EARLY CHILDHOOD
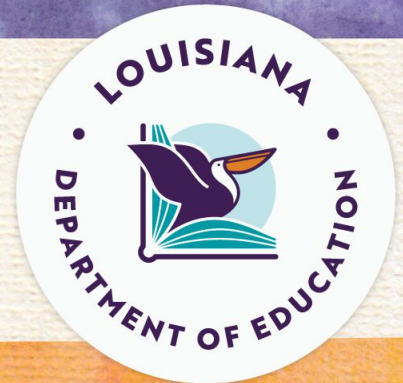**CONFERENCE 2024**
SHAPING LOUISIANA'S FUTURE

Supporting Young Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings

LOUISIANA · DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ·

Supporting Young Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings

Agenda

I. Objectives
II. Welcome Activity
III. Supporting All Children in Early Childhood Settings
IV. Creating Inclusive Experiences for Young Children with Disabilities
V. Creating Inclusive Environments for Young Children with Disabilities
VI. Supporting Young Children with Disabilities through Intentional Efforts
VII. Closing
VIII. References

Session Overview

- This session will provide early childhood educators with strategies for supporting young children with disabilities in early childhood settings.
- Topics covered will include:
  - utilizing best practices for supporting young children with disabilities
  - creating inclusive environments
  - providing appropriate materials
  - facilitating high-quality educator-child interactions

Objectives

- Participants will learn the inclusive practices that exist to support the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings.

- Participants will be able to improve the quality of inclusive strategies used in their programs to meet the individual goals of children with disabilities in early childhood settings.

Introduction

Who's in the room?

- Teachers?
- Site Directors or Owners?
- School leaders?
- School system leaders?
- Lead Agency?
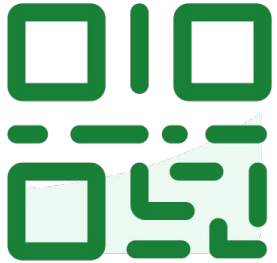- Teacher Coaches?
- CCR&R leaders?

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Louisiana Department of Education
Office of Teaching and Learning
Early Childhood Strategy

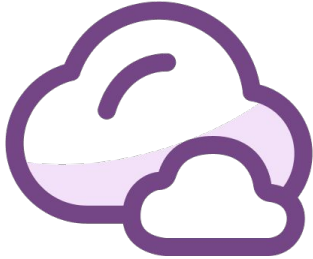# Providing High Quality
Early Childhood Opportunities

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What is one word that represents how it feels when you find a strategy that works for a child with a disability to be successful in the classroom?

Supporting Child Development

While not all children will reach developmental milestones at the same time, it's important to understand the critical milestone that children are expected to achieve.

Early Educators should be able to:

- identify early warning signs of a suspected delay or missed milestone
- talk to families about child development
- assist in monitoring child development

Developmental Screening: ASQ-3

- The Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition (ASQ®-3) is used by pediatricians and early educators.
- EarlySteps, Louisiana's program for infants and toddlers with disabilities, also uses the Ages & Stages Questionnaire in their screening process.
- The questionnaires are family-friendly, easy to use, and helps create the snapshot needed to celebrate milestones and identify delays in development.

Focusing on Individual Child Outcomes

The focus of individual child outcomes should be on both developmental and academic skills and outcomes such as acceptance, participation, and friendships.

Individualized supports can improve child outcomes by:
- providing the child with an environment that enriches child development skills through play and intentional center activities;
- engaging in play with children, encouraging participation, and guiding the children through the process with prompting.

Focusing on Individual Child Outcomes

What could focusing on individual child outcomes look like in practice?

Infants/Toddlers:
- Use a lighted toy to encourage scooting or crawling on the floor.
- Hide a toy and look with the child to solve the problem of finding it.

Preschoolers:
- Use manipulatives that are a child's favorite color to engage them in a counting activity.
- Play a game with a child and allowing them to pick their partner and the game that they want to play to encourage the experience of participating.

Development Through Daily Activities

Healthy development is supported when children are exposed to opportunities and experiences where their needs are met.

