



A guide to inclusive childcare for childcare providers

Childcare is good for children and good for families

Childcare for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is crucial to all families who need it. It gives children a chance to play with other children and adults, to explore the world around them, to prepare for school, or just chill-out after school or in the holidays. Childcare also gives parents the opportunity to work, train, get stuff done at home or spend time with other children.

Yet parents of children with SEND tell us they are frequently refused a place for their child because childcare settings do not feel they have the experience or expertise to care for their children. However, many children with varying levels of SEND are able to enjoy the same play and learning opportunities as their peers. It does not mean you have to have lots of expensive equipment or expertise about specific conditions or disabilities. Parents tell us the most important thing is a positive attitude and willingness to learn alongside the family.

Unique Kidz and co, a specialist after-school and holiday childcare provider in Lancashire has developed this handy guide to inclusive childcare. It offers hints, tips, ideas and resources to help demystify what inclusion means and to create a happy, welcoming play environment for children of all ages and abilities. You can read all about Unique Kidz and co in our case study section.

We have also included quotes and tips from parents across England, who have children with SEND and who have benefitted from inclusive childcare.

Inclusive childcare

Encouraging inclusivity helps children gain an understanding of fairness and adapt to the different needs of others. For children with SEND, many expected developmental milestones will not take place or may be delayed, so supporting healthy social interactions with other children from pre-school upwards is an important preparation for a happier, fulfilling life.

Every child is unique – even when they have the same diagnosis or condition as another. All children have their own personalities, likes, dislikes, habits and quirky behaviour. See the child first and their disability or special educational need second.

All children benefit from inclusive play and learning opportunities, not just those with SEND.



Specific toys and equipment

You do not need to buy lots of specialist equipment or toys. Many toys that you already have in your setting will be suitable. Some children with SEND may only want to play with one particular toy or do one specific activity and may not want to move on to other activities. This is fine, be led by them and their likes.

Children with SEND often respond well to sensory play, rather than purely visual or physical play. This can mean playing with malleable toys such as dough, clay or foam. Toys or materials that have a particular sensation such as soft toys, crinkly materials or substances such as water, pasta or "gloop" can also be really popular. Observing what a child is most attracted to and comfortable with is a key part of understanding how to adapt play to suit all the children in the setting and be truly inclusive. Ask the parents about what children like doing at home, and whether they have a favourite toy or activity.

"Sam loved the messy play, sensory equipment and singing songs"

Jess, Sam's mum

If additional toys or equipment would be helpful, think about speaking to the local toy library or specialist SEND service to borrow and try out new things or hire equipment.

Designing play to be age appropriate to fit in with developmental milestones is not always the best approach for a child with SEND: They may be highly gifted in one area but might never develop skills in other areas. Therefore, expectations to reach certain development goals may be unhelpful. Inclusive play works best when the emphasis is on supporting all children to socialise together and understand each other's uniqueness.





Here are some tips:

- Let the child take the lead – they may choose to do the same activities every day but will be aware of what else is on offer.
- Adapt facilities to focus on what the child likes doing and is able to do. Think about having a quiet space, tables that are accessible, outdoor space that is easily accessible, toys or activities that a child may not quite be ready for but knows they are there if they want to use them.
- Focus on what a child can do and not on whether they are achieving the conventional developmental milestones. This approach may need to be explained to parents.
- Allow the child to be unique. Preparing for life as an adult should be key, which is why supporting all children to mix works well.

Communication

Communicating with a child with SEND can be challenging, particularly if you are only caring for them for a few hours a day, such as in an after-school club. However, there are many communication techniques that can be used to help children settle, understand their routine, express their feelings and to explore the world around them. If you are an early years setting, there are many communication techniques that can support all children who are developing their speech and language and do not need to be used only for children with SEND. The following tips and ideas can help the process of understanding and inclusion.

Welcome booklet

Giving children a welcome booklet with pictures of the setting they are entering can help a child with SEND feel more comfortable and secure when they arrive in an unfamiliar place. Think about a photo of their key worker or other staff who will be working with the child, photos of different areas of the setting such as outdoor space or reading corner and images of some of the activities they will be doing.

Speak to the parents

Find out how the family communicates at home – do they sign, do they use particular communication techniques, do they use picture cards – try and ensure consistency between home and childcare. If you use a communication technique in the setting that you have found to be successful, suggest this is used at home.

