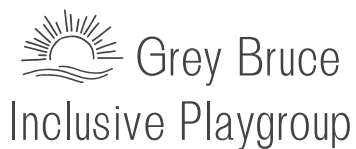




# ALL KIDS CAN PLAY



"If we consider how much children without disabilities grow as a result of their involvement in activities, we can imagine what another child stands to lose when they are excluded from those same activities"

Susan Stoltz  
*Kids Included Together*

The information in this booklet has been adapted from material originally developed by:

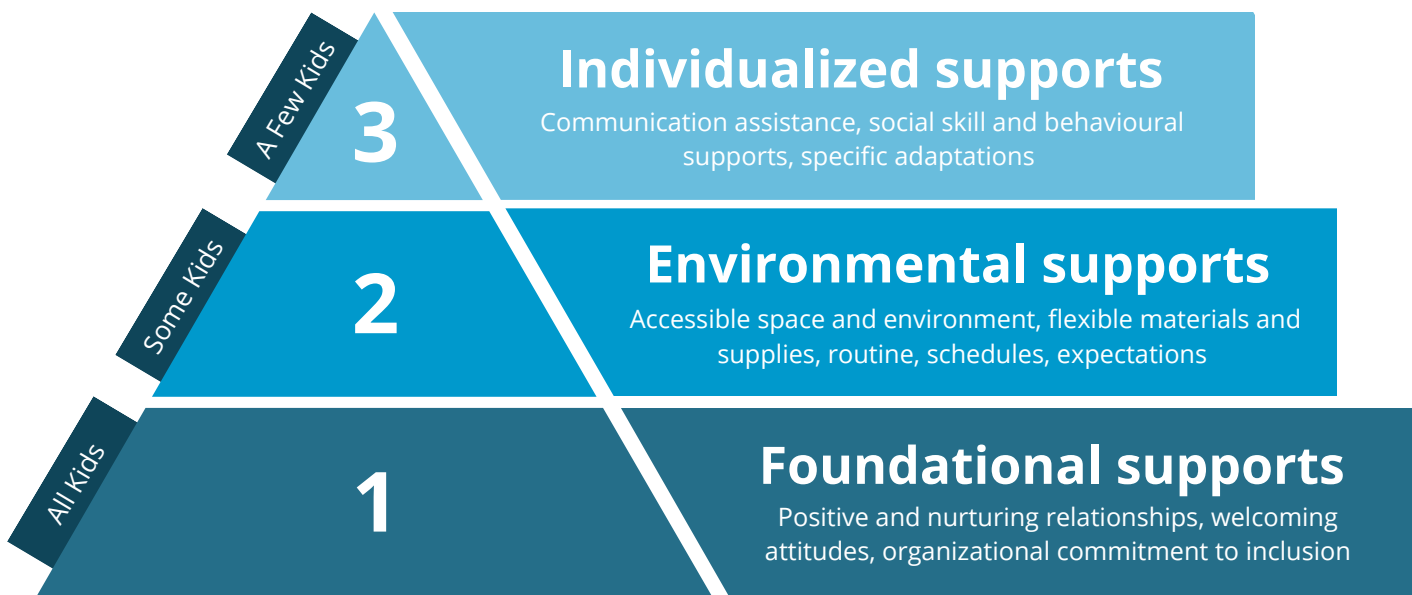
- Kids Included Together
- Centre on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
- Recreation Integration Victoria
- Move United
- CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Resource
- ActionSchoolsBC
- Special Olympics Unified Sports
- Canadian Disability Participation Project



The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of  
Community Foundation Grey Bruce

# ALL KIDS CAN PLAY

## Inclusive Practices Support Pyramid



When working to make a program more inclusive, it is important to take a bottom up approach. Begin by considering how your program can reduce participation barriers and foster the independence of all children. Investing energy into the first two levels of the Support Pyramid can reduce the time and amount of individualized supports that any particular child will need.

### 1. Foundational Supports

Positive relationships - with families, participants and other leaders - are critical. All children, regardless of ability, need to feel valued and accepted when participating in your program. The organization and its leaders should clearly communicate, genuinely believe and act in a way that demonstrates all children are welcome.

### 2. Environmental Supports

Setting up a program environment and structure that automatically meets the needs of as many children as possible means leaders spend less time trying to make adjustments on the fly. Many environmental support strategies and approaches can greatly benefit children without identified disabilities as well - inclusive practices will not diminish anyone's experiences while non-inclusive practices can.