Development through daily activities can be met by:

- *educators* who participate in consistent quality training on the subjects that matter the most to better support child development
- *educators* who monitor child development through Teaching Strategies® to identify learning and developmental lags and gaps in order to provide appropriate instruction and make decisions on whether or not a child may be in need of additional support
- promoting child development through intentional *planning* and consistent *monitoring*. The Louisiana Early Learning Development Standards provide information in planning and Learn the Signs. Act Early provides materials from the CDC to monitor children's development.

Supporting Young Children with Disabilities through Inclusive Best Practices

Inclusive Best Practices

Supporting young children with disabilities in high quality early childhood settings requires ongoing professional development to acquire the knowledge and skills to implement inclusive practices.

Supporting infants and toddlers with disabilities in inclusive environments:

- ensures high-quality professional development, effective ongoing follow-up assistance, and support for collaborative teaming

- promotes effective policies and high-quality preschool inclusion within early childhood programs

Defining Inclusive Best Practices

- Inclusive practices provide opportunities for children with physical, behavioral, or learning disabilities to be included and participate in general early childhood settings with their peers.

- Inclusive practices engage and bring together all children within the early learning setting to meet common goals through experiences and opportunities.

- Inclusive best practices foster inclusion in early learning settings to provide young children with disabilities the opportunities to:
  - support developmental needs to improve outcomes
  - participate in early learning experiences alongside their nondisabled peers
  - build friendships
  - teach children how to interact with one another despite differences

Benefits of Inclusive Best Practices: *Infants*

Inclusive practices are most impactful for *infants* when they:

- Support the early development that allows children with disabilities to practice and generalize skills they are learning to meet their developmental milestones.

- Enhance interactions by providing supports needed to encourage appropriate receptive and expressive language and communication.

- Encourage play with more toys or others in the classroom.

- Increase body awareness and strength by using the senses and movement.

Benefits of Inclusive Best Practices: *Toddlers*

Inclusive practices are most impactful for *toddlers and preschoolers* when they:

- Promote the development of quality interactions among peers that allow children with disabilities to practice and generalize skills they are learning.

- Enhance language and communication skills by providing peer models that have appropriate language and communication skills.

- Help children learn to interact with other children.

- Develop patience by helping children understand that everyone can play, learn, and grow together.

Benefits of Inclusive Best Practices: *Early Educators*

Inclusive practices are most impactful for *early educators* when they:

- Broaden the development of new instructional techniques and perspectives by opening new levels of understanding in child development;

- Stretch educators to learn innovative ways to modify the environment and accommodate their lessons according to individual child needs;

- Expand opportunities to discover and develop partnerships with other community resources and agencies;

- Build stronger relationships through communication with parents and partners in education.

Benefits of Inclusive Best Practices: Families

Inclusive practices are most impactful for *families* when they:

- Connect families to resources within the community that assists with educational and social resources needed for their child to be successful.

  - Examples may include EarlySteps or other local community programs

- Unite families and provides a support network where they can share openly about the struggles and triumphs of their experiences.

- Provide families of non-disabled children the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and supports for children with disabilities by building friendships and connections that may not otherwise exist.

Benefits of Inclusive Best Practices: Communities

Inclusive practices are most impactful for *communities* when they:

- Allow the community to embrace a vision that all children are valued and welcome.

- Help communities become more accepting and supportive of all people.

- Allow for the sharing of resources in the community from various agencies that can benefit all children.

- Lead to more opportunities and possibilities for children with and without disabilities.

Turn and Talk

- Tell about a time when you saw the impact that providing an inclusive environment can have on a child/teacher/family/or community.

- How did that impact motivate you when working with the child?

Creating Inclusive Experiences for Young Children with Disabilities

Defining Practices in Inclusive Settings

Inclusive practices provide an appropriate, non-restrictive, educational experience for young children with disabilities in the general education setting while using the general curriculum.

The defining practices used in inclusive settings include:

- meeting developmental milestones by teaching and learning through the lens of the children with and without disabilities
- providing management strategies that meet the needs of all children
- approaching the curriculum with individuals in mind and thinking about how you will reach every individual child in the classroom
- understanding that all children bring value and are able to succeed

Curriculum Modifications

- Curriculum modifications for young children with disabilities provide children with disabilities with the same experiences as their peers in the early learning setting.
- These modifications could include making small changes to an activity to meet the end goals while also meeting the individual child needs.

