

Writing an Inclusion Policy

A Guide for
Child Care Centres and Homes



Healthy Child Manitoba
Putting children and families first

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Introduction

The Manitoba Child Care Program is committed to supporting high quality, inclusive practices in licensed early learning and child care centres, nursery schools and family and group child care homes. Quality programs respond to the individual abilities and needs of each child.

Developing an inclusion policy supports high quality, inclusive, early learning and child care. A policy guides each program and your daily decisions. It should be based on the principles of inclusion and adapted to your specific program.

Changes to child care regulations require you to:

- have a written inclusion policy
- provide a daily program that is inclusive of children with additional support needs and reflects the developmental capabilities of all the children
- ensure each child in the Inclusion Support Program has an individual program plan (IPP) and that it is revised annually
- ensure centre and nursery school staff are aware of the inclusion policy and the goals of each IPP

This guide will help you develop your inclusion policy. It provides general information and the steps to writing an inclusion policy statement. If you already have an inclusion policy, you can use this guide to review and revise it, if necessary.

A child with additional support needs is a child who has a physical or cognitive disability or a behavioural or emotional issue; and needs additional accommodation or support to meaningfully participate in the program at the child care facility.

Inclusion

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion means children of all abilities have equal access to and participate meaningfully in child care programs. When children are together as part of the group, their development is enhanced and positive social attitudes are fostered.

In a high quality, inclusive program the centre staff or family child care provider is responsive to the individual abilities and needs of each child. Opportunities are provided for all children to learn through play with their peers, supported by knowledgeable staff or provider.

All children need support to reduce or eliminate barriers so they can learn and fully engage in experiences with their peers. Adaptations and strategies are specific to each child. For example, staff can make paint brush handles thicker with masking tape so they are easier to manipulate, modify a chair to fit a specific child to sit at the snack table or change a routine to make transitions more positive. Occasionally, additional staff are required as part of a strategy to include every child.

Genuine inclusion is more than just a child's presence. It ensures active, meaningful participation by every child in the daily program and with one another. How this occurs will be different for each child, based on individual abilities and needs. All children should be valued, have friends and feel they belong.

Benefits of Inclusion

When all children are meaningfully included, everyone benefits.

Benefits for children:

- better understanding and appreciation of individual differences
- acceptance and respect for and from others
- learning with and from one another
- more opportunities for socialization with peers
- preparation for full participation in the community, including the transition to school

Benefits for families:

- access to child care
- ability to go to school and get or keep a job
- better understanding and appreciation of individual differences
- learning with and from other families and professionals in the field of early childhood

Benefits for child care centre staff or family child care providers:

- better understanding and appreciation of individual differences
- learning with and from all of the children and adults
- strengthening skills by working with a variety of abilities



Inclusive Practice

All staff and the provider should be aware of each child's developmental goals and the support needed to achieve them. Goals are written in the child's IPP and should be incorporated into the daily program. The staff or the provider is responsible for meeting the needs of all children in their care. For example: during group time, an early childhood educator can give a child an athletic ball to sit and bounce on. This satisfies the child's need for motion and the IPP goal of socialization by allowing the child to watch, listen and respond.

Inclusive practice meets IPP goals most effectively when:

- all children, including children with additional support needs, are valued, active participants in group social play and in the program's experiences and routines
- positive attitudes are demonstrated by the staff or the provider when making changes to accommodate all children
- all staff or the provider are aware of the goals of children's IPPs and support them in everyday activities
- staff or the provider work as a team with parents and other professionals to develop, carry out and review IPPs for children with additional support needs
- staff or the provider pursue specific training in inclusive practice



Steps to Writing an Inclusion Policy

There are six steps for developing and implementing an inclusion policy:

Developing Your Inclusion Policy

1. Think about the principles of inclusion
2. Consider language
3. Write an inclusion policy statement based on the principles of inclusion

Implementing Your Inclusion Policy

1. Ensure your other policies, procedures and practices agree with your inclusion policy
2. Get your inclusion policy approved by your board of directors (child care centres and nursery schools)
3. Review and update the policy and other policies, procedures and practices regularly

Developing Your Inclusion Policy

1. Think about the principles of inclusion

The principles of inclusion are: access, participation and support. They guide your decisions and actions. Think about these principles and your practices before you write your inclusion policy statement.

