with asthma. You should be able to fully include most children by making such reasonable accommodations as required by the ADA. Unless admitting a child with a disability requires extreme changes that significantly alter your program, you should be able to fully include the child.

Everyone benefits from inclusive child care programs. The child who has special needs benefits from time spent with typically developing children through learning, playing and friendship. All children learn the importance of diversity, tolerance and relationships. Parents also benefit from an early childhood program that reflects a diversity of strengths, needs and a commitment to include all children.

Caring For A Child with Special Needs

A careful interview and a visit with the family will help you learn how you can provide a safe and positive environment for each child. It is usually more helpful to know a child's strengths and challenges rather than a medical diagnosis to meet his or her needs. Consider asking the parents the following questions.

- What kinds of activities does your child enjoy? What does she do well?
- How does your child communicate her needs?
- How does your child get around (walking, crawling, with braces, or a walker, etc.)?
- What other group experiences has your child had? How does she interact with other children and/or adults?
- Is your child on a special diet and how does she eat?
- Does your child need help with toileting or diapering? If so, what type is needed?
- Is your child taking any medication or receiving any medical treatments? What do I need to know about the medication or treatment?
- What are your child's special needs?
- What are your social or educational expectations for your child in care? Can you help me get a sense of what you want for your child?
- Are there other health professionals, special education, or early intervention programs (for children ages 0-3) that are helping you and your child? Do you think their staff would be willing to work with me in the child care setting with your consent? Can I get your written consent to contact them?
- What, if any, special skills or training will I or my staff need?

These questions can help determine what accommodations are needed, but cannot be used to screen out a child. Ongoing communication between parents and providers is essential. In order to be adaptable and make necessary accommodations, you may need to meet regularly with the child's parents.

Over time, as you get to know the child, you may identify other needs. Please refer to the Early Warning Signs list in BANANAS' Child Care Providers' Guide to Identifying and Caring for Children with Special Needs, \$3 per pamphlet. Call 658-7353 for more information.

Making Accommodations In Your Policies

The ADA requires that you attempt to provide care for a child with special needs by drawing on your knowledge of child development and by obtaining information from the parent on the needs of each child. Following is a list of ways that providers can develop their inclusive child care programs as they comply with the ADA:

- Develop admissions policies that do not discriminate against children with disabilities and do not charge more to the parents of a child with special needs.
- When hiring staff, ask about their experience with caring for individuals with disabilities.
- Make reasonable modifications to the policies, practices and procedures of your program. This means significant attempts must be made to include a child with disabilities into the program. Care providers could include language of their policies to this effect. For example: Rainbow Day Care is "fully accessible" or, "our teachers have experience in caring for children with disabilities."
- Provide resources for effective communication between caregiver and child. For example, providing large-print books, using picture cards, or learning some sign language.
- Comply with physical access requirements.



Making Accommodations In Your Program

Many of the accommodations children need can be easily planned and put into practice. Following are brief descriptions of general disabilities and some sample accommodations. Some children may have one identified special need, other children may have multiple disabilities.

Communication/Language—A child with a disability in this area may have difficulty speaking or understanding speech. Expressing needs or understanding rules and instructions may be difficult and frustrating for this child. Repeat what the child says and add missing words, or ask the child to repeat what you are saying. Build on what the child says by adding new information.

Developmental – A child who is developmentally delayed grows and develops more slowly than other children. Physical, mental and emotional development may all be affected by the disability. Use simple words to teach new concepts and repeat as often as needed. Make sure to break tasks and information into simple, small steps that are easier to grasp. Give clear, simple directions, providing structure and consistency. Label objects with pictures and words.

Emotional/Behavioral – A child with this disability may need help learning how to relate to others and how to follow daily routines. Tell the child of upcoming changes ahead of time to help the child deal with transitions: “We’re almost done with snack time. In a little while, we’ll all go outside to play.” Provide the child with a safe emotional outlet for anger or fear. For example, tell an angry child that it is **not** OK to hit another person, but it **is** OK to hit a pillow.

Hearing – A child with a hearing impairment may have significant hearing loss or be deaf. Make direct eye contact with the child so she knows you are talking to her and can see your lips and/or signs. Set up play space so it is visibly accessible to all children; blink the lights to signify transitions in the day.

Learning – Children with a learning disability may need help because they learn in different ways. For instance, a child who has difficulty remembering may need very detailed, step-by-step instructions. Because learning in traditional ways is frustrating for some children, they may act out with other, challenging behavior. Provide activities that appeal to children with different learning styles. The more visually inclined children will enjoy looking at picture books. Those who learn through touching will prefer hands-on activities, like finger-painting, or helping in the garden.

Physical – A child with a physical disability may have limited movement or require adaptive equipment such as braces, a walker or wheelchair. Rearrange furniture, install a grab bar in the bathroom, or set up a temporary or permanent wheelchair ramp for children who would benefit from an easier entry to the program.