  Examples may include:

  - Creating activities that are age-appropriate while also being sensitive to individual needs.
  - Adapting materials such as eating utensils and cups to make them easier to grasp.
  - Breaking down tasks into smaller activities that include breaks.
  - Using markers instead of paint if a child struggles with the paint texture.

Classroom Management Strategies

Inclusive strategies are an important part of inclusion for children with disabilities. Strategies will change depending on the child's exceptional needs. Inclusive strategies may include material, activity, and environmental modifications that help children be successful.

These modifications may include strategies such as:

Material Supports	Activity Supports	Environmental Supports	Behavioral Supports
*Providing age-appropriate materials *Placing all materials at accessible heights and locations *Providing visual boundaries	*Giving choices *Taking breaks *Teaching to child interests through preferred activities	*Using picture supports. *Clearing pathways *Minimizing distances traveled *Stabilizing materials using tape or velcro.	*Encouraging positive interactions *Rewarding positive behavior *Keeping rules simple and clear

Considering Child Preferences

Management strategies can be improved at child care sites when we consider child preferences. These preferences include preferred activities, preferred means of communication, or preferred ways of engagement. Allowing child preference into the classroom environment increases participation and sparks the interest in the activities for some children.

Examples may include:

- Making the environment less complicated by placing materials at accessible locations for all children to reach them.
- Removing items in the environment that cause over-stimulation.
- Using picture schedules to help children know what is next.
- Providing materials that are organized and sorted.
- Allowing a child to play alone or with a buddy in order to participate in an activity.

Providing Individualized Support

Inclusive environments adapt and modify materials to meet the needs of individual children. Teaching and learning through the lens of the individual child addresses individual needs of children who have different backgrounds and abilities.

Material modifications can sometimes be necessary due to developmental delays.

Examples may include:

- Feeding a child at a different time due to medical or sensory needs.
- Allowing a child to enter with an item of comfort such as a lovie or toy.
- Replacing unacceptable materials with acceptable ones.
- Using materials/toys in the room that are age-appropriate.
- Avoiding using small toys in environments where children may put them in their mouth.
- Using larger and brighter materials to attract child attention and interests.

Promoting Participation

Promoting participation in high quality early childhood settings provides learning opportunities to support young children with disabilities by providing individualized accommodations to participate.

Promoting participation in inclusive environments:

- provides a range of instructional strategies to ensure all children have opportunities to engage, participate, and learn while using the same curriculum as their peers

- uses adaptations to promote active participation and sense of belonging for all children in general education settings

- emphasizes the needs of the individual child and their family

Intentional Efforts for *Infants and Toddlers*

Children with disabilities need more intentional, systematic instruction to learn how to interact with others.

Teachers can provide opportunities through play for improve child connections.

Examples may include:
- *Making faces during diaper changing time.*
- *Greeting children as they enter the classroom.*
- Sitting with a group of children and giving the children the words to say such as "your turn" and "my turn" to help the child interact appropriately.

Intentional Efforts for *Preschoolers*

Children with disabilities need more intentional, systematic instruction to learn how to interact with others.

Early educators can provide opportunities throughout the day to improve child connections.

Examples may include:
- Playing a game where children take turns.
- Greeting children as they enter the classroom.
- Pairing children with peers who have strong language skills to nurture the development of language in others.

Creating Inclusive Environments for Young Children with Disabilities

Responsive Environments for *Infants and Toddlers*

When creating a responsive learning environment for infants and toddlers, the key is to consider the interests and developmental needs and levels of the children in the classroom.

Some ways that you could adjust the classroom environment that is responsive to infant and toddler children:

- Ensure children have access to toys that are safe for biting or chewing.
- Ensure that your classroom is accessible for all family members to feel welcome. Allow children to bring pictures of their families to have in the classroom.
- Set up a learning environment for more space if toddlers are beginning to walk and pull up so that there is plenty of room to move around.
- Daily routines allow for children to feel comfortable in the classroom and the children know what is expected and what is next in their day (HeadStart ECLKC, 2024).

Responsive Environments for *Preschool Children*

When creating a responsive learning environment for preschoolers/pre-K, the key is to consider the interests and developmental needs and levels of the children in the classroom.

