


Inclusion:

Policy Development Guidelines for
Early Learning and Care Programs



Children are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, but because of their unique vulnerability, it is incumbent upon adults to ensure not only that children are safe from exploitation and neglect, but that they have access to a fair share of society's resources and as such all of Toronto's children shall be entitled, if their parents so choose, to participate in high quality child care/early education programs designed to meet the best interests of the child.

(Toronto Children's Charter)

Using this guide

This guide provides an overview of how to develop and embed Inclusion within the policies of your child care program. It outlines the benefits of inclusive child care from both a practical and an ethical point of view.

For new child care programs, we have provided background information on what inclusion means, given examples of good policy elements and provided some sample policy statements. For programs that have already developed inclusive policies and practises, this guide will provide an opportunity to revisit and update existing policies.

If you have questions about this guide or need assistance in developing your programs policies, contact your Toronto Children's Services Consultant.

Thank-you.

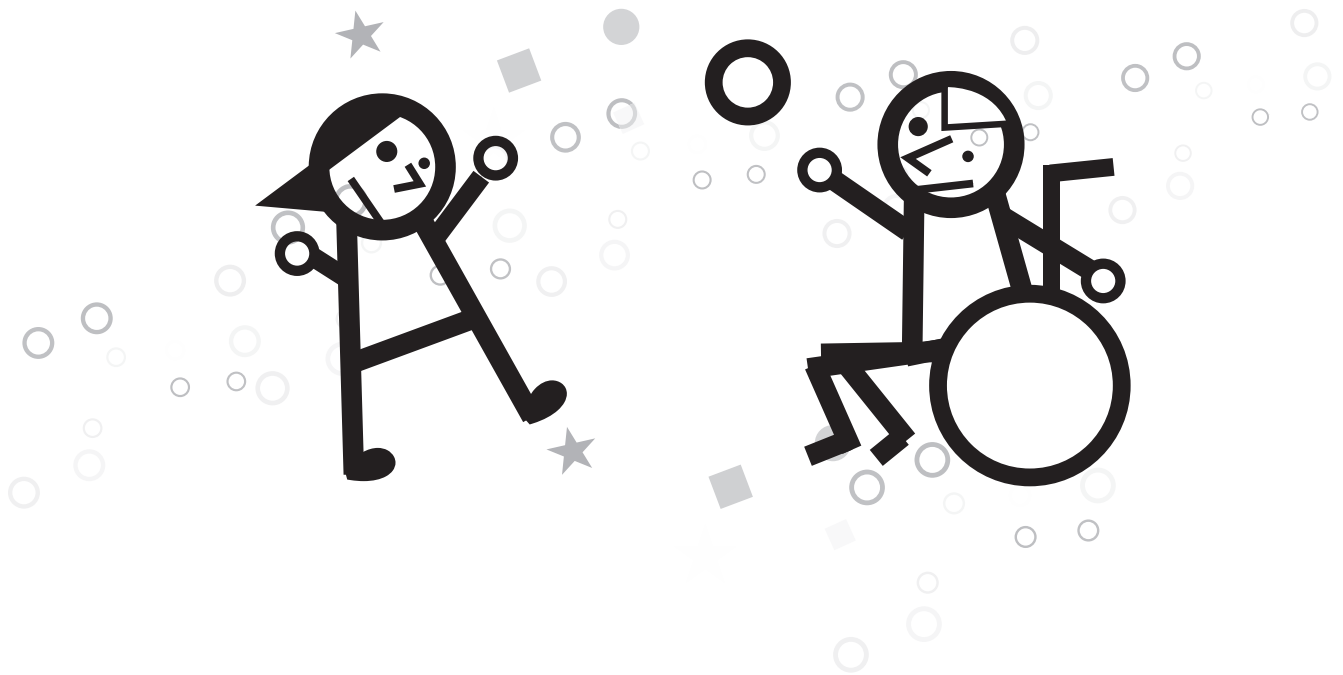


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Why Inclusion?

Inclusion comes from the meaning of “to Include”: to hold, embrace, involve, to count among. An inclusive early learning and care program strives to find ways to include all children and remove barriers that prevent children from actively participating.

Current research has determined that approximately 10% of children will require some level of additional support to ensure they can participate fully in community-based child care programs. These “special needs” can vary dramatically, from physical disability to intellectual delays, from social and behavioural challenges, to communication difficulties. Disabilities may be visible or invisible; children may be born with them, or they may emerge later on; the cause may be known or unknown. Special needs can change over time with just about every child having extra support needs at some point in their childhood (Child and Family Canada, Fact Sheet #18).

