



Including All Children in Child Care

4Cs of Alameda County | www.4calameda.org

Many child care providers have concerns about including a child with a disability or special needs in their program. How will I know how to care for her? Will I be able to provide the special care he needs? Will caring for this child interfere with serving other children?

Fortunately Alameda County has resources to help child care providers include children with special needs (see back). It may be easier than you think! Here's an overview of inclusive child care.



WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires child care programs to:

- Admit children without discriminating against those with disabilities.
- Assess each child's needs and how the program might adapt to include him.
- Make "reasonable" changes in order to include a child with disabilities. For example, providing resources for communication (such as using picture cards or learning some sign language).
- Ensure physical access (such as rearranging furniture or installing a wheelchair ramp).
- Charge the same rates for children with and without disabilities.

For more information go to the Department of Justice website, www.ADA.gov, or call the ADA Information Line at 800-514-0301.

WHAT DOES INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE LOOK LIKE?

Children with and without special needs participate in the same routines and activities. Providers recognize each child as an individual with special strengths and needs; they make small adjustments to the environment and the program so each child benefits from participating. They support children's relationships with each other by modeling respect and warmth for every child and by coaching, when needed, to facilitate interaction.

Child care providers do not provide specialized treatment for the child's disability - sometimes a therapist may come to give on-site treatment.

HOW DO CHILDREN BENEFIT?

Children with disabilities: Participating in natural, day-to-day experiences with other children gives them opportunities to have fun, learn, and develop social skills and self-confidence.

Children without disabilities: In inclusive child care, they learn about differences and similarities and see that everyone contributes.

All children benefit from an environment that puts a high value on responding to each individual's strengths and needs.

HOW DO I LEARN ABOUT CARING FOR A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

First and most important, ask the child's parents to tell you about the child, her strengths, interests, and needs, and their goals for her – the whole child, not just the disability. Ask the parents about others involved in his care, such as doctors or therapists. Would it be helpful for you to contact them?

4Cs offers ongoing workshops on topics related to caring for children with special needs. Visit the website, www.4calameda.org, to view the current training calendar. You may also contact 4C's Resource and Referral Department at 510-582-2182 for resources on including children with special needs.

DO I NEED SPECIAL SKILLS?

Yes and no. You may need to learn a few new things. But mostly you will just need slightly different ways of doing what you already do to meet the needs of young children. If a child has a special need that is unfamiliar, his parent can usually explain how to meet it or connect you with someone who can help. And children with disabilities also have the same everyday little-kid needs as others. You already have the most important skill: responding to each child as an individual.

CAN I GET HELP WITH THE COSTS OF ADAPTING MY PROGRAM?

You may be able to receive tax credits or deductions to help with the costs. Call the Department of Justice ADA information line, 800-514-0301.

For more ideas:

See 4Cs Parent Tip Sheet
"What if My Child Has Special Needs?"

HOW DO I WORK WITH PARENTS?

Many parents of children with disabilities are eager to share tips for including their child in your program. They may also have concerns: How will their child's specific needs be met? Will she be able to participate fully? How will he be received by teachers, children, parents? Your reassurance and interest in their child will encourage them. Build communication by asking questions and sharing your observations and thoughts with them.

Keep in mind that parents of a child with disabilities may be experiencing a variety of emotions - possibly grief, anger, denial, etc. - about their child's disability. Try to be patient, and don't take it personally!

Parents of other children may worry that children with disabilities will take time and attention away from their own children. You can help these parents see how their children benefit from inclusive child care. Your positive attitude will reassure parents and encourage them to follow your lead.



To learn more:

"The Top Eight Questions Providers Ask About Inclusive Child Care" is a publication of the Alameda County Early Care and Education Planning Council and is available in English, Chinese and Spanish. Download it at www.acgov.org/childcare/inclusive.htm