

# Inclusive Practice in Early Childhood Development and Education



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Session 1:

# What should inclusive early childhood development and education be like?



# Session 1: What should inclusive early childhood development and education be like?

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Inclusive early childhood settings support the learning of children with diverse abilities and interests.
- In the early years of life children have many basic needs which educators will need to respond to.
- Inclusive educators know that there are some key areas of learning and development that take place in the crucial early childhood years. They will know that children's experiences in these years have a life-long impact.
- Age-appropriate and individually appropriate early childhood settings allow children to build foundational skills forming a basis for all future learning.
- Early childhood experiences must focus on supporting children to thrive in the present rather than as a preparation for school. Instructional approaches found in schools are not suited for young children and beginning academic learning early does not give them an advantage.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 03:08-11:43**

# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 1.1 – Accepting and valuing diversity

🕒 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To remember the experience of being a small child and recognise and value our diversities.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work individually. You have 5-10 minutes to think about when you were a young child.
- Prepare to tell the others a story of when you were a young child. Choose a story you feel comfortable sharing. Your story should give the others a glimpse of your personal background and history. Make notes if that is helpful. You will have 3-4 minutes to talk, maximum.

Invite each participant to share their story with the whole group.

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**Note for trainer:** If the group is large, it may be better for participants to share their stories in smaller groups to save time. Ensure all participants show respect to each other's stories.

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Ask the participants to:

- Comment on the similarities between other people's stories and their own.
- Comment on the differences between the stories.

### Present the following:

Through this activity we see that we share the experience of childhood. We have all been children, and may experience childhood again through our roles as parents, grandparents, or as aunts and uncles.

We have also seen the ways in which we and our experiences are different, or diverse. We have respected each other by recognising and valuing each-other's diverse background and history.

A key step towards inclusive education in early childhood settings is to respect all children by recognising and valuing their diversity.

## Activity 1.2 – Recognising diversity

🕒 40 minutes

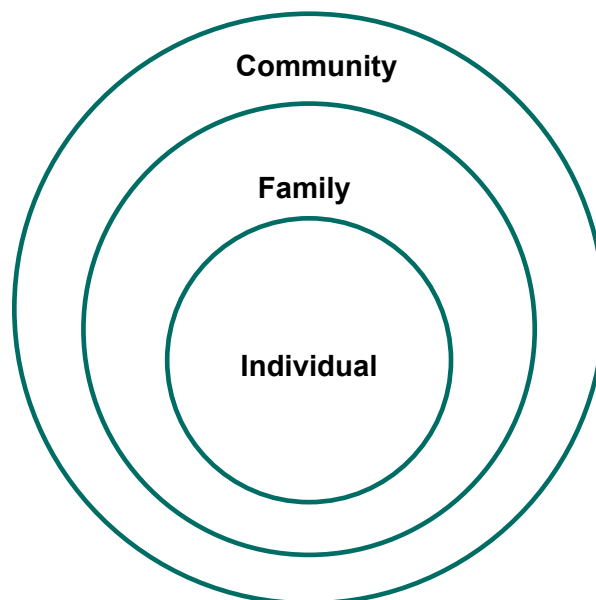
### Main purpose of this activity

To consider ways in which children are diverse.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Think about children you know or have worked with. How were the children different from each other?
- You have 5 minutes to write a list of all the diversities you can think of.

Draw the following diagram on a flipchart:



After 5 minutes give participants the following instructions:

- Pass a ball around (or another object available).
- The first person to hold the ball shares one item from their list.
- The trainer writes the item on a small piece of paper or post-it note. The participant tells the trainer where to put the post-it note: in the individual, family or community circle.
- The participant passes the ball to another person.
- The next person with the ball shares one item from their list that has not already been mentioned. Again, the trainer writes the item on a post-it and the participant tells the trainer where it should be positioned.
- This continues until no one has anything new to add.

**Note for trainer:** Participants may disagree on the placement of items. You can discuss as you go along, or ask them to note which item they disagree with and why. At the end of the activity share these alternative ideas. Point out to the group that diversities often span individual, family and community levels.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

The examples in this box are a guide only. They are not the only possible answers. You can ask the group for an idea from each category at the start of the activity, and give them an example if needed. At the end of the activity you can share any ideas that were not mentioned.

#### Individual

Gender, ability (e.g. impairment, giftedness), race, sexuality, skin colour, physical features, appearance, social/emotional (e.g. mental health, trauma, extrovert/introvert), behavioural, communication (e.g. minority language, sign language, speech delay).