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) defines children with special needs as, “children who, due to emotional, familial, physical, behavioural, developmental, cognitive, communicative or emotional factors, are at risk of not maximizing their potential. Special needs encompasses children who require support and assistance with daily living, whether formally diagnosed or not, and whether a diagnosis is short or long term in nature.”

All children have the right to be cared for in environments within their own community that can meet their needs, and help them grow and develop to their fullest potential. Children with special needs require child care for the same reasons as all children:

- * to grow, develop and learn
- * friendship building and social inclusion
- * parental employment, training, respite and support.

(“Children with special needs: the need for child care,” Fact Sheet, Specialink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion and “What do we mean by inclusion?” Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, Fact Sheet)

Legal Obligations and Government Policy:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child — Article 23. Specifically this addresses the human rights of children with a disability by promoting dignity and self-reliance and by facilitating the active participation of children with disabilities in their communities.

The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms — All individuals must be treated equally, regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability.

Canadian Human Rights Act — Employers and service providers are required to accommodate special needs, including those of people with disabilities, short of undue hardship.

In addition, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the City of Toronto's Access and Equity Policy require organizations to be non-discriminatory. Exclusion is never appropriate, whether it is on the basis of race, faith, sexual orientation, gender or disability.

Understanding the Benefits of Inclusion

A growing body of research indicates a definitive link between high-quality and inclusive early childhood programs. As outlined in *Inclusion: The Next Generation in Child Care in Canada*, “high quality programs are important for all children” and “children with special needs most certainly benefit much more from programs that not only provide opportunities for social interactions with others, but also afford them opportunities to develop their skills and abilities in stable, well-run programs that are attentive to their unique needs...” (Irwin, Lero & Brophy, 2004).

Specialink — the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion outlines six elements that must be present if inclusion is to be a reality in child care programs:

- * **zero reject** — no child is excluded on the basis of level or type of disability
- * **natural proportions** — programs include children with disabilities in approximate proportion to their presence in the population
- * **full participation** — activities and routines are modified and adapted to include all children
- * **same range of program options** — parents of children with disabilities have the same options that other parents have (e.g., full day, part day, flexible hours)
- * **maximum feasible parent participation** — parents are actively encouraged to participate in the child care program
- * **pro-action for community inclusion** — staff and parents promote inclusion in the whole community.

When talking about inclusion, the focus is typically on the barriers or problems encountered. But when you re-frame how you look at Inclusion, you discover how it can have long-term positive outcomes for children, families and staff in your program.

If you are committed to working with all children, every child care staff will :

1. Value the opportunity to acquire specific competencies for working with children with disabilities
2. Share the same value base and program vision as the other early childhood staff
3. Attend and participate in training in order to understand and become skilled at using strategies and techniques
4. Conduct regular observations, know the program and children well
5. Acquire skills for positioning, handling and feeding a child with special needs, in addition to using devices and equipment required by the child
6. Seek mentoring from Special Needs Resource staff and act as a mentor to others
7. Respect parents as experts on their own children
8. Work to embed the children's individual objectives into the classroom activities and routines
9. Identify, implement and evaluate appropriate opportunities and strategies to allow children to interact without adult assistance
10. Build bridges between children with disabilities and their typically developing peers and help foster friendships.

Benefits to your program include:

- * All children and adults value acceptance and appreciate diversity
- * All children benefit from program consultations that are provided by support agencies
- * All staff benefit from enhanced training opportunities and broadened experiences.

Benefits for families include:

- * Enhanced family support connections in their local community
- * Greater opportunity to develop friendships with other parents
- * Improved awareness and appreciation for diversity and individual differences
- * Increase opportunities for seeing social justice in action.

Benefits for all children include:

- * Gives children with special needs the opportunity to form friendships within their local community
- * Access to early intervention services
- * Allows children to attend local children's programs and schools in their neighbourhood
- * Develops empathy and an acceptance of individual differences.

Benefits to Boards of Directors/Operators

- * Ensures that the organization follows fair and equitable practises.

The Power of Language

What we say and how we say it

Language is extremely important to consider when creating your Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy. Appropriate terminology supports attitudes and beliefs, and will ensure dignity of the individual is maintained and participation of all is valued.