Some additional ways that you could adjust the classroom environment that is responsive to preschoolers:

- Adjust the classroom environment and materials to meet the needs and interests of children.
- Use the environment to support learning and development:
  - Small furniture, chairs, and tables.
  - Interactive schedules and routines promote predictability.
  - Allow children to take risks and engage with others.
  - Accessibility for different needs and disabilities (HeadStart ECLKC, 2024).

Environmental Supports

Inclusive environments provide adaptations and supports that meet the needs of individual children.

- Visual supports help children use materials independently.

- Environmental support would include labeling with photos and text to help the child better understand the classroom and navigate to where materials should be placed on shelves or where their materials should be placed.

Peer Support

Inclusive environments meet the needs of individual children by modifying and adapting experiences through the use of peer support.

Peer supports may include peer models help other children make appropriate choices or work on skills necessary to meet developmental milestones.

Examples may include:

- Betty has an IFSP objective to use two hands together. The teacher pairs her with a peer and/or an adult to pass toys back and forth and hold toys with two hands.
- Layla has a behavior disorder and becomes overwhelmed when she walks into the childcare setting early in the morning. Layla's IEP has an objective to use appropriate behavior when entering the classroom. Her teacher uses social stories to teach her the expectations of entering the classroom.

Adult Support

Inclusive environments provide adaptations and supports that meet the needs of individual children. Adults can provide the supports that are needed to improve child outcomes over time.

Adult support can be provided as needed to guide children in interactions and activities throughout the day.

Examples may include:

- Sadie has an IFSP objective for increasing eye coordination. The teacher plays with Sadie and uses a rattle to facilitate eye coordination by using sound to increase her ability to follow the toy with her eyes.
- Max has a physical delay and uses a walker. His teacher ensures that the floor is open so that Max can move around the classroom.
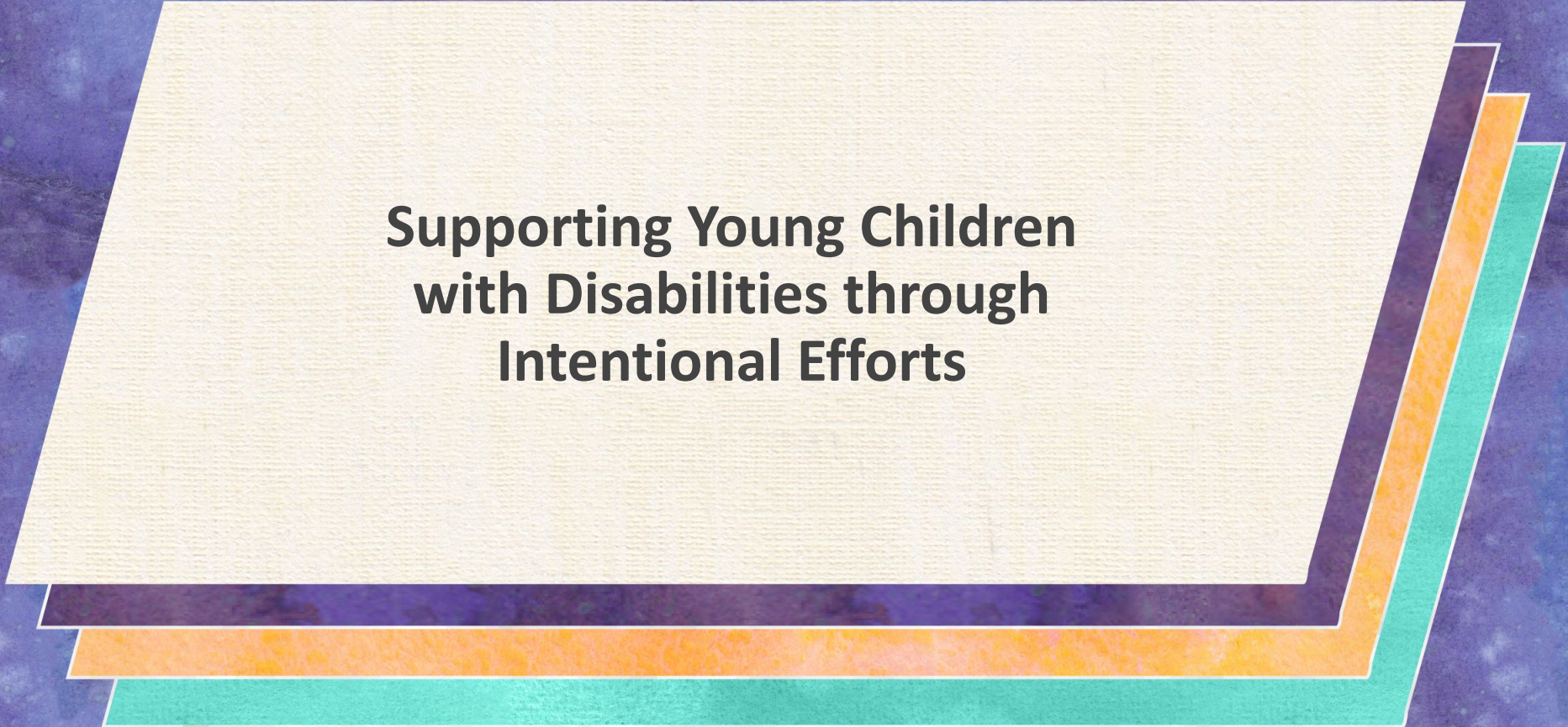
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What inclusive strategies have helped you support young children with disabilities in the classroom?