### 3. Individualized Supports

Having already addressed many of the factors that may make it harder for children with disabilities to participate, it becomes more realistic for leaders to be able to meet the higher support needs of particular individuals. A strong understanding of the child's personality, rather than a focus on their disability, makes it possible to find creative solutions and make specific activity adaptations.

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## Foundational Supports Benefits of Inclusion

### Children with Disabilities

Participating in inclusive programming:

- Builds critical skills including gross motor, adaptive, communication, and social skills
- Raises self-esteem and promotes a positive self-image
- Provides opportunities to challenge oneself, increase resilience and develop perseverance
- Creates a greater sense of belonging - both within the program and in the broader community
- Improves opportunities to develop authentic, meaningful relationships with peers based on common interests
- Results in more positive social interactions with peers outside of the program

### Children without Disabilities

Participating in inclusive programming:

- Provides opportunities to learn from and interact with people they may perceive as different
- Teaches children to respect their peers, demonstrate acceptance and have a better understanding of diversity
- Creates opportunities to practice empathy, compassion, patience and flexibility
- Highlights that disability is a natural part of life and prepares children for adult life in an inclusive society
- Supports children to prioritize their role as a teammate while participating to the best of their own ability
- Broadens peer networks and reduces instances of bullying

### Coaches and Leaders

Leading an inclusive program:

- Supports the development of more positive attitudes about children with disabilities
- Helps develop the knowledge needed to make accommodations and be responsive to the needs of diverse children in the program
- Provides enhanced opportunities to practice flexibility, creativity and leadership skills
- Emphasizes the role adult mentors can take in helping children build personal and social skills

### Families and Caregivers

Successful experiences in inclusive programs:

- Reduces stress and feelings of isolation
- Helps to raise expectations of what is possible for children with disabilities
- Expands family support networks
- Increases willingness to participate in other community events, programs and activities

### Broader Community

A commitment to inclusive programming:

- Focuses attention on personal achievements and abilities rather than disabilities
- Creates opportunities that are truly reflective of the entire community, meeting the dynamic and diverse needs of all individuals
- Reinforces the message that recreation programs improve both physical and personal development

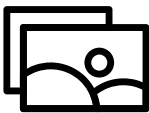
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## Foundational Supports Organizational Practices



### Statement or Policy

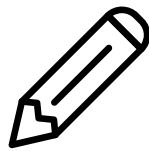
Do you have an Inclusion Policy or use language that shows your program is inclusive? Many families may not be comfortable registering children with disabilities unless they know they are explicitly welcome. Consider phrases such as: *"Our program welcomes children of all abilities"* or *"We strive to make accommodations to support the participation of all children"* on your website, registration forms and other documents.



### Marketing and Program Materials

Are your marketing materials, posters and brochures reflective of the current or potential diversity within your program? Do the images show your program is welcoming for children with different abilities or identities?

Could you incorporate more diversity into program materials? Use books, movies and toys that feature characters and role models of all abilities - even when the 'topic' isn't focused on disability.



### Registration and Intake process

Your intake process should respect confidentiality and only ask for relevant information. It is not necessary to ask a child's diagnosis - a family or child may choose to share this information if they wish but should not be required to disclose. Using a diagnosis to 'label' a child can reinforce stereotypes and interfere with getting to know the child as an individual.

Registration and intake forms should gather background information that may help the child participate. Questions such as: *"We strive to provide supports so that all children can be successful in our program. Can you share what accommodations have worked for your child in the past?"* help leaders plan for potential adaptations.

It is also important to gather information that will help leaders look beyond the child's challenges and develop a positive relationship. Working with the family, you can create a one-page profile to learn about their interests, preferences, strengths and what motivates them.



### Ongoing Training

Providing inclusive supports is an evolving process, as no two children are exactly alike. To offer the best supports to every participant, leaders should continue to build on their skills and be open to learning new approaches. Leaders should also take time to reflect on their own potential biases or stereotypes about disability, as they play a critical role in modelling inclusive behaviour and respectful language for participants.



### Welcome Feedback

Keep an open mind and be willing to listen to the experiences of families and children with disabilities. This valuable information can help to reshape programs and encourage leaders to consider inclusion from the outset when designing activities and brainstorming possible accommodations. Individuals with disabilities are the experts of their own experiences and their insight should be respected and welcomed.