People First Language

Putting the person first and the disability/special need second encourages equity and dignity by focusing on the person rather than the disability/special need. Say “child with a disability or special need” while avoiding “disabled/handicapped, or special needs child.”

Examples:

Words with Dignity

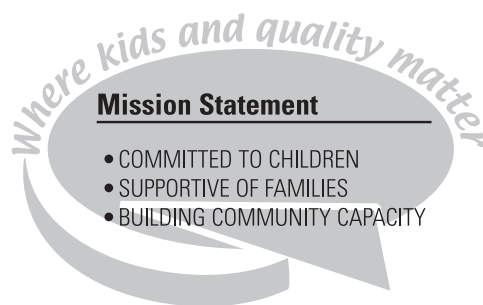
child with a disability
typical
intellectual disability
child with autism
disabled since birth/born with
Support need

Words to Avoid

handicapped
normal
mentally handicapped, challenged
autistic
birth defect
behavior problem

Children's Services Requirements

Children's Services manages Toronto's child care system. In partnership with the community, the Division promotes equitable access to high-quality care for children and support for families and caregivers. An integrated approach to planning and management ensures that services to children promote early learning and development, respond to families' needs and choices, and respects the diversity of Toronto's many communities.



Toronto Children's Services Mission Statement outlines a commitment to equitable access to high quality care for all children. Therefore, Toronto Children's Services requires that all Early Learning and Care programs with a “Service Contract” develop and implement inclusive

policies and procedures. This expectation is outlined in the “Toronto Children's Services Operating Criteria” Administration section.

Operating Criteria Requirements

1. Admission procedures followed for all families, which includes:
 - * Orientation that includes a meeting with parents
 - * Application that includes documentation of child's needs, abilities, interests, cultural observances, etc.

In addition, the following information is shared with parents prior to admission:

- * Philosophy Statement
 - * Access and Equity Policy
 - * Behaviour Guidance Policy
 - * CAS reporting policy/requirements
 - * Withdrawal Procedures
 - * Health Policy
 - * Parent Involvement Policy.
2. Withdrawal procedure is followed for all families. If children are asked to leave or denied admission due to the centre's inability to accommodate a child's needs or family circumstances, the procedure will include:
- * Documentation of meeting with parent and use of support services
 - * Notification of Children's Services Consultant
 - * Notification of Board/Operator
 - * Referral to other services.
3. Access and Equity Policy or individual anti-racism/anti-bias and inclusion policies describe:
- * Families have equitable access to services and programs
 - * Policies, procedures and practices are free of racism and bias
 - * Child care communications are sensitive, inclusive and non-discriminatory
 - * Procedure for responding to incidents of racism and bias involving both children and adults
 - * Requirements for reporting incidents of racism and bias as Serious Occurrence.

In addition to the above areas, the Operating Criteria outlines expectations for program/equipment adaptations to accommodate children's individual abilities, strengths, needs and interests, and highlights that child care programs reflect a range of abilities, cultures, races, family structures and languages.

Why a Policy?

In 1998, Toronto Children's Services required all child care programs with a service contract to develop an anti-racism policy. Over the years, it has been recognized that other groups also face discrimination and exclusion, based on their disability, faith, sexual orientation, gender and social-economic status.

Developing an independent inclusion policy or embedding inclusion principles in an access and equity policy is an important step on the road to full inclusion. A good Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy will be one that:

- * Is unique to your centre
- * Establishes expectations and clear roles for staff, parents, board members, support agencies and the community
- * Is consistent with government legislation

- * Clearly states core principles of equality, fairness and dignity
- * Outlines transparent processes for admission, special needs consultation and withdrawal
- * Is accountable and respectful of confidentiality
- * Is responsive to the changing needs of families and the community.

Together with your Philosophy Statement, your Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy will describe the “culture” of your program.

Policy Development

Step 1: Guiding Principles

Determine the core principles that are central to your program. These will be the foundation of your policy and the standard upon which to test your policy once it is developed.

Below you will find examples of guiding principles taken from current policies in child care programs to consider when drafting your policy.

We believe that:

- * Inclusive programs are quality programs
- * We must be responsive to the needs of our community
- * Children have the right to attend child care within the community of their choice
- * Our programming should be reflective of the varying needs of our participants
- * All children are welcome and bring value to our program
- * Children are best supported through collaboration
- * Parents are integral to a successful inclusion process
- * Every child is an individual and is unique
- * You place the person first and not the special need
- * Everyone has the right to privacy and dignity
- * Children learn best when they participate with others who have different goals and abilities
- * Fair does not always mean everyone gets the same
- * Good programming requires dedicated staff who are flexible in their approach and who are provided with learning opportunities wherever possible.