Special Health Care Needs – This child may require specialized care for a health problem such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, sickle cell anemia, or for a terminal illness. Learn from the parent or other providers in the child’s life how to use an asthma nebulizer, or how to check the child’s blood glucose level.

Vision – Children who are visually impaired cannot see well or are blind. They will rely more on hearing and touch to learn. Provide large print or Braille books, audiobooks and toys that offer auditory and sensory stimulation (noises and textures). Store toys so children can reach them independently.

For more information about your responsibilities under the ADA, contact BANANAS (or your local resource and referral agency). In some cases, additional training may be helpful or necessary to you as a professional caregiver. Classes and workshops are available from a variety of organizations. Contact your Professional Growth/Career Advisor for information on training opportunities on disabilities and inclusion issues. You can also visit the provider page of our website, www.bananasinc.org, to view our current listings of Professional Growth opportunities.

Getting Help

As a child care provider, advice and assistance are available to you from many sources:

Parents – Share your observations with them, consult them and keep in close contact. Ask them about strategies they use at home, and what agencies or individuals work with their child, especially those who may be able to help you. Ask for a copy of a child’s **Individual Family Service Plan** (IFSP) for children 0-3, or **Individual Education Plan** (IEP) for children older than 3, or other plans that will help you learn more about what the child is learning, or what skills he is working on. See if the parents will grant permission (written consent) to contact members of the child’s “team.”

Consultants – BANANAS has a Warmline (658-7353) staffed with counselors who can help parents and providers with questions on developmental or behavioral issues. In addition, a mental health specialist is available to provide on-site consultations for children ages 0-5.

Agencies – Seek out services that work with the families of children with special needs. Staff at BANANAS can help you find the right organizations.

Written Materials – You may want to read more about the child’s disability, but remember that each child is an individual and that parents really are the experts on their child(ren).

Because caring for children with special needs depends on the particular child with a particular disability, much of what you will be learning is O.J.T. (On the Job Training). But don’t worry. BANANAS is here to offer advice and support, and to help you plan and find resources you need to work with all children in your care. BANANAS also has a reference library of books, videos, and children’s books on child care and inclusion.



Other Support and Resources

Family Resource Network (FRN) provides resources and support to Alameda County families whose children, birth to 22 years, have disabilities or special health care needs. With offices at BANANAS, FRN also assists professionals who are working with a child or family, or who have concerns about a child's development. They offer workshops, classes, and support groups. All FRN staff members are parents of children with disabilities and understand the services children and families need.

This organization also maintains a lending library containing adult and children's books and videos on disabilities. It publishes a comprehensive directory in English and Spanish of special resources for families in need, free for parents, \$4 for providers. All services are free and available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Call 547-7322 or visit www.frnoakland.org for more information.

Child Care Law Center (CCLC) works to ensure quality, affordable child care for all children. CCLC produces and distributes publications on a wide range of legal issues related to child care. Following are some on inclusion of children with disabilities available in English, Spanish and Chinese.

- Questions and Answers About the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Quick Reference (Information for Child Care Providers)
- ADA Title III Flowchart: When Are You Required to Admit a Child with a Disability?
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Child Care – a manual that covers multiple aspects of what the law requires of child care providers and how to integrate children with special needs into child care programs most effectively
- Can I Provide This Type of Health Procedure In Licensed Child Care? – a manual that addresses health-related procedures allowed in California child care programs

CCLC has other relevant publications as well. Call (415) 394-7144 to download or order any publications or visit www.childcarelaw.org.

The following organizations also provide information on caring for children with disabilities:

- California Early Start Library, managed by Early Source Resources:
(800) 869-4337, www.dds.ca.gov/earlystart.
- Child Care Plus+ Center on Inclusion in Early Childhood:
(800) 235-4122, www.ccplus.org.

- Exceptional Parent Magazine
(877) 372-7368, www.exceptionalparent.com.
- Healthy Young Children – A Manual for Programs by the NAEYC:
(800) 424-2460, www.naeyc.org.
- National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY):
(800) 695-0285, www.nichcy.org.

Children's Book Resources

The books you choose for your program and read to children should reflect the diversity of the world around us. Following are some resources:

- **Special Needs Project** offers listings of good books about disabilities:
(800) 333-6867, www.specialneeds.com.
- **Jason & Nordic Publishers** present award-winning Turtle Books for children with disabilities, their families and friends:
(814) 696-2920, www.jasonandnordic.com.
- **Garlic Press** includes books and resources on sign language:
(541) 345-0063, www.garlicpress.com.
- **Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Bias Against People with Disabilities.** Call BANANAS for a copy of this manual, or to review our library of good children's books about people with disabilities:
(510) 658-7353, www.bananasinc.org.