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## Foundational Supports Tips for Leaders

### Get to know the child

- Focus on the child's personality, unique strengths and interests - not their disability
- Disability is not a tragedy, something to fear or pity - its a natural part of human diversity
- Don't make assumptions or define anyone by a particular behaviour or interaction - build a positive relationship based on who the child is, not how they handle difficult situations

- 
- Greet and treat every child with the same level of enthusiasm, warmth and attention
  - Shut down gossiping, bullying and negative conversations about program participants
  - Support program participants to interact and build connections with each other
  - Explain to children and youth that all people are unique and emphasize it's ok to do things differently sometimes

**All children  
should feel  
welcome**

### Be respectful

- Listen carefully to the language used by the child and family; ask if you should use the same terms or phrases
- Talk directly to the participant even if a family member or support worker is with them
- Make sure participants are prepared when it's necessary to enter their personal space
- Assistive devices are considered part of a person's physical space - do not touch or interfere with them without asking for permission first
- Do not negatively reference a child's diagnosis, disability or behaviour in front of peers

- 
- Keep an open mind and be willing to try new ideas and approaches
  - Use your creativity to try out possible solutions, instead of dwelling on challenges. Not every idea will work, but you may discover even better ways of doing things
  - Sometimes, the best ideas come from children - so don't be afraid to ask them too!

**Creativity has  
no limits**

### Embrace learning from mistakes

- It's ok to make mistakes. It is how we learn!
- Every participant is different and has different needs - what you think might work, may not. Give yourself a break and try something else.
- Embrace opportunities to self-reflect on your own biases, discomfort and areas of frustration.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help - sometimes, another set of hands is just what`s needed. Consider how an additional leader or volunteer could enhance the overall program and contribute to everyone's success rather than one particular participant.

- 
- Embrace the opportunity you have to make a positive impact on young people's lives.
  - Being a recreation leader can be incredibly fun and rewarding. Keep your sense of humour and enjoy yourself as much as possible.

**Have fun!**

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## Foundational Supports One Page Profile

Building a strong relationship requires getting to know the person and seeing them for the unique individual they are. A simple one-page profile can gather and present this key information in an easily readable format, acting as an important reference guide before and during program activities. One-page profiles are applicable and beneficial for strengthening relationships with children of all abilities.

One-page profiles should be viewed as 'living documents' that can be updated and changed as leaders develop a better understanding of program participants. The profile should try capture the following information:

### Strengths

*Things that are important to them; interests and abilities*

What are they passionate about?  
What makes them happy and excited?  
What are their best personal qualities?  
What is the individual good at?

Try to highlight the strengths behind their interests:  
ex. Loves arts and crafts - can sit still and focus for long periods of time when drawing or painting

### Context and Background

*What may impact them; what is going on in their life*

Is it their first time participating in this activity?  
Do they have any friends in the program?  
Is there anything going on in their personal life that may impact their attitude or behaviour while participating?

ex. change of family status or break-up, bullying, medical needs or concerns, injury, cultural or religious considerations, major changes to routines,

### Challenges

*Things that are difficult; reactions to stress*

How do they show they are overwhelmed or stressed?  
Are there particular environments or activities they find uncomfortable or unpleasant?  
When might they need extra support?  
Do they have any relevant fears or triggers?  
What behaviours may be concerning or a risk to themselves or others?

Challenges are not related to a child's personality but are places or things that may be difficult for them:

ex. Loud environments are overwhelming, risk of bolting, communication barriers

### Supports

*How to bring out their best; accommodation examples*

What routines are important to them?  
What helps them to prepare for or deal with change?  
What helps them to work through challenging emotions or experiences?  
What helps to motivate them to get involved or try?  
How do they ask or show they need help or attention?  
What is the best way to communicate with them?  
What tools or strategies have worked well before?

ex. time alone when upset, use of visual schedules, extra warnings before transitions, incorporating movement, use of adaptive equipment,

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## Environmental Supports Physical Spaces and Materials



### Physical location and program layout

Regardless of their ability or how they move around, are all children able to:

- Get to and from the program location (via ramps, wide doorways, even pathways)?
- Move around and navigate the space (clear pathways, automatic door openers)?
- Sit next to peers?
- Reach materials (toys, games, supplies) as independently as possible?
- Use the washroom, as independently as possible?

Consider whether slight adjustments to program elements could better suit all participants.

- Can the program area be visually defined with markings, chalk, pylons etc?
- Can the difficulty level be adjusted as needed (baskets lowered, goal areas expanded, field made smaller, distances shortened)?



### Sensory Considerations

Consider the lighting, noise, temperature and smells in your program environment. Avoid overly busy visual environments when possible and look for ways to lessen distracting stimuli - can lights be dimmed, surfaces be cleared, or unnecessary items be removed?