Step 2: Policy Format

The following format outlines areas that are important when developing a comprehensive Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy.

Section I: The Policy Statement

The statement should embody the following themes: welcoming, flexibility, partnerships, fairness, dignity and quality.

Examples of how these themes have been expressed in current child care policies:

- * All children are welcome
- * We support all children to reach their full potential
- * We aim to include all children within our programs and services
- * We believe that each child is unique, and in partnership with families we are committed to meeting the developmental/educational needs of all children
- * Integration and inclusion are used to express the view that all people, including children with special needs, hold rights and responsibilities as equal and essential members of our community
- * We are committed to the provision of service irrespective of abilities
- * We are committed to working with community partners to enhance our ability to support children with special needs through training and consultation
- * We ensure that all possible modifications are made to promote the full participation of all children
- * We work to reduce physical barriers wherever possible
- * Our program demonstrates strong leadership by supporting staff training needs
- * Our program ensures inclusion is supported through equitable admission practices.

Section II: Definitions

Define the terms used in your policy to ensure clarity.

Example:

- * Special needs is defined as:
Children who, due to emotional, familial, physical, behavioural, developmental, cognitive, communicative or emotional factors, are at risk of not maximizing their potential. Special needs encompasses children who require support and assistance with daily living, whether formally diagnosed or not, and whether a diagnosis is short- or long-term in nature. (OMSSA definition)
- * Special Needs Resource Staff are defined as:
Staff that are funded by the City of Toronto to support licenced child care programs for the provision of providing consultation, training, referral, case coordination transitional support, and advocacy

Section III: Procedures

Policy statements cannot stand on their own. They must be supported by procedures that are consistent with your guiding principles and congruent with other program policies.

1. Human Resources

- * The centre's hiring process supports the centre's Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy
- * All staff of the agency understand and agree to support inclusive practices as outlined in the centre's Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy
- * Board recruitment includes strategies for selecting members who understand and support the Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy
- * Staff and Board members review and sign off on Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy on an annual basis.

2. Training

- * All staff receive an orientation on the Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy and attend special needs-focused training opportunities on effective inclusive programming whenever possible.

3. Programming

- * The program staff will adapt the environment and routines as necessary to meet the needs of the children enrolled
- * The program is committed to developing flexible programming that can be adapted as required
- * Program adaptations are reviewed with the parents and support agencies.

4. Confidentiality

- * Staff understand that they will receive and have access to confidential information about children and families. They agree to keep this information in the strictest confidence (sample in the appendix)
- * Before sharing information about a child with outside agencies or schools, the child care program will get parental consent (sample in the appendix)
- * Documentation of consent to share information will be kept on-site in child's file.

5. Partnerships

- * The centre will foster partnerships by working collaboratively with parents and community supports in order to meet the needs of all children
- * The centre will, with the consent of the parent, enlist services from Special Needs Resourcing for children for whom they feel, or the parent feels, may need extra support.

6. Admission/Registration

- * All families interested in admission to the child care program are dealt with in a fair and equitable manner
- * Admission Procedures are followed for all families, including sharing information on your Access and Equity Policy, Behaviour Guidance Policy, Philosophy Statement, Withdrawal Procedure, Parent Involvement Policy, Health and Safety Policy, CAS reporting and any other related policies.

7. Transitions

- * Children with special needs may require additional support when transitioning to new age groups and/or programs
- * It is preferred that children progress with their same age peer group
- * When children are not able to progress with their peer group, a collaborative plan is developed by the program staff, the parents and support agencies.

8. Withdrawal

If the program is having difficulty meeting the child's needs, the program will ensure:

- * All families asked to withdraw from child care program are dealt with in a fair and equitable manner
- * Notice of withdrawal is consistent with the Withdrawal Policy of the program and is the same for all families. It should include written notice of withdrawal, documentation of meetings and discussions with special needs support staff when appropriate
- * Reasonable care has been taken in assessing the child's needs, including the program's ability to support those needs
- * Special needs resources and other outside agency support have been exhausted prior to notice of withdrawal.

