



## Inclusion as Part of Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offer the following definition of early childhood inclusion. You can find more helpful information and recommendations in their full statement, "[Early Childhood Inclusion](#)."

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (DEC & NAEYC, 2009)

In other words, inclusion means providing appropriate accommodation and support so that each child can participate to the fullest of his or her developmental abilities. Inclusion requires acceptance and compassion, and a commitment to creating a culture of belonging for all children and their families.

We all need a sense of belonging and to feel included. This is the essence of inclusive child care—that every infant and toddler feels like an important and accepted member of the group. Inclusive practices benefit everyone in the group (PITC, n.d.).

### What Is Required by Law?

The Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities is also known as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or simply Part C (IDEA, 2004). It is a federal grant program that helps states operate early intervention (EI) services for children from birth to age 3 and their families.

Each state and territory has its own system for providing services under Part C, including an agency that oversees the EI system for children from birth to 3 years of age. The system includes such things as evaluation and assessment, eligibility for Part C services, and the development of Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs).

You can find the Part C coordinator in your state here: [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#).

Congress established this program in 1986 in recognition of "an urgent and substantial need" to:

- ◆ enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities;
- ◆ reduce educational costs by minimizing the need for special education through early intervention;
- ◆ minimize the likelihood of institutionalization, and maximize independent living; *and*,
- ◆ enhance the capacity of families to meet their child's needs (ETCAC, n.d., "Overview").

#### What Do Young Children with Special Needs Require?

According to this [Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center infographic](#), these children require the following:

- "Their families, early care and education staff, and other service providers to work together as early as possible because...this creates a solid foundation to support optimal development."
- "Early Intervention Screening, evaluation, and appropriate services as early as possible because...strengthening brain and physical development early on can reduce the prevalence of ongoing and future challenges."

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. \(2018\). Infographic: Young children with special needs.](#)



Part C says that EI services and supports must be provided in natural environments, including both home and community settings where children would be participating if they did not have a disability.

## How Do Child Care Professionals Create Inclusive Environments That Support a Sense of Belonging?

There are many ways to build inclusive environments and learning experiences, and to develop skills that will help you collaborate with families and other professionals such as early intervention specialists, infant mental health specialists, other program staff or leaders, and community partners.

Whether you are new to this field or have years of experience, your personal and professional background can help you support high-quality inclusive child care for children and families. The questions below can help you reflect on your experiences and consider how you can best include infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in your child care setting. There is also a list of resources at the end of this article with websites that offer information and strategies for inclusive care of infants and toddlers.

### A Resource for Frequently Asked Questions

- What is developmental screening?
- Why is it important?
- What is the difference between screening and assessment?
- I'm worried about a child; how can I find more information to find out if he or she is on track?

Have you wondered about these questions such as these, or do you have other questions about child development and serving children with disabilities?

Find answers to your questions, links to key resources, and more in the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center's frequently asked questions about serving children with special needs. The answers apply to all children, not just those enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start.

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. \(2017\). Frequently asked questions: Disabilities.](#)

It's good to keep in mind that a sense of belonging begins with strong relationships. All children, including children with special needs, grow and learn through strong adult-child relationships. Caregivers and program leaders (including family child care owners and operators) play an important role in helping each infant, toddler, and family feel safe, included, and valued.

## Inclusive Practices: Questions to Inspire Thinking and Action

- ◆ What experiences have you had caring for infants and toddlers with disabilities or other special needs? How might you share your experiences and insights with your colleagues?
- ◆ If you are new to caring for infants and toddlers with disabilities, are there insights, questions, or concerns you have after reading this section?
- ◆ How is the topic of inclusion addressed in your program philosophy, policies, and practices?
- ◆ What supports and resources do you need to build your confidence and ability to provide care for children with special needs? How can you work together in your program to make sure each caregiver and staff member gets the support they need?
- ◆ What systems do you have to support child care providers in giving quality care to infants and toddlers with disabilities?



## Resources

[Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!](#) Is a coordinated federal effort to encourage developmental and behavioral screening and support for children, families, and the providers who care for them. Access this site for resources and to learn more.

[A Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children.](#) Birth to 5: Watch me Thrive! A Compendium of screening Measures for Young Children. This compendium identifies a set of first line screening tools.

[California MAP to Inclusion and Belonging: Making Access Possible:](#) Visit this site for essential information and publications on inclusion, including the book Inclusion Works and training PowerPoint presentations created by the Making Access Possible (MAP) team.

[Center for Inclusive Child Care \(CICC\):](#) Explore this network for comprehensive resources and training and consultation to support inclusive care for children in community settings.

[Center for Parent Information & Resources \(CPIR\) Library:](#) Search the CPIR resource library for webinars, articles, and publications to share with families and other providers on several topics including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, other laws, and early intervention.

[CONNECT Modules:](#) Participate in these self-guided online courses to improve your inclusive practices. This resource comes from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[Desired Results Access Project Video Library:](#) View these videos to enhance your skills in observation, documentation, assessment, evaluation, coaching, consultation, reflective practice, family education, and professional development. The videos are offered by the Napa County Office of Education's Research and Professional Development Center, Rohnert Park, California.

[Early Intervention and School Readiness for Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs:](#) Watch this 55-minute video for ways to adapt environments and practices to support school readiness for infants and toddlers with special needs. Provided through the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\) page on Children with Disabilities:](#) Explore this ECLKC web page for information on high-quality inclusion, individualized teaching and learning, frequently asked questions, and resources about specific disabilities.

[Inclusion Matters:](#) Listen to these podcasts by inclusion specialists on topics related to inclusion. The podcasts are produced by the Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC). Continuing education units are available.

[Learn the Signs: Act Early:](#) Look here for materials on developmental milestones and resources on early warning signs from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Providing Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments:](#) Find resources about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the definition of natural environments, key roles in early intervention, and the development of Individualized Family Service Plans. This information comes from the Center for Parent Information & Resources.

[Series on High Quality Inclusion:](#) Watch this webinar series addressing current research on assessment, screening, evidence-based practices to support individualized care, and partnering with parents. This series is from the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.



[Special Needs and Inclusion](#): View this video from the California Early Childhood Educator Competency Series to explore program policies for inclusion, developmentally appropriate practices, collaboration with families and service providers, and adapting environments and equipment for infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities or other special needs.

[Watch Me! Celebrating Milestones and Sharing Concerns](#): Participate in this 1-hour, 4-module online training course to learn about tools and best practices for monitoring the development of children in your care. This training is provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Continuing education units are available.

[Zero to Three](#): Explore the Zero to Three website to find information and resources on early development, early learning, parenting, and policy and advocacy supporting the unique needs of infants and toddlers.

## References

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400. (2004). Retrieved from <http://idea.ed.gov/part-c/downloads/IDEA-Statute.pdf>
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