You may not be able to make any changes to your program environment, but being aware of these elements prepares you for potential reactions from children who may struggle with particular environmental factors.



### Spaces to support self-regulation

Create dedicated movement and calm spaces that all children can access when needed. A movement space may be a spot where children can climb, wiggle, dance, practice sports drills or bounce. Dedicated "calm spaces" can help children manage stress or take a break when overwhelmed. Do not use these spaces as a form of punishment - instead, encourage children to access them before anything escalates. They don't have to be elaborate - they could be a corner of a room, an identified location on the sidelines of a sports field or a blanket laid out on the ground. Include a few sensory items or movement flashcards to help children use the spaces as intended.



### Materials and supplies

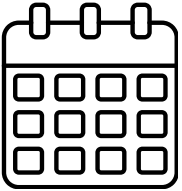
Try to incorporate a variety of items into your program space to support various abilities.

- Include large-barrel markers, easy to hold paint brushes and/or grip-aids for art activities
- Use balls that vary in size, weight, colour and texture (or slightly deflate balls)
- Test out shorter/lighter bats or other adaptive sports equipment
- Use a variety of furniture - bean bags, child-size chairs, blankets etc.
- Include materials that match participant interests and strengths. When kids have access to materials that enable them to participate successfully, they are more likely to stay focused and engaged



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## Environmental Supports Program Structure



### Schedule and Routines

Clear, consistent schedules and routines provide a strong base of support for all children and creates a predictable and comfortable setting.

**Schedule:** the order or sequence of activities that will occur at the program. A schedule might look like: outdoor time, snack break, quiet activity, free play time, wrap-up. The specific activities in the schedule may change based on the day, but the general flow or structure should remain relatively consistent.

Visual schedules are an excellent tool that can be customized to meet the needs of any program. Use text and images, preferably of your own environment, to show what is planned for the day. Rather than using times (such as 10:30), simply order of activity by 1,2,3,4 etc to make it more flexible.

**Routines:** the order or sequence of tasks related to each activity. For snack time, children may need to wash their hands, get out their snack, find a place to sit, eat quietly, clean up and then have free play time until all participants are done. Each time that activity appears on the schedule, the associated tasks should follow the same basic sequence to help children know what is expected. Children with higher support needs may benefit from a laminated routine checklist to help them follow the expected steps.



### Balance of Activities

When considering what activities to incorporate into your program schedule, look for ways to balance a variety of elements such as:

- location (indoor / outdoor)
- level of movement (active / quiet or passive)
- length
- structure (organized / free play)
- size (large group / small groups / independent)
- type (competitive / individualistic / cooperative)



### Opportunities for Choice

Being able to make choices helps children feel more in control and respected. The choices don't have to be complicated - they may involve picking between different art supplies or materials. When the ratio of children to program leaders allows, offer opportunities for children to choose between participating in several different activities happening at the same time.

Avoid offering broad or open-ended choices and make sure you can live with all the options you provide. Some children struggle with too many choices, preferring to pick between two or three options.



### Skill Development

No two children in any program will be exactly alike or have exactly the same strengths. Plan ahead when choosing activities and think about ways to adapt the activity for children with various skill sets.

Offer substitutions such as walking instead of running and stay focused on the improvements participants are making rather than only praising achievements. Another technique to support skill development is called scaffolding, which breaks more difficult skills down into tasks or progressively increasing the difficulty level.

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## Environmental Supports Communication

Environmental communication supports focus on the information that program leaders want to share with participants. Effective supports assist all children to understand what is being said.

### Visual Supports

Don't rely only on verbal communication alone when giving instructions, demonstrating an activity or offering choices. Many children benefit from visual supports to help them understand concepts and information. Visual supports may be static or dynamic.

Static supports are objects, pictures or signs featuring images or drawings that are used in addition to text or verbal communication. For example, sports jerseys, visual schedules, labels on materials or spaces in the program space, printed instructions, holding up two objects to help children make a choice.

Dynamic supports involve movement or gestures. For example, physically demonstrate how to complete a task or activity, videos or animations, using simple signs or hand signals to get attention (quiet coyote, clapping etc).

### Simple Language

Keep verbal communication short and clear. Avoid long or complicated instructions - try to break things down into steps or give them one at a time. When you must use 'jargon' or program-specific phrases, explain what it means.

### Positive, Clear Instructions

Make sure to use concrete language. Some children may not understand phrases such as 'respect others'. Try 'use kind words' or 'hands to yourself' instead. Positive instructions help remind children what they should be doing, rather than what is inappropriate. For example, saying 'walk please' rather than 'don't run'.