Because everyone involved in your program is responsible for implementing your policy, get their input at the beginning. You can use this guide as a workbook for individuals to think about the principles of inclusion or as a tool for group discussion. Use the information collected to write your policy.

Staff, parents, boards of directors and other key community members can help child care centre and nursery school staff with this part of the process. Family child care providers may want to ask parents and other community members to help with this.

Inclusion is a process that is unique to each program. Review the following principles and explain how your program meets each one. If there are principles listed here that are not currently being practised, review the examples and discuss how to incorporate them. Because principles are related, your examples may overlap in some sections.

Access

Community Inclusion: Every child is able to attend typical activities in the community, including early learning and child care facilities. This means that a child's additional support needs do not hinder a family's ability to enroll in any program. It also means families with a child with additional support needs have access to the number of hours and days of attendance available to every family.

Examples:

- Children of all abilities are accepted into the program.
- The waiting list identifies children with additional support needs to ensure supports are in place upon enrolment.
- We keep in contact with our child development counsellor who refers families with children with additional support needs to our program.

Describe how your program makes all reasonable efforts to enroll children with additional support needs.

Inclusive Environment: The physical environment is set up to consider the unique needs of each child. Areas are accessible to all the children. For example:

- Wide pathways between furniture allow for a wheelchair or walker.
- Materials and equipment are visible and at the children’s level so that every child can access items independently.
- Adaptations are made to equipment and furniture to reduce or remove barriers for children, such as adjusting table heights.
- Adjustments are made to routines and transitions to make learning experiences positive for all children.

Examples:

- We arrange our learning centres so that all children can reach and use the materials in them.
- I observe the children closely so I understand and meet their needs such as shortening planned activities when needed so that all children can be successful.
- The sand table has risers so a child who uses a standing chair can reach and use it.

Describe how you set up your environment and make changes to the program so all children can access areas, materials and activities.

Participation

Meaningful Participation: Inclusion encourages the development of real relationships, a sense of belonging for all children and respect for dignity and equality. Children of all abilities learn from each other. Experiences and routines are adapted so all children can participate actively and meaningfully. Supports, when required, are provided in natural environments with peers.

Examples:

- The goals for children with additional support needs are carried out during play experiences with peers.
- Opportunities are provided for children to play together so they develop relationships with others.
- Field trips are planned so that all children can attend and participate in the activities of the trip.

Describe how you encourage all children to participate in meaningful ways with their peers.

Individual early learning and child care: Each child is unique with a range of abilities and variety of needs. Each child's abilities are considered and their needs are met so everyone develops to their fullest potential. This is done with a supportive approach that builds on each child's strengths.

Examples:

- I observe and document children's play to identify the abilities and needs of each child.
- We limit the number of large group activities throughout the day so all children can actively participate in the experiences provided.
- We offer sensory toys for children to use during large group activities and we shorten the length of the activity when children show signs of disinterest. We leave the box of sensory toys out in the room, so children can find them during the day, when needed.
- A private space is accessible for children to use when they feel they need time alone.

Describe how you build on each child's strengths to respond to his or her abilities and needs.

Support

Family Centred Practice: Your policy and practices consider the desires of each family. You support families by ensuring their child's development and needs are recognized so each family can make appropriate choices for their child. There is acknowledgement and respect for the priorities the family has for their child. Families are encouraged and supported to make decisions about early intervention options.

Examples:

- I speak to each family every day. We share information about the child's day and evening.
- We set meetings based on the parent's schedule.
- During individual program plan review meetings, we let parents be the first to discuss the successes of their child.

