



## The principles of inclusion



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### Understanding inclusion in early childhood education and care

The guiding principle of inclusion in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is that all children, regardless of their ability, socio-economic status or cultural background, may access and participate in the service in the same way as other children. Our goal is the inclusion of all children, including those with disability.

It is important to understand that inclusion goes well beyond simple enrolment or attendance. Inclusion means that an ECEC service supports children with disability or complex additional needs to participate in the program in full and meaningful ways. For a child with disability or complex additional needs, their participation might look different to that of other children—for example, they may need physical supports or some time away from the group. Inclusion means meeting a child's needs, so that they can participate to the full extent of their abilities and interests—just as every other child does.

Familiar principles from early childhood pedagogy and practice can strengthen inclusion. These include:

- respect for the rights of each child
- respect for each child's family
- the importance of having high expectations of each child.

### Applying principles in practice

Many ECEC services refer to inclusion in their Statement of Philosophy and in their policies. It is important that these documents reflect a sound understanding of inclusion, and that all approved providers, service supervisors and management, and educators share a common understanding of the service's commitment to inclusion.

A useful resource to help understand what inclusion means in ECEC is:

- the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA) Position Statement on the Inclusion of Children with a Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care, which states:

*Children with a disability ... **share with all children** the right to be valued as individuals and as contributing members of families, communities and society. Every child is entitled to access and participate in ECEC programs which recognise them as **active agents** in their own lives and learning, respond to them as **individuals**, respect their families as **partners** and engage with their diverse **backgrounds and cultures**. This means that ECEC services and support professionals must be resourced and supported to the level required to fully include children with a disability and to achieve high quality outcomes for all children (ECA & ECIA, 2014; emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>*

Developing an understanding of what inclusion means is an important first step to building a culture of inclusion in ECEC services. Delivering on the principles of inclusion is an ongoing and evolving process that encompasses forming trusting and respectful relationships with children, their families and carers, approved providers, service supervisors and management, educators, professionals from allied services and the wider community.

In building a shared culture of inclusion, ECEC services need to take into account the different 'starting points' of each participant. For example, different cultures may generate different understandings of disability. It is also important to treat with sensitivity a parent's journey of understanding and adjustment if their child has been diagnosed with disability or developmental delay.

For more information on building a culture of inclusion, see Information Sheet 12—*Working together to create inclusive services and communities* in this series.



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## Using inclusive, respectful language

Acting on the principles of inclusion means understanding, using and promoting inclusive, respectful language. This is not optional, but essential for genuine inclusion:

*Language shapes the way we view the world. The words we use influence community attitudes—both positively and negatively—and impact on the lives of others. How we write and speak about people with disability can have a profound effect on the way they are viewed by the community and themselves. Some words, by their very nature, degrade and diminish people with disability. Other words perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes (PWDA, n.d.).<sup>2</sup>*

When creating inclusion in ECEC services, it is important to understand how different terminology is used, as well as being conscious of avoiding labels that can directly and indirectly stigmatise or exclude children. Here is a brief outline of some of the key terms and concepts you may encounter and use when developing inclusive practice in your service.

## Talking about children's needs

### Children with complex additional needs

The term 'complex additional needs' encompasses children who require a range of extra support or services to participate as other children do. Complex additional needs may include:

- health and medical conditions, including asthma or allergies
- developmental delay, such as a language delay or learning difficulties
- diagnosed developmental disorders, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder
- disability, such as physical, sensory or intellectual
- issues arising from abuse, neglect, trauma, loss or grief
- belonging to a culturally and linguistically diverse group (Response Ability, 2010a).<sup>3</sup>

This covers a very broad range: it is not possible to generalise about children with complex additional needs, or to generalise on how best to meet their needs.

You will also hear the term 'special needs', but this is being used less often and is not preferred (as the word 'special' can be judgmental or exclusionary).

## Children with disability

Children with disability may have physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological or learning impairments (*Disability Discrimination Act 1992* [Cwlth]). Disability may be diagnosed or undiagnosed, and not all families using ECEC services will have completed the process of identifying their child's precise needs—some will not even have begun this process.

Terms such as 'disabled child' or 'disabled person' are no longer considered respectful in Australia, because they define a person primarily by their disability, rather than their status as a person.

## Children with developmental delay

Each child develops at their own rate across a range of domains. For some children, their development is slower than for most children of the same age. This delay may be only temporary, for example caused by illness, or it may persist over time. Developmental delay may affect gross or fine motor skills, language and speech, cognitive skills or social and emotional skills. Noticing a delay in a child's development may be the first step to diagnosing a developmental disability (RCH, 2009).

## Children with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs

At certain times, all children will display anxious or aggressive behaviours, in response to their environments, health, tiredness and many other factors. Each child also has a unique temperament. The behaviour of some children, observed over time, may indicate sustained difficulties in managing social interactions and emotional regulation. These children have more complex needs than other children, and some may be diagnosed with a developmental delay or disorder (Response Ability, 2010b).

## Children with special health care needs (CSHCN) or additional health and developmental needs (AHDN)

These terms are used in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), respectively. They refer to children who have, or are at increased risk of, chronic physical, developmental, behavioural or emotional conditions, and who need more support

than their peers. The term may describe children with diagnosed conditions or emerging issues who do not qualify for special education supports (AEDC, 2015).

## Where to find more information

The Queensland Government publishes online information and links for early childhood services and parents on [learning support](#) and [early intervention](#) for children with disability and complex additional needs.

Under the [Disability Inclusion Support for Queensland Kindergartens \(DISQK\)](#) program, kindergartens in Queensland can access funding to help support the inclusion of children with diagnosed or suspected disability.



Photo: Lime



## References

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