Picture exchange

Showing pictures of favourite toys, emotion-related pictures and familiar items can help determine what a child wants and how he or she is feeling. Ask the parents for photos or images from home or encourage a child, particularly older children, to take photos themselves or to pick out images from a magazine or catalogue.

"Preston is totally non-verbal, but since he has been at Sandcastle Playgroup, he is learning to communicate, to be around other children and be happy being cared for by other adults."

Jade, Preston's mum



Social stories and visual timetables

A simple, visual description of where the child is going or what they will be doing can help create an atmosphere of security and clarity. This does not need to be complicated at all, just a few pictures tailored to the child's ability. A visual timetable also provides the same visual description of what you and the children will be doing – with pictures of each activity. For example, pictures of food for lunchtime, shoes for going out, a bed for sleep time, books for story time, coat for going home.

"Karen and Steve made a visual timetable, so Erin knew what she was doing at all times during the day. She doesn't like change, so this really helped her settle into a routine."

Tracey, Erin's mum

Careful use of language

Choose your words carefully! Try not to use more words than you need to and be careful to avoid common sayings that mean something different from their literal meaning. For example, saying that it is raining cats and dogs could be quite frightening for an autistic child who believes a dog or cat will land on their head! Also certain words may trigger certain behaviour, so speak to parents about language that is helpful or not helpful.

"They never call him silly or naughty"

Sarah, Tom and Bobby's mum

Makaton

Makaton is a system of communication using signs and symbols within ordinary speech. It can be used with all children across a setting and can be a fun way of assisting all children with developing their speech and language, without singling out a child with SEND. You can view our film of Sandcastle Playgroup in our filmed case study section to see how they use Makaton across their nursery. See further resources to find out how to access Makaton training in your area.



Prepare for change

Changes to routine, unfamiliar items and people or transition to another setting can trigger distress, anxiety and related behaviour. Preparing for this and being aware of these triggers can make life easier for all children and staff. Think about preparing a social story of what the change will involve or using simple explanations to prepare for the change gently.

'All about me'

Parents, teachers and childcare providers can ease transition to a new setting by preparing a short '**All about me**' document. This will help the new setting to understand a child and ensure certain things are in place. This might be one or two pages of information explaining the child's likes and dislikes, hobbies, habits, how their disability or condition affects them, what situations may trigger distress and what helps alleviate distress.



Training and resources

If you do think that your setting would benefit from additional training and expertise, the following organisations and resources can help.

- Find out which other professionals are involved in a child's education and care – they may be a valuable resource to help you care for a child with specific needs.
- Ask the local Family Information Service whether they offer inclusion training for childcare settings or if they can suggest specialist services to support you.
- Special educational needs' schools, nurseries and out-of-school clubs sometimes offer training, advice and support, the opportunity to observe their setting, and in some cases the loan or rental of physical resources. Find out what services are available in your area and contact them to ask how you can create links and access any resources they may have.
- Go to an assembly at a local special educational needs school and gain an understanding of how they manage higher numbers of children with vastly different needs.
- The Makaton Charity (www.makaton.org) offers training at all levels for parents, teachers and service providers. Contact them to find out how to access their training and support in your area.
- Look honestly at what is the right environment for the child's needs, in terms of whether they are better suited to a mainstream or specialist setting – for some children, it will be a combination of both. The most important thing to take into account is where they will be happy and accepted.
- Create links with other charities, organisations and settings for support and resources.





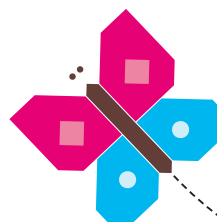
Behavioural support

Understandably, handling behavioural issues with a child with SEND needs to be done sensitively and with the use of different strategies depending on the child. What might work with other children may not be appropriate or may exacerbate issues with a child with SEND, particularly if their communication needs are complex.

There will usually be a reason for changes in behaviour and it is good practice to try and find what the reason is, rather than focus on the behaviour. For example, has something changed in the setting that could have caused distress or anxiety? Is the behaviour triggered by a negative experience with another child, or could a loud noise or other sensory experience be causing discomfort? Or is it a positive trigger, such as the child becoming so excited to be going outside, or using a particular toy, that the usual rules of sharing or waiting a turn may not be understood or developed. Using observation early on to identify likes, dislikes and behavioural triggers can help with avoiding issues in the future.