Describe how you encourage all families to take part in making decisions about their child.

Collaboration among partners: Outcomes for children improve when the relationships among partners are based on trust and respect and supports are co-ordinated and complimentary. Parents are recognized for their understanding of their child. Professionals, including staff or the provider are recognized for their experience and knowledge of child development. When these partners work together and communicate openly, goals are set for the child and appropriate supports can be planned. Existing supports and community resources are used and adapted to meet these goals.

Examples:

- I attend individual program plan meetings with the parents of the child with additional support needs.
- The desires of the family, the needs, abilities and interests of the child and the knowledge of professionals are used to create the individual program plan.
- During visits to the facility, the early intervention service provider and/or therapist and the early childhood educator decide together on the best strategies for the group setting to support the child.

Describe how you work together with parents and professionals.

Staff Supports: Staff or the provider need training and resources to be effective at including all children while meeting individual needs. Professional development focuses on flexible practices for all children, such as a workshop on inclusive social play. Staff or the provider may also need specialized training for specific procedures required by individual children. For example, an occupational therapist may provide hands-on instruction on the appropriate lifting techniques for a child with limited mobility. In a child care centre or nursery school, the director supports staff in responding to the abilities and needs of each child.

Examples:

- Staff are required to complete a specific number of hours of professional development each year. Some of these hours are devoted to inclusion.
- Medical procedures required for each child are taught to staff by a registered nurse or other health care professional.

Describe what supports are available for the staff or the provider.

2. Consider language

The words you use in a policy have a significant effect on your practices. Carefully chosen language will ensure you are promoting appropriate practices.

General Language: Use language that supports the intent of your inclusion policy and clearly describes your inclusive practice. Use words such as “**all**,” “**every**” or “**each**.”

Examples:

- All children are valued.
- We get to know every child as an individual and make changes to our environment to promote each child’s development.

People-First Language: The person or child should always come first when you refer to a disability. This focuses attention on the child and his or her abilities, rather than the disability. For example: use *child with autism* rather than *autistic child*.

Strength-Based Language: State your policy in a way that focuses on the abilities of each child rather than on disabilities. For example, “We welcome children of all abilities.” over “We welcome children with disabilities.”

Definitions: Terms used in your policy may need to be defined so families and the public can understand the meaning of your policy. For example:

- a child with additional support needs
- adapted equipment
- professionals who work with your program

Make sure you are specific and explain words and concepts.



3. Write an inclusion policy statement based on the principles of inclusion.

In the above steps you have considered the principles of inclusion and thought about language. You now have the information needed to write a draft of your policy statement.

The principles of inclusion are access, participation and support. Your inclusion policy needs to describe each one. The following examples may help.

Access

Access describes community inclusion and the inclusive environment. The information gathered in section one (1) will help you describe access in your inclusion policy.

Examples:

- We accept and welcome children of all abilities.
- Indoor and outdoor areas are arranged so all children can move freely and make choices based on their abilities, interests and needs.
- We make changes to our daily program to meet the needs of each child.

Participation

Participation refers to meaningful participation and individual early learning and child care. The information gathered in section one (1) will help you describe participation in your inclusion policy.

Examples:

- Opportunities are provided for all children to participate in social free play and routines throughout the day.
- We believe that each child deserves an environment and experiences that promote growth in all areas of his or her development.
- We use program approaches that best meet the needs of each child and his or her family.



Support

Support describes family centred practice, collaboration among partners and staff supports. The information gathered in section one (1) will help you describe support in your inclusion policy.

Examples:

- We respect and value input from parents and encourage them to be part of the decision making process for their child.
- We support families by consulting with early intervention professionals.
- We work with parents and professionals who have valuable knowledge and expertise to share with us and each other.
- I receive professional development in current areas of child development, research, theory and practice.