Some children may need support and clear instructions to help them respond in different situations. Not all children may recognize when you are busy - explain that when your head is down and you are reading or talking to another leader, they will need to wait to get your attention.

### Other considerations

Speak clearly and avoid covering your mouth. Be aware of background noises, the volume of your voice and other factors that may make it harder to understand what you are saying. It can be helpful to get down on the child's level and speak to them face to face rather than towering over them from above.

Recognize that different children may show they are listening in different ways. Not all children are comfortable making eye contact and some may move their bodies or fidget.

# ALL KIDS CAN PLAY

## Individualized Supports Communication

Individualized communication supports focus on helping leaders understand the thoughts, ideas and needs of participants. Supports may assist an individual to communicate with leaders or help leaders understand the communication styles of participants.

When interacting with a child with communication challenges, show them respect by giving them the time they may need to respond. Don't allow other children to interrupt them or start speaking on their behalf. If you are not sure what they said, repeat back what you did hear and ask if that is correct.

It's important to remember that just because a child may have communication challenges, it doesn't mean they don't understand you.

### Active Listening

Most experts agree that the majority of communication is non-verbal. Children who don't communicate clearly or use verbal language still have a lot to say.

When interacting with children with limited verbal communication, it's important to identify the way they communicate 'yes/no'. They may use thumbs up/down, facial expressions, nodding, pointing, simple signs, gestures or an augmentative communication device.

You can ask the child or caregivers to show you how they communicate other important information such as: help, needing to use the bathroom, hungry/thirsty, more, stop and play.

Recognize that the type of non-verbal communication used by one child will not be the exact same as others. Take the time to get to know the child and learn how they communicate rather than making assumptions.

### Non-verbal communication

Augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) are methods or tools an individual may use to enhance their communication.

Unaided options don't require any equipment and can involve pointing, simple signs, gestures or facial expressions.

Aided AAC involves uses either low or high-tech tools to support communication. Low-tech options include the use of whiteboards or notepads for writing and drawing or the use of a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) which enables children to point to words, symbols or images. Higher-tech options include apps and speech-generating devices.

Depending on the type of AAC used by a child in your program, you can ask if it is helpful for you to use the device yourself when communicating. For PECS or apps, you can also work with caregivers to add photos or phrases from your program to make communicating even easier.

### Augmentative or Alternative Communication

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## Individualized Supports Positive Peer Interactions



### Set the stage

Plan and design activities to facilitate peer interactions - such as cooperative games or organizing children into small groups. Ensure your groups have a mix of children with strong social skills and children working to improve their skills.

### Model skills

One way to support positive peer interactions is to model different skills, such as getting a friend's attention, sharing objects, asking someone to share or joining in on a game. For children working to develop these skills, explaining or narrating what you are doing can be helpful. You can also support children with strong skills to initiate interactions with others.

Storytelling is another method to demonstrate both positive or unsuccessful peer interactions. When reading books or discussing a situation, take a moment to explain what the characters did well or what they may have had trouble with.

### Prime and Prompt

Some children may be able to 'ask Alex to play' while others may need more specific cues or advice on how to interact with peers. Prime them for a more positive interaction by giving more detailed instructions such as 'Alex likes to play with blocks too. You could go and ask them to help you build a castle'. You may need to facilitate these interactions with ongoing prompts and encouragement. Fade out direct supports when possible to avoid disrupting natural relationship-building.

Before starting an activity that incorporates peer interaction, you can remind all children of some positive social skills, such as taking turns talking and sharing. This can reinforce expectations while also helping children to remember important social skills. You can also prompt children to give you suggestions on how they might demonstrate these skills by asking what they could say or do.

### Interpret the 'hidden curriculum'

Some children may need help to uncover or understand behaviours or actions of other children. Program leaders can uncover the 'hidden curriculum' by explaining the rules for popular activities, abstract concepts and the pop culture references that they may be unfamiliar with. 'Slang' and abstract phrases can be particularly challenging for some children to understand.

### Acknowledge the effort

Positive reinforcement naturally occurs when peer interactions are more successful. However, even when an interaction does not go well, program leaders can praise the efforts and help the child to reflect on what they may have learned. Praise is not intended to teach the child to please others but to be proud of their own willingness to try something they might find challenging or overwhelming.



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## Individualized Supports Considerations

### Transitions

Moving from one activity to another can be significantly challenging for some children. Program leaders should work to limit the number of major transitions each day.

