

Foundational Supports

Organizational Practices



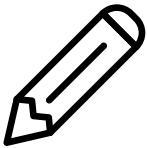
Statement or Policy

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

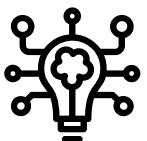
Are your marketing materials, posters and brochures reflective of the current or potential diversity within your program? Do the images show your program is welcoming for children with different abilities or identities? Could you incorporate more diversity into program materials? Use books, movies and 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 rarely 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.



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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Tips for Leaders

Get to know the child

- Focus on the child's personality, unique strengths and interests - not their disability
- 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

All children should feel welcome

- Greet and treat every child with the same level of enthusiasm and warmth
- Shut down gossiping, bullying and negative conversations
- Support program participants to interact and build connections with each other

Be respectful

- Listen carefully to the language used by the child and family; ask if you should use the same terms or phrases
- Always talk directly to the participant - even if a family member or support worker is with them or they need assistance to communicate
- Make sure participants are prepared before entering 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

Creativity has no limits

- 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!

Embrace learning from mistakes

- It's ok to make mistakes. It is how we learn!
- 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 collective success.

Have fun!

- Enjoy 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.
