

# Inclusion: Preschoolers with Special Needs

A team approach is most successful when working with children who have special needs. Preschoolers with special needs should have an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan). As someone who plays a vital role in the child's development, it will help you tremendously to be aware of what is included in this plan and how you can contribute. You will need to work not only with the child's family, but also with the child's service coordinator and any therapists or other professionals who help the child. The child's service coordinator should schedule regular meetings with the team. These are important so that everyone is aware of how the child is progressing and what interventions are needed. If the child is receiving services from other professionals, you need to be aware of ways you can work together to help the child.

Thoughtful planning can help you address the needs of children with special needs so they can be included fully in your program. Think about your environment, your daily schedule, and what obstacles might keep children from participating and feeling competent. This analysis will help you determine what adjustments to make. Here are some ways to help children with disabilities, or any child who is struggling with learning, to be more successful in their environment.

## Communication

- Offer materials to look at and touch along with stories and songs so children have multisensory ways to help them understand. The props can be used to encourage children to look at the teacher and to maintain their attention. Puppets are a great prop for getting attention.
- Use sign language and gestures as needed to help children understand what you say. Sign language gives children with limited language another way to communicate their needs. Each kit includes a few sign language symbols to help you. You can find more signs online or in books. You may even want to sign up for a class to learn more.

## Daily Schedule and Routine

- Keep your schedule and routines consistent and predictable. Follow the same procedure daily during arrival and closing times so children know what to expect. If changes need to be made during the daily schedule, talk about them with the children at the start of the day or before the change happens.
- Help children prepare for transitions that occur throughout the day. Object or picture cues that show activities may be helpful for children with learning and language difficulties during transition times. Children with attention or behavior issues might benefit from five-minute, two-minute, or one-minute warnings about upcoming transitions. Children with hearing impairments will benefit from visual cues such as hand gestures or sign language. Most children will benefit from a review of a picture schedule upon arrival and at various points during the day to help them understand what will be happening next.
- Since all preschoolers progress at different rates, you are already accustomed to adapting or modifying activities to meet different levels of development. When working with children who have special needs, you may need to add more modifications specific to the child's needs. Try to plan activities that are flexible enough for everyone to participate rather than offering separate activities for children with special needs.

## Physical Environment

- Ensure that the physical arrangement of the room allows for materials to be accessible to all children. Consider making changes in lighting, noise level, and visual input to meet the needs of the children in your program.
- Label toy and art shelves with pictures to help children understand where materials are to be kept or put away. This will help keep things organized and ease the clean-up process, while promoting independence and cooperation.
- Use clear visual cues to help children understand where to find their own personal items. Place pictures on coat racks, cubbies, and any other places where children may need to find their own belongings.

## Assessing Individual Needs

- Specialists on your child's team can help you know if the child needs assistive devices or special equipment, and may be able to help you access what is needed. Such needs might include auditory trainers/speech therapists for children with hearing deficits, language devices or a speech therapist for children with communication difficulties, or adaptive equipment for children with orthopedic impairments.
- Regular assessment of the effectiveness of your teaching strategies can help you determine when changes are required.
- Keeping good observation notes and portfolios will help you to share with the team the positive progress the child is making and any areas of concern. See Assessment/Documentation in the Fireflies® Supplements online at [funshineexpress.com](http://funshineexpress.com) for helpful materials.

# Inclusion: Preschoolers with Special Needs



## Adaptations and Modifications for Supporting Special-Needs Children in Your Environment

### Adaptations for children who are physically (mobility) challenged:

- Provide adequate space for movement (wheelchair access, etc.).
- Use wagons or other simple ride-on toys.
- Modify movement games and activities so child can reach a goal (add more time, modify playing field, etc.).
- Modify equipment used in a game or play (larger target, larger/softer ball, etc.).
- Install handholds in toileting area, etc.
- Provide large-handled paintbrushes and large crayons for easier grasping.

### Adaptations for children who are visually challenged:

- Provide more hands-on experiences (models of things talked about).
- Seat the child near you during instructional time.
- Use a buddy as a class helper (for transitions, moving to different activities, etc.).
- Keep recordings of books in book center.
- Utilize adaptive play equipment (balls/toys that make sounds).
- Use lots of descriptive language.
- Take a field trip, even virtually (go to a farm to experience hearing, smelling, and feeling animals; hear animal sounds on a computer).
- Plan and adapt activities to maximize the use of other senses (textures, tastes, sounds, smells).

### Adaptations for children with an auditory challenge:

- Learn, use, and teach sign language for everyday words to all children.
- Create and show cue cards with pictures for changing activities.
- Seat the child near you during instructional time; face child while speaking.
- Provide books with lots of colorful pictures.
- Make eye contact with child before speaking.
- Provide directions one-on-one while maintaining eye contact with child.
- Use a buddy as a class helper (for transitions, moving to different activities, etc.).
- Plan and adapt activities to maximize the use of other senses (sights, tastes, sounds, smells).

### Modifications for children who are cognitively challenged:

- Modify concept being taught to simplify (allow a child to mix instead of teaching measurement in a recipe, etc.).
- Repeat basic concepts taught often and allow time for practice.
- Provide modified concrete experiences related to daily living (self-care: using a tissue, hand-washing, toileting, brushing teeth, dressing, feeding, etc.).
- Utilize a teacher aide (if available) during instructional and transition times.
- Offer ample opportunities for hands-on learning.
- Plan activities that maximize use of all senses.