



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT INDICATORS AND ELEMENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY INCLUSION (*FIELD REVIEW*)

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The Early Childhood Education Environment (ECEE) Indicators detail the key elements that are necessary for implementing high-quality inclusive practices in early childhood settings. They are designed to assist personnel in providing effective supports and services to young children with disabilities. It is assumed that all federal and state legal requirements are in place. These indicators are not meant to examine federal and state requirements. They are intended to enhance high-quality inclusive practices implemented by early care and education personnel.

For more information, visit <http://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion>

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"Inclusion in early childhood programs refers to including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities; holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations; and using evidence-based services and supports to foster their development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional), friendships with peers, and sense of belonging. This applies to all young children with disabilities, from those with the mildest disabilities, to those with the most significant disabilities."

—U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#) (2015)

INDICATOR 1: Promotion and Affirmation of Individual Differences

Personnel promote acceptance and appreciation of children's individual differences and their varying abilities, with a focus on children's strengths and contributions to an enjoyable, engaging and positive learning environment.

Personnel:

1. Routinely comment on the accomplishments of all children to the entire learning community.
2. Display all children's work.
3. Call attention to all children's contributions.
4. Identify all children's preferences and continually use their preferences to guide instruction.
5. Actively facilitate belonging of children with disabilities in the learning community regardless of severity or type of disability and/or presence of challenging behavior.

INDICATOR 2: Family Partnerships

Personnel develop authentic and culturally responsive relationships with families that involve daily communication about children's learning and development and frequent celebrations of the child. Families have multiple and varied opportunities to provide input into their child's learning and supports.

Personnel:

1. Create an environment for open and two-way communication with families by using a variety of strategies, reflective of family preferences, (including in-person, paper, and electronic information sharing, such as email, text or app) to communicate with families and by offering opportunities for families to share information about themselves and the child.
2. Affirm the languages spoken by families and use multiple forms of communication based on the preferences of families.
3. Build and sustain trusting, responsive relationships with families.
4. Assume the competence of all families. Jargon-free information is shared with families about the program and about decisions the early care and education environment team makes related to strategies used with the child, and families are seen as a source for ideas, materials and support for planning and developing early care and education environment activities.
5. Include and involve families in early care and education environment activities to the extent to which families want to and are able to be involved. Providers offer a multitude of ways for families to be involved, such as observing, volunteering, and developing materials outside of the early care and education environment. Opportunities for involvement are culturally and linguistically affirming.
6. Involve families as members of their child's educational team by inviting them to meetings regarding important programming decisions, sharing important information, asking families for their ideas, opinions, and guidance and involving them in the development and evaluation of individualized goals, placements and other aspects of the Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP)/Individualized Education Program (IEP).
7. Encourage families to be involved in program leadership and regularly share information with families about opportunities to do so.

INDICATOR 3: Social Emotional Learning and Development

Personnel foster positive and culturally responsive adult-child relationships, establish predictable routines, and intentionally teach a range of social emotional skills. When children engage in challenging behavior, a team-based approach is used to understand what the child is communicating, how to adapt the environment, and what social emotional skills to teach and/or strengthen.

Personnel:

1. Foster positive and culturally responsive adult-child relationships by giving 5 positive statements for every 1 negative statement.
2. Respond to at least 80% of children's bids for attention or communication.
3. Establish predictable routines through the use of visual schedules that are posted and used by personnel and children throughout the day.
4. Intentionally teach a range of social emotional skills in small and large group, using prepared curricular materials and/or activities that target particular social emotional skills, such as understanding emotions, problem solving, entering play, and taking turns.
5. Use a team-based approach to understand individual children's challenging behavior, adapt the environment, and plan individualized instruction to teach or strengthen the child's social emotional skills.
6. Include families as members of their children's behavior team. Any time that an individualized positive behavior support process is implemented, families are included as active members of the team at all steps of the process.
7. Regularly acknowledge and comment on children's emotional states in order to build emotional vocabulary and awareness.

INDICATOR 4: Meaningful Interactions with Peers

Personnel use various strategies to promote interactions between children without disabilities and children with disabilities. This includes organizing the environment for positive social interaction and teaching specific social skills that promote peer interactions among all children, encourage peer interactions with multiple exchanges, and increase the complexity of peer interactions.

Personnel:

1. Identify children's individualized peer social interaction goals.
2. Teach appropriate peer social skills through large and small group lessons and role-playing opportunities for all children.
3. Teach children a variety of play skills with varied complexity to support participation and peer interactions across all children in the early care and education environment.
4. Select and arrange activities and materials that promote interactions.
5. Plan for consistent social opportunities within routines, such as for children to participate as table captain, clean-up partner and snack helper.
6. Model phrases children can use to initiate, respond and continue interactions.
7. Teach all children to be instructional agents to capitalize on strengths and abilities of all children.
8. Encourage peer partners/buddies to promote peer transitions through buddy play and clean-up partners.