Section IV: Supporting Documentation

Identify other policies that may be relevant to the issues in your Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy or policies that readers should refer to for additional information.

For example:

- * Anti-Bias Policy
- * Behaviour Guidance Policy
- * Admission Policy
- * Withdrawal Policy
- * Medication/Health Policy
- * Code Of Conduct
- * Serious Occurrence Reporting Obligations, etc..

Note:

If this is a new policy, all standing policies will need to be reviewed to ensure they support the same principles and are not in conflict or contradictory.

Section V: Accountability

- * The child care program will review its Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy and procedures regularly to ensure it is current with respect to language and legislation
- * The policy will be reviewed and signed off by current board members/operators
- * The child care program will include Inclusion/Access & Equity Policy in its Parent Handbook.

Inclusion Policy Template

Agency name: _____

Policy name: _____

Approved by: _____

Date approved: _____

Date reviewed: _____

Guiding Principles:

-
-
-

Section I: Policy Statement

Section II: Definitions (e.g., inclusion, special needs, special needs resource staff, etc.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

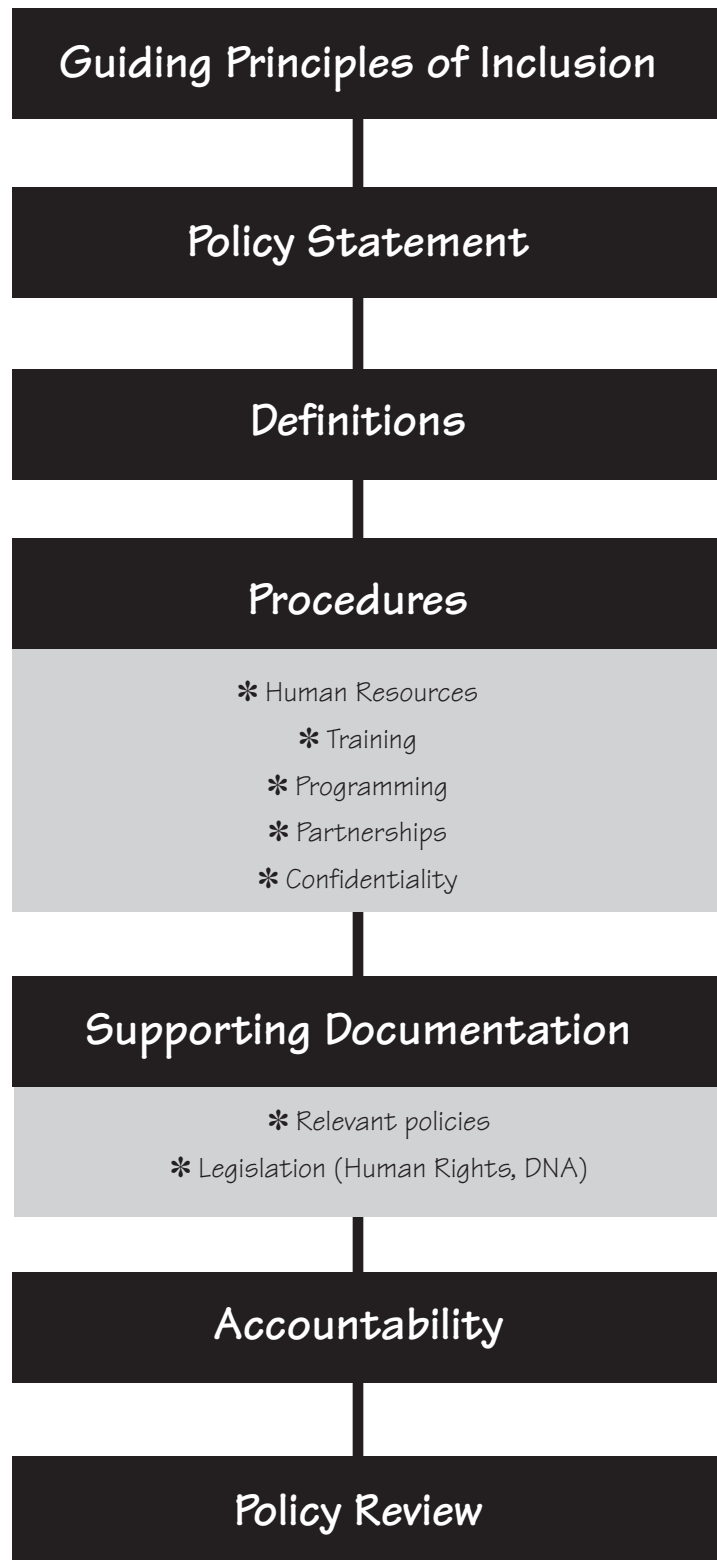
Section III: Procedures

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Section IV: Related Documentation/Policies: (e.g., Behaviour Guidance, Admission Policy, etc.)

