

OCTOBER
2022



ACCESS

in Early Childhood



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Many times when people think of the word “access” in terms of education it is used interchangeably with inclusion. While the two are not synonymous, access is one piece of the larger puzzle of inclusion.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines access as, “providing a wide range of activities and environments for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.” By providing individual support, instruction, and care many educators are already working towards a more accessible program.

In addition to access, the other components of inclusion are participation and support. When considering access, ideally we want children to have as much autonomy as possible. If a child with different abilities needs a teacher's help to participate in an activity, consider what accommodations can be made to better support that child to participate more independently. “Participation” includes supporting the child with forming relationships and being an active participant in play. Finally, “supports” include physical/environmental modifications, knowledge, and advocacy.



Focusing on Access in Your Program

When it comes to inclusion we want to make sure that we are living our policies and values. If our inclusion statement welcomes all children and their families, we want to be able to accommodate those children and families. Below are some ways to promote access in your program.

- Environmental modifications - Even if your program does not have any families that currently need modifications, it is a good idea to have a plan for how to make accommodations. Keep in mind that we should be mindful of the families as well. For example, if a parent/guardian is in a wheelchair, we would want them to be able to access the building and participate in family events and activities.
- IFSP/IEP support - It is helpful to have a protocol for how to engage in IFSP/IEP planning and implementation. It is ideal for early childhood educators to sit in on planning meetings or to talk with therapists about their work with the child. Also, consider including IFSP/IEP support in the staff professional development plan to adequately prepare educators.
- Language support - It can be helpful to have a plan in place to translate documents and provide support to multilingual families. This is something that program administrators/FCC educators can work on even when there is not an immediate need for translations. Having a plan in place will make things run smoothly if/when a family needing translations does enroll in your program.
- Inclusive books and materials - Having materials that represent diverse children and families help children to better understand the world around them. In addition, diverse materials help all children to feel important and included.
- Professional development - Inclusion is an important topic to consider when choosing professional learning experiences. Professional development will help educators to feel more confident in their work and more prepared to support all children.

Benefits of Access in Early Childhood Education

There are so many benefits to making access a priority in your program! Children needing special support will feel important and included in their classroom environment. Everyone can benefit from inclusive practices because inclusivity encourages all children to support each other. When access is a point of focus, children are able to work together and learn together. Educators also benefit from inclusive practices as well. Striving to make the classroom more accessible to all children, helps the educator to become more well-rounded in their knowledge of supporting children.

We hope that you are choosing to focus on access in your program! It is important to note that access looks different for everyone. We must consider the unique and individual needs of each child and their families. Prioritizing accessibility provides a fun and supportive learning environment for everyone!

Resources:

[Rocking and Rolling: Promoting Inclusion in Infant and Toddler Settings \(NAEYC\)](#) - Article

[Meaningful Inclusion in Early Childhood \(WisconsinDPI\)](#) - Video

[Children with Disabilities \(Head Start ECLKC\)](#) - Resources

Professional Learning Experiences:

[The Importance of “I” in IEP: Individualizing in Early Childhood \(Virtual Live\)](#)

[Inclusion: Best Practice \(Self-paced\)](#)