INDICATOR 5: Curriculum

Personnel develop, modify, and implement teaching plans that optimize the amount of time children with disabilities spend engaged in activities, such as small and large group play, and other routines, such as arrival, snack and across all domains of learning. The planned activities consider the specialized equipment, assistive technology (low and high), and materials to benefit children with disabilities.

Personnel:

1. Select themes that reflect children's interests, abilities, familial/cultural norms and developmental levels.
2. Make necessary adaptations to ensure that children with disabilities can access and participate in all curricular activities.
3. Modify materials to enable manipulation by children with a range of motor skills.
4. Use sign language, gestures and visual cues during activities when appropriate.
5. Use visual, verbal and gestural cues with materials to help children with disabilities participate more independently.
6. Reduce distraction by limiting materials in the environment when necessary.
7. Integrate individual children's adaptive, augmentative communication systems into all early care and education environment routines and ensure that pictures or alternative, augmentative communication (AAC) systems are readily available to individual children at all times.

INDICATOR 6: Instruction

Personnel in the early care and education environment use child-led, culturally responsive, embedded, evidence-based and data-driven instruction during naturally occurring routines, such as small and large group activities and play to provide children with disabilities with sufficient opportunities to learn the skills that the team, including the family, has identified as important. Instructional supports, delivered by all staff, are individualized and effective.

Personnel:

1. Recognize children's strengths, needs, interests and abilities and identify reinforcers to inform instruction, through observation and recording of information.
2. Develop or modify the environment, materials and instruction to ensure children can engage in curricular activities and achieve their individualized goals.
3. Follow children's lead by responding to ongoing play and initiations in a manner designed to increase and improve the quality of engagement in the learning environment.
4. Embed instruction and targeted goals into naturally occurring opportunities for learning, for example by working on language, social and fine motor skills while participating in snack time.
5. Plan repetition, modeling and imitation to assist children's skill development.
6. Break tasks into smaller steps, using familiar and less familiar materials, as needed for instruction.
7. Use evidence-based instructional practices, such as least to most prompting and intentional teaching.
8. Create opportunities to address all stages of the learning cycle such as acquisition, fluency, maintenance and generalization.

INDICATOR 7: Collaborative Teaming

Personnel demonstrate dispositions consistent with positive communication and collaboration, such as flexibility, coachability, and ethics, with team members including the special educator, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, teaching assistant and families to gather and share information, review data, plan, implement and embed instructional supports and adaptations for individual children within the naturally occurring routines of the early care and education environment.

Exemplars:

1. Develop norms for meetings consistent with the team's values and goals.
2. Meet formally and as a whole to plan lessons and curricular activities, make adaptations, determine effective instructional strategies and review data.
3. Have informal and ongoing conversations to exchange ideas, share observations, and discuss new strategies.
4. Are willing to share their role with other team members, and accept the responsibilities of other team members, to benefit children and families.
5. Communicate information regarding children's needs, interests, and programming goals with all staff members.
6. Give and accept feedback from other team members.
7. Participate in team discussions about children's preferences, interests and learning as well as the practices that support overall development.
8. Actively seek input from families in decision-making and to gather evidence of generalization to other environments.

INDICATOR 8: Assessment

Personnel use ongoing observation and authentic assessment practices that span all areas of development and are culturally responsive, non-biased, and in children's primary languages, to understand children's learning and development. Data about individual children's learning are monitored and inform the use of adaptations or additional supports for children.

Team Members:

1. Collaborate with families to identify the assessment tools to use and when they should be used.
2. Collaborate with their teaching team to identify and engage in ongoing assessment for children with disabilities.
3. Identify and use culturally and developmentally appropriate assessments and assessment processes (such as the use of translators) that are reliable and valid.
4. Regularly engage in developmental screening activities and take appropriate follow-up actions.
5. Use appropriate assessment tools to identify objectives and goals related to the general education curriculum and across developmental domains for children with disabilities.
6. Collect data on progress towards individualized goals for children with disabilities.
7. Use data from progress monitoring to make environmental or instructional adaptations for children with disabilities.
8. Use data from progress monitoring to make changes to individualized goals for children with disabilities.

INDICATOR 9: Culturally Responsive and Identity Affirming Practices

Personnel use culturally responsive and identity affirming practices by:

1. recognizing diversity in their environment including race, ethnicity, social class, gender, language, immigration and refugee and disability,
2. recognizing the intersecting diversities of children and families in their care (e.g., race and disability or gender and disability),
3. demonstrating an awareness of implicit and explicit biases as they relate to their teaching,
4. developing relationships with children with disabilities and families in their care, and
5. providing learning experiences that are aligned with children's cultural and familial norms.

Personnel:

1. Interactions with family members and children demonstrate personal knowledge of and appreciation for the values, beliefs, and cultural norms represented by the children and families in their care.
2. Interactions with family members and children demonstrate personal knowledge of and appreciation for the individual and intersecting identities (e.g., race and disability or gender and disability) of children and families' experiences in their care.
3. Form and sustain positive and bi-directional relationships where families have specific opportunities to share information about their culture with staff.
4. Use learning activities and materials in large and small groups that connect to children's experiences, funds of knowledge, and cultural/familial norms beyond token holidays and foods.