GUIDELINES

FOR INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

APRIL 2026

BACKGROUND

What is Inclusion?

There is not one definition of inclusion. What inclusion is to you is based on your experience and values. The intentional act of ensuring that diverse individuals feel a genuine sense of belonging, value, and influence within a group forms the context of inclusion.

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSION	DETAILS
Create an inclusive mindset	Inclusion is an ever-evolving process, not a finite destination. It takes a mindset that all children can be included, recognizing each child as capable, unique, and deserving of respect. This takes self-reflection and acceptance that unconscious bias is natural. The goal is not to eliminate bias entirely but to recognize and ease it before it affects your actions.
Build relationships and understand child development	Building a relationship with children with special needs and their families is imperative. This relationship leads to trust, safety and acceptance. Once staff understand typical development and have built a nurturing relationship, strategies to foster development in areas of challenge can be identified.
Listen and respond to behaviour	Behaviours are communication. Document and reflect on your own reaction to the behaviour. Our job is to observe and adjust where needed. Listen, reflect, and respond to interactions that the environment and experiences provide.
Review your expectations	Review your expectations to match individual abilities and developmental stages of children with special needs. Be realistic in order to foster growth and connection, not frustration.

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GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSION	DETAILS
Be resourceful with adaptations & support	**Environmental Support:** Consider outdoor arrangement, lowering table legs on some furniture, reviewing your schedule and reduce transitions **Materials Adaptation:** Using straps on pedals, substituting bean bags for balls, putting materials on a lower level **Activity Simplification:** Provide photos and symbols as prompts **Child Preferences:** Have toys the child prefers ready and nearby **Equipment Adaptation:** Raised sandbox, heavy work strategies, sound buffers, special equipment, like wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc. **Adult Support:** Lap sitting, hand over hand assistance, provide narration to encourage further interaction **Peer Support:** Identify “friends” willing to play with the child **Invisible Support:** Position teacher in relation to students
Advocate in your community	Being an advocate means being the voice for the child, defending their rights, and ensuring they get the necessary support, resources, and fair treatment to reach their full potential. All stakeholders must be involved including staff, families, politicians, funders, other professionals and government officials.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

1. What is one thing you can do to **create an inclusive mindset** within yourself or your setting?
2. What is something you can do to **build relationships and understanding of child development?**
3. How can you **listen and respond to behaviours** to meet emotional needs?
4. How can you **review your expectations** in relation to the children's needs and abilities?
5. When and how can you be **resourceful with adaptations and support?**
6. What can you do to **advocate in your community** to staff, families, politicians and funders?

To share your story of inclusion please visit our World Forum Foundation Working Group on Including Children with Special Needs webpage. Please complete the "Sharing your Story: Stories of supporting Children with Special Needs" template.