Supporting Young Children with Disabilities through Intentional Efforts

Development Through Daily Activities

Healthy development is supported when children are exposed to opportunities and experiences where their needs are met.

Development through daily activities can be met by:

- *Educators and Providers* who participate in consistent quality training on the subjects that matter the most to better support child development.
- *Educators and Providers* who monitor child development through <u>Teaching Strategies GOLD®</u> to identify learning and developmental lags and gaps in order to provide appropriate instruction and make decisions on whether or not a child may be in need of additional support.
- Promoting children's development requires intentional *planning* and consistent *monitoring*. The Louisiana Early Learning Development Standards provide information in planning and <u>Learn the Signs. Act Early</u> provides materials from the CDC to monitor children's development.

Daily Intentional Instruction

Individualized adaptations should be made to daily routines and activities, and intentional, specialized instruction should occur.

Teachers can make adaptations to their routines and activities to allow the child to learn and grow.

Examples may include:
- Allowing a child to enter with an item of comfort such as a lovie or toy.
- Feeding a child at a different time due to medical or sensory needs.
- Allowing a child to sit in a chair instead of on the floor with the group.
- Providing music for transitions between routines.

These types of adaptations help the teacher to support the individual needs of the child.

Including Families

The goal of family involvement is to enhance the family's capacity to promote their child's development.

Learn The Signs. Act Early.
- The <u>LTSAE Milestone Checklists</u> make developmental monitoring more practical and easy for families to monitor children's development at every stage, and act early when there is a concern.

Family Engagement
- Teachers can intentionally engage families to improve participation in school activities by personally inviting them or asking them to volunteer.
    - *For example: Milestone Nights for parents to come and learn more about developmental milestones and complete an ASQ-3 screener with educators.*

When parents experience the early learning setting, they are able to better advocate for the things their child needs.

Supporting Families

Children's development is best supported when adults who care for them work as a team.

Collaboration

It is important that the lines of communication among all members of the team are open and ongoing in order to share information on how a child is progressing and collaborate on how to address concerns.

- *Educators and Providers* must develop a communication system for ongoing communication with families and caregivers and address concerns in a collaborative approach.
- *Families* must know about appropriate child development to ensure what is best for their child as they support their child's growth.
- *Community Entities* must work in partnerships to ensure support is provided to the field.

Closing

Closing

Ongoing program evaluation will help providers maintain high-quality opportunities for all children who participate in early childhood programs.

When you are reviewing your program, consider the following supports in your classroom(s) that impact young children with disabilities:

Curriculum Support	Activity Supports
-Can the child experience success in the same activities as his/her peers? -Can the child participate in the same activities with modifications? -Can goals be embedded in classroom activities?	-What activities can the child participate in without extra support? -In what activities does the child require extra support? -What extra support would be required?

Closing

Key levers for change:

- Use observations to choose strategies to support individual children and drive decision-making within your child care site.
- Partner as a team member with the family in the decision making process to support the child being part of your classrooms.
- Support the family's understanding of inclusion and how to advocate for what's best for their child.

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