Putting it all together

The chart below is a summary of the information provided in this guide. You can use it to evaluate your inclusion policy and ensure you have captured key concepts to describe access, participation and support.

ACCESS		
Key Concepts	Principles of Inclusion	Sample Wording
<p>Community Inclusion Make all reasonable efforts to enroll children with additional support needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child is able to attend early learning and child care programs. • A child's additional support needs do not hinder a family's ability to enroll in a child care program. • The family has access to the hours and days of attendance available to every family. 	<p>We accept and welcome children of all abilities.</p> <p>Our program supports the full inclusion of children who require additional support because of a physical, cognitive, social or emotional need.</p>
<p>Inclusive Environment Set up and make changes to the program so all children can access areas, materials and activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical environment is set up to consider the unique needs of each child. • All areas are accessible. • Materials and equipment are visible and at the children's level so all children can access items independently. • Adaptations are made to equipment and furniture. • Adjustments are made to routines and transitions. 	<p>Indoor and outdoor areas are arranged so all children can move freely and make choices based on their abilities, interests and needs.</p> <p>We make changes to our daily program to meet the needs of each child.</p>
PARTICIPATION		
Key Concepts	Principles of Inclusion	Sample Wording
<p>Meaningful Participation Children participate in meaningful ways with their peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences and routines are adapted. • The development of real relationships and a sense of belonging are encouraged. • Respect for dignity and equality is developed and promoted. • All children learn from each other. • Supports are provided in natural environments with peers. 	<p>Opportunities are provided for all children to participate in social free play and routines throughout the day.</p> <p>We provide developmentally appropriate group experiences for all children and encourage the socialization of every child with peers.</p>
<p>Individual early learning and child care Respond to the abilities and needs of each child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each child's abilities are considered and needs are met. • A supportive approach is used that builds on each child's strengths. 	<p>We believe that each child deserves an environment and experiences that promote growth in all areas of his or her development.</p> <p>We use program approaches that best meet the needs of each child and his or her family.</p>

SUPPORT

Key Concepts	Principles of Inclusion	Sample Wording
<p>Family-Centred Practice Families can take part in making decisions about their child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are encouraged and supported to make decisions about early intervention options. • Each child's development and needs are recognized so families can make appropriate choices. • The priorities the family have for their child are acknowledged and respected. 	<p>We respect and value input from parents and encourage them to be part of the decision making process for their child.</p> <p>We recognize the desires of the family.</p>
<p>Collaboration among partners Staff or the provider work with parents and professionals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships among partners are based on trust and respect. • Supports for the child are co-ordinated and complimentary. • Each partner brings knowledge and expertise to the group. • Partners work together and communicate openly. • Goals are set for the child and appropriate supports are planned. • Existing supports and community resources are used and adapted to meet goals. 	<p>We support families by consulting with early intervention professionals.</p> <p>We work with parents and early intervention professionals who have valuable knowledge and expertise to share with each other.</p>
<p>Staff Supports Supports are available for staff or the provider.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff or the provider need training in flexible and responsive practices and in carrying out specific procedures. • In a child care centre or nursery school, the director supports the staff in responding to the abilities and needs of each child. 	<p>I receive professional development in current areas of child development, research, theory and practice.</p> <p>We are committed to learning more about various disabilities and full inclusion as part of our annual training plan.</p>



Implementing Your Inclusion Policy

1. Ensure your other policies, procedures and practices agree with your inclusion policy.

Your inclusion policy affects all aspects of your program as well as the children, parents, staff, community members and the board of directors or parent advisory group. The principles of inclusion in your policy statement should be reflected in your program's other policies and procedures, describing actions taken by staff in day-to-day practice.