#### Family

Religion, family structure (e.g. grandparents as caregivers, blended family, institutional care, foster family, only child, large family), language (e.g. minority language, foreign language), ethnicity, socio-economic status (e.g. unemployed), parent's level of education, home environment (e.g. standard of living, type of home – farm, apartment, care home, travellers).

#### Community

The community that the child identifies with, or is identified as belonging to (e.g. majority, minority; linguistic, ethnic or cultural group; associated with a particular location or occupation). National status (e.g. single, dual or multiple nationalities; short or long-term migrant, refugee, stateless or displaced person status).

### Present the following:

**In inclusive early childhood settings, none of these diversities (or any other) are a reason to exclude a child from accessing or participating in education.**

**However, you may need to recognise and respond to diversities to enable children to access and participate in education.**

Ask participants:

- Do you know children who have been excluded from an early childhood setting for any of these reasons?

# **B** Important theoretical issues to discuss

## **Activity 1.3 – Age-appropriate early childhood development and education**

 **60 minutes**

### **Main purpose of this activity**

To recognise that people have different understandings of early childhood and early childhood education;

To think about early childhood education in relation to the needs of children and communities;

To recognise that children have a range of needs e.g. self-help, language and communication, physical, cognitive, social and care.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Form groups of 5-6 people. Make groups diverse, with people from different geographical areas or who have different roles at home, in the community and at work, if possible.
- Answer and discuss the following questions in your groups:
  1. What ages does 'early childhood' include in your community?
  2. What beliefs and values does your community hold about childhood?
  3. What is the purpose of 'early childhood development and education' in your community? What goals do parents/caregivers have? What goals do educators have?

After about 20 minutes, ask each group to present their answers to question 1. Summarise ideas on a flipchart. Encourage participants to explain their ideas and identify similarities and differences between groups.

Repeat the process for questions 2 and 3.



### Possible answers to expect from participants

You are not looking for “correct” answers and people’s answers may vary considerably. This activity shows that there are different ideas about early childhood and early childhood development and education. Encourage participants to show empathy and understanding to different values and beliefs if debating their merits. Avoid making simple ‘either/or’ comparisons e.g. young children learn from others OR learn for themselves. Try using AND instead: young children learn from others AND learn for themselves.

The following are examples of answers you might see:

#### **Age range**

0-5  
0-8  
3-4  
0-16

#### **Beliefs and values about childhood**

Innocent  
Wild  
Cute  
Naughty  
Need protection  
Asset for the family  
Burden  
Sign of wealth  
Loved and valued  
Seen but not heard  
Dependent  
Independent  
Owe respect to elders  
Deserve respect

#### **Goals of early childhood development and education**

Learn religion  
Preparation for school e.g. learn letters and numbers  
Acquire practical skills e.g. cooking, cleaning, self-care  
Socialise with other children  
Take care of children so parents can work  
Find out about the world  
Learn to learn and love learning  
Learn the traditions of our community and other communities  
Learn to express ourselves

Prepare the following flipchart:

Happy memories of childhood

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work individually. Write 3 happy memories from your childhood.
- Share the 3 memories you noted with your group.
- In groups, compile your memories as brief points.
- A representative from each group presents the points from their group to the whole group and adds them to the flipchart.

**Present the following:**

In the early years, children have many needs. These include feeding, dressing, personal hygiene, safety, emotional attachment and sleep. During their early years, children do not only grow in terms of height and weight, their brains are also growing fast. The neural connections within the brain increase hugely during these years, much more than at any other time in their lives. Social interaction and sensory stimulation feeds the brain, like food feeds the body. Children's experiences in these crucial early years have a life-long impact. Learning and development in this unique phase is often divided into different areas. Here we use 5 categories: self-help, language and communication, physical, cognitive, and social skills. We also include 'care' to mean the practical and emotional support that young children need to develop to their full potential.

Display a flipchart divided into 6 parts with the 5 domain headings plus 'care':

Needs of childhood	
Self-Help	Language and Communication
Physical	Cognitive
Social	Care

**Note for trainer:** Some contexts will categorise children's development differently. Any variation can be used for this activity, to show that there are distinct areas of development and learning.

#### Present the following:

**Inclusive early childhood development and education enables children to learn and develop in these 5 key areas with the support and care of educators, parents and families. Inclusive education is age-appropriate and responsive. Educators are guided by early childhood education knowledge and principles and the interests needs and abilities of individual children.**

Revisit the happy memories that groups presented. One by one, try to transfer the points from the 'happy memories of childhood