"Erin would barge past other children to get outside. She didn't mean to be aggressive, but was just over excited about going out. We explained this to other children and worked with Erin to help her with situations such as this."

Steve, Erin's childminder





Here are some helpful tips:

- Use visual communication. For example, pictures of unhappy faces in connection with unwanted behaviours to help a child realise the impact of their behaviour.
- Look at the setting as a whole and consider how well the group is integrating. For example, the behaviour of just one or two children can have a great impact on others.
- Pick your battles – carefully examine why you want a child to stop doing something. Is the behaviour upsetting the other children or is it upsetting you?
- Link any observations into activity planning and share with the child's parents.
- Encourage openness and transparency in explaining SEND to other children in the setting. Creating an environment where children feel comfortable asking questions will help encourage a more inclusive atmosphere in which diversity is seen in a positive light.
- Parents or siblings can visit and speak to children to help share what they know about their children and why they are different.
- Staff can play an important part in creating a culture of acceptance so that all children mix. All children have quirky behaviours regardless of SEND. Make comparisons to encourage all children to understand.
- Think about a buddy system – where children with no SEND buddy up with children with SEND. This can enhance a culture of acceptance within the setting as well as helping all children understand different games and the unwritten rules of play. This method is used a lot in schools and helps all children participate in playground games.
- Having a quiet place where a child can retreat to if it all gets too much is a really good idea. This might be a den, under a table, or a space with cushions and blankets. Having a safe place can help reduce emotional stress or insecurity if it arises – let the child know that this is where they can go and be led by them on when they feel ready to come out.
- Having timers for sharing toys can help all children to feel equal in the setting and creates an atmosphere of adaptability.

"Good nursery care has been a life saver. I have been able to work two days a week, have a professional life away from home, feel more able to give Sam the care he needs on my non-working days and to spend time with my younger child."

Jess, Sam's mum





Striking a balance between children with SEND and those without

Helping children with SEND access mainstream learning and play should be about "reasonable adjustments". Accommodating a child with SEND is not about doing things that will create an impact on the other children, but should help create an inclusive positive environment where children adapt to each other and play together.

Having SEND does not mean a child cannot contribute in many positive ways to a mainstream environment and parents and inclusive providers, say that an inclusive environment enhances the experience for all children.

If a child does need additional support which you feel will have an impact on staffing or ratios, speak to your local authority inclusion service about additional support they can offer. Alternatively, find out whether the care you provide can be included within the child's Education, Health and Care plan and would be eligible for additional funding.

"Tom doesn't have any additional needs, but I chose Challengers pre-school for him because of their inclusive ethos. Tom is now a very empathetic, emotionally intelligent young boy, who just wouldn't have developed in the same way at any of the other nurseries I visited."

Sarah, Tom and Bobby's mum

Promoting your service

Inclusive childcare can be hard to find, so if you do offer good inclusive childcare for children of all abilities, make sure you shout about it!

- Ensure that parents know about the expertise and experience of your staff.
- Make sure your local Family Information Service is aware of you and keep your service listing on the Family Service Directory up-to-date.
- Use the council Local Offer to promote your service.
- Visit parent and carer forums/groups to tell other parents about your service.
- Use parent testimonials on your website.
- Develop a group of parents to be service ambassadors or champions to spread the word.



Useful resources:

Toys and equipment

Sensory Direct:

www.sensorydirect.com

Tacpac:

www.tacpac.co.uk

The Sensory Toy Warehouse:

www.sensorytoywarehouse.com

Communication

The Makaton Charity:

www.makaton.org

The Communication Trust:

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Other organisations:

Contact a Family:

www.cafamily.org.uk

The National Autistic Society:

www.autism.org.uk

The National Deaf Children's Society:

www.NDCS.org.uk

Scope:

www.scope.org.uk

Mencap:

www.mencap.org.uk

Thanks to Unique Kidz and co



www.uniquekidzandco.org.uk

For further information and resources on inclusive childcare visit: www.familyandchildcaretrust.org

The Family and Childcare Trust works to make the UK a better place for families. Our vision is of a society where government, business and communities do all they can to support every family to thrive. Through our research, campaigning and practical support we are creating a more family friendly UK.