Review existing policies, procedures and practices to ensure they agree with your inclusion policy. Provide further descriptions, when needed, to support the intent of your inclusion policy. Here are some suggestions:

Your program statement should indicate that:

- all children participate in regular activities and routines
- all children attend fieldtrips, outings and special events with their peer group
- experiences are developmentally appropriate
- supports are made available
- adaptations are made
- individual program plan goals are carried out in the regular daily program
- peers are included in IPP activities and therapies

Your behaviour management policy should include:

- clear descriptions of positive guidance techniques
- that techniques are adapted based on children's developmental levels
- what supports are available

Your transportation policy should indicate:

- arrangements your facility makes so all children can be transported on outings

Your enrolment, withdrawal and transition policies should indicate:

- children of all abilities are welcome to attend your program
- all families have the same hours and days of attendance available
- procedures and practices are in place to help with enrolment transition
- procedures and practices are in place to help during the transition to another early learning and child care program or to school
- your program follows the procedures outlined in Guidelines for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Special Needs

Your safety plans should indicate:

- specific plans for children with additional support needs, including designated staff to help individual children and ensure any specialized equipment or medications are taken during evacuation or shelter-in-place procedures
- there are wide pathways to all exits
- all corridors, stairs and exits are accessible and clear of clutter

Your parent policies and procedures should:

- identify the strategies used to communicate with parents about their children
- identify how parents are included in decision making and goal setting
- identify consulting services available for families and staff
- indicate that informed, written consent is obtained before there is collaboration between staff or provider and other professionals
- encourage all parents to participate in the program and/or on the board of directors or parent advisory committee

Your staff policies and procedures should:

- state that all staff members are expected to be involved and work with all of the children in their care
- identify how IPP goals and resources are communicated to all staff
- identify how child care assistants and early childhood educators help each other implement IPP goals
- indicate required annual professional development hours for inclusion training
- identify management members designated to provide inclusion orientation, mentoring and staff support

Review other policies and procedures unique to your program to make them consistent with your inclusion policy.

2. Get your inclusion policy approved by your board of directors (child care centres and nursery schools).

When a draft of your inclusion policy is complete, it will need to be presented to your child care centre or nursery school board of directors for review. Your board of directors may make changes before approving the final statement. Once approved, send a copy to your child care co-ordinator. Each family in your program should receive a copy of the policy as an update to the package they received when they enrolled.

3. Review and update the inclusion policy and other policies, procedures and practices regularly. You should re-examine the inclusion policy statement during your regularly scheduled policy review. Any necessary changes or clarifications will need to be reflected throughout your program's policies, procedures and practices. Your updated policy statement will need to be re-approved by your board of directors (if applicable) and a copy sent to your child care co-ordinator.



References

These references were used to create this guide. They may help you develop your inclusion policy.

Best Practices Licensing Manual for Early Learning and Child Care Centres. Manitoba Child Care Program. Available from your child care co-ordinator and at manitoba.ca/childcare.

A Guide to the Inclusion Support Program. Manitoba Child Care Program. Available from your child care co-ordinator and at manitoba.ca/childcare.

Guidelines for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Special Needs. Available from the Government of Manitoba; or your child care co-ordinator and at manitoba.ca/childcare.

The Human Rights Code. Available from the Government of Manitoba: manitoba.ca/hrc/english/publications/hr-code.html.

Inclusive Policies Resource Kit. Available from Community Living Manitoba: www.aclmb.ca/Early_Childhood_Education.html.

The SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Practices Profile and Principles Scale: Final Workshop Version May 2005. Available from SpecialLink Canada: www.speciallinkcanada.org.

Inclusion: Policy Development Guidelines for Early Learning and Child Care Program. Available from City of Toronto Children's Services. www.toronto.ca/children/prof_dev.htm.

Early Childhood Inclusion. A Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) draft for field review. Available from Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children: www.dec-sped.org/index.aspx/About_DEC/PositionConcept_Papers/Inclusion.

A Thinking Guide to Inclusive Child Care for Those Who Care About Young Children with and without Disabilities. Available from Disabilityrights Wisconsin: www.disabilityrightswi.org/archives/112.

For more information contact your child care coordinator or:

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