Just like activities, well-planned transitions have a beginning, middle and end. The best transitions reduce waiting or build in activities to ease the shift (singing a song, walking like a snake)

Strategies to help children prepare for an upcoming transition can include:

- cues, such as verbal warnings (10 mins, 5 mins, 2 mins etc), visual timers or specific noise
- allowing identified children to transition ahead of the larger group
- using a visual schedule to highlight next activity

### Individual Schedules

Some children may require more individualized schedules or routines. Consider whether the child may benefit from:

- a tour of the program space prior to the start of the program
- an individual visual schedule or a 'first/then' board
- an early arrival time
- longer or more frequent breaks
- modifying timeframes

Changes to schedules or routines may be extra challenging for children who thrive on consistency. While it is inevitable that there will be unexpected changes, program leaders should prepare children for known adjustments to schedules or activities.

### Sensory Supports

Sensory supports are activities, items or adaptations that help children interact with the world around them more easily and comfortably. When a child experiences sensory overload or underload, they may have difficulty following instructions, paying attention or regulating their emotions. When children are experiencing 'sensory roadblocks' it is important to remember it is not related to the child's personality but the inputs from the environment around them.

There are activities, strategies and calming tools you can use to help a child move through these roadblocks, such as:

- touch/tactile:
  - more: children seeking extra touch sensations may enjoy playdough, sand, slime or fidget toys
  - less: adapt activities that use slimy or messy textures by putting the material inside well-sealed ziploc bags
- balance and movement:
  - moving the body by balancing and bouncing can be particularly helpful
  - almost anything can become a balance beam - a curb, piece of table, log, line of chalk
- body awareness
  - yoga poses and stretches can support increased body awareness
  - resistance bands can be used in various ways - above their head, behind their back, in pairs
- noise/hearing
  - more: use music or items that have a variety of sounds, such as easter eggs filled with different items
  - less: children sensitive to sound can benefit from the use of noise cancelling headphones

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## Individualized Supports

### Understanding and Dealing with Behaviour

#### **Behaviour is communication**

It is important to realize that all behaviour is a form of communication. In order to understand, respond to, prevent or change challenging or concerning behaviours, program leaders must try to understand the message behind it. Getting to the root of the issue makes it easier to provide support.

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A child may use behaviour to communicate their needs in the following areas:

- attention seeking (lack of awareness for personal boundaries, pinching, yelling)
- access to items or things they want (grabbing items, pushing people out of the way)
- escape or avoidance (running away, flopping on the ground)
- sensory seeking (mouthing items, seeking hugs or physical touch, self-injurious)

#### **Functions of Behaviour**

#### **Challenging or Concerning Behaviours**

Challenging behaviour can be difficult to deal with but it may not significantly or consistently impact participation or relationships.

Concerning behaviour has the potential to cause harm to themselves or others if not addressed. When concerning behaviour escalates, it can become unsafe for the child and those around them.

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Before engaging with a child who is displaying challenging or concerning behaviours, pause to reflect on your own feelings. How you respond can have an impact on whether the behaviour is more or less likely to happen again.

Depending on the child, you may be able to redirect their behaviour with words or non-verbal actions. For children needing more connection, you can acknowledge their behaviour by describing what you see (such as their body language) or sharing what you think they are feeling. Not all children demonstrate emotions in the same way so avoid making assumptions.

Remember that emotions control the brain and that when a child is extremely angry or frustrated, their brain may enter the 'fight, flight or freeze' response. This means they are less able to think or respond rationally and need support to calm down before being redirected.

#### **Responding and Redirecting**

#### **Addressing Behaviour**

As you develop a stronger relationship with the child and begin to see patterns, work to understand what the function of the behaviour might be. This can influence the way you respond in order to avoid reinforcing the child's use of that behaviour.


When children are calm, take the opportunity to support them by discussing or demonstrating more appropriate ways of expressing their needs or emotions. Work with them to problem-solve and share ways you stay calm or deal with difficult experiences, such as taking deep breaths, using calming tools or taking a break.

Provide plenty of positive attention to reinforce these skills if the child is using them.





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Grey Bruce  
Inclusive Playgroup



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We're here for good.



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# Foundational Supports

## One Page Profile Template

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Name

### Strengths

*Things that are important to them; interests and abilities*

### Challenges

*Things that are difficult; reactions to stress*

### Supports

*How to bring out their best; accommodation examples*

### Context and Background

*What may impact them; what is going on in their life*