Section V: Accountability

Policy Development Flow Chart



Supporting Your Policy

Policies must be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant, effective and appropriate. It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors/Operators to complete this review. Also critical to the process is how policies are implemented and communicated to parents and staff. Training, partnerships and understanding the broad system of supports for children with special needs are key components for successful implementation.

Training

Training for staff and Board Members/Operators on policy ensure:

- * Communication of policy and procedure components
- * Individual roles and expectations
- * Importance of inclusive practices
- * Successful placement for children with special needs.
- * Staff's ability to advocate for inclusion with all parents.

Partnerships

All licensed child care programs in the City of Toronto have assigned Special Needs Resource staff. Their services include:

- * Regular visits to the program
- * Early identification and interventions
- * Individual consultations
- * Program consultations
- * Staff and provider training
- * Program adaptations and environmental assessments
- * Service coordination and referrals
- * Supporting application for Child Care Support funding
- * Enhanced staffing/intensive resource support when needed (see definitions)
- * Support transition to school placement (i.e., *IPRC if necessary)

Definitions

Program Consultation

- * Program consultations relate to a specific program goal or identified program need. It often involves more than one program visit on the same topic.
- * They often include general environmental recommendations, program adaptations, resource sharing sessions and other recommendations that address program issues.

Individual Consultations

- * These are consultations performed by Special Needs Resource staff regarding an individual child.

Child Care Support Funds (CCSF)

- * Available to licensed child care centres who have a service contract with Toronto Children’s Services. Provides funding for enhanced staffing to support the successful inclusion of a child with extra support needs
- * Requests must be facilitated by Special Needs Resource staff (SNR)
- * Funds are limited, time specific, and are approved on a case-by-case basis. CCSF support the development of targeted goals, the implementation of specific strategies for the child and are available for a specified time frame
- * A committee will review and approve all requests for funds. Requests will be accepted on a “first come, first served” basis.

For more information about CCSF, contact your assigned Special Needs Resource staff.

Intensive Resource Support (IRS)

- * Intensive Resource Support (IRS) is available to all licensed child care programs (group and home) to support the inclusion of children with complex and/or intensive developmental, social, emotional or behavioural needs
- * IRS is available to children in child care programs who require a higher/more intensive level of support to maintain enrolment, adapt to the environment and/or learn skills
- * Requests must be facilitated by a Special Needs Resource staff (SNR) who provide support to the child in the child care program. The SNR staff and the child care program are responsible for implementing the agreement.
- * IRS staff will work directly with child care staff to build their capacity to include children with complex and/or intensive developmental, social, emotional or behavioural needs.

For more detailed information about IRS, please contact your Special Needs Resource Staff.

Resource Supervisors

Each district is assigned a Resource Supervisor who is responsible for supporting special needs resource staff and special needs agencies. Should you have any questions and/or concerns about developing your policy, you may contact the Supervisor in your district:

* West 416-392-6176

* East 416-338-7560

* North 416-392-4349

* South 416-392-5865

Conclusion

By developing an Inclusion Policy you have taken a positive first step toward making your program more inclusive. Your efforts will reap positive rewards for you, your staff and all the children and families in your program.

Your Inclusion Policy is not simply a document to be left on a shelf but should be used to support inclusive programming and interactions. Your policy is one that will evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of your community and broader society. We thank you in advance for your time and effort in addressing this very important topic.

Acknowledgements

The following individuals were instrumental in developing this document:

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- * Michael Laflamme
- * Birgit Maxseiner
- * Linda Tham
- * Dick Winters

Appendix

Sample

Staff Confidentiality Agreement

Guiding Principles:

- * Confidentiality is important to establish and maintain trusting and lasting relationships among parents/legal guardians and professionals.
- * Confidentiality is the cornerstone to ensure that privileged information is accessible only to those authorized to have access.
- * Confidentiality acknowledges respect for an individual's right to privacy.
- * Confidentiality builds respect for human relationships in which personal information is shared.
- * Confidentiality assumes that those who pledge to safeguard confidential information will do so.

As a _____, (position/role) I will receive and have access to confidential information about children and families. Except when required by law, this information will be kept in the strictest confidence.

I understand that the discussion of personal information about children and families without authorized consent is unethical.

I will abide by this Confidentiality Agreement to ensure respect for the privacy of children and families at _____

Name of school/child care/family support program

Name of staff member (please print)

Signature of staff member

Witness

Date (DD/MM/YY)

Sample: (page 1 of 2)

Consent for the Release of Information

Guiding Principles:

- * It is the right of the parent or legal guardian to determine what information can be shared and with whom.
- * Consent acknowledges the parent or legal guardian has the authority to grant permission for the sharing of relevant information with another party regarding their child for an identified purpose.
- * Parents and legal guardians retain the original signed Consent for the Release of Information form for their own records.
- * It is the parent's or legal guardian's right to cancel or change their Consent for the Release of Information at any time. This request must be made in writing.

Informed Consent:

Informed consent ensures that the parent or legal guardian is making informed decisions. Parents or legal guardians must be aware of the purpose for sharing personal information, how the information will be used and by whom.

- * Specific information to be disclosed must be identified:
 - ❖ Attendance, psychological, psychiatric, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, medical, developmental, social work and/or speech-language information
 - ❖ Parents and legal guardians have the right to determine which pieces of information can be released, except when required by law.
 - ❖ Parents and legal guardians must also be made aware that limiting access to pertinent information can make it difficult to meet a child's individual needs appropriately.
- * Who the information is being released to must be identified:
 - ❖ Includes the school, child care, family support program, agency and/or individual who will be in receipt of the information.
- * The purpose for releasing the information must be identified:
 - ❖ The information may be used for educational planning, service coordination and/or service provision
 - ❖ Other purposes can also be specified.

Sample: (Page 2 of 2)

Consent for the Release of Information

I/we _____
Print name of parent or legal guardian (first name, last name)

of _____
(address of parent or legal guardian)

hereby consent to the release of the following information*: (Check only those that apply)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychiatric | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physiotherapy | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupational Therapy | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developmental | <input type="checkbox"/> Speech-Language | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | | |

Compiled/prepared by: _____
(name of school/child care/family support/agency/individual)

In respect to: _____
(name of child) (date of birth (DD/MM/YY))

To: _____
(Name of school/child care/family support/agency/individual)

For the purposes of:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Service Coordination | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Provision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

Special instructions/restrictions:

Signature of Parent/Guardian ** Date (DD/MM/YY)

Witness Date (DD/MM/YY)

This Consent for the Release of Information form remains valid until* _____
Date (DD/MM/YY)

* Written information can only be released by the parent or legal guardian

** Authorizing person(s) may rescind or amend the above authorization in writing at any time prior to the expiry date, unless action has already been taken on the basis of the authorization

Sample:

Consent for Informal and Ongoing Sharing of Information

Guiding Principles:

- * Consent for information sharing among professionals involved in a child's day enhances educational, child care and family support experiences.
- * Consent for information sharing is a necessary legal and ethical practice and must be obtained prior to the sharing of any information.
- * Consent for information sharing acknowledges the parent or legal guardian as having the authority to grant permission for the sharing of relevant information with another party regarding their child for an identified purpose.
- * Consent for information sharing ensures that the parent or legal guardian is aware of the purpose for sharing personal information, how the information will be used and with whom.

In order to best serve children's needs, there are times when it is appropriate for the school, child care centre and/or family support program to exchange information about children participating in two or more of the above mentioned programs.

The kind of information shared may include, but is not limited to, matters involving attendance, illness, transportation or behaviour. Procedures for sharing information are explained to parents and are followed consistently.

In the event that it is necessary to refer to clinical records, developmental reports and/or Ontario Student Record (OSR) documents, parents will be asked to sign appropriate consent forms before such information is disclosed.

Your consent will give permission for the exchange of information between the school, the child care and/or the family support program while your child is registered in these programs.

I/we give permission to _____
(Name of school/child care/family support)

and _____ and _____
(Name of school/child care/family support) (Name of school/child care/family support)

for the reciprocal exchange of information about my child:

Name of Child (please print)

Date of Birth (DD/MM/YY)


Name of Parent/Guardian (please print)

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Witness

Date (DD/MM/YY)

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Where kids and quality matter

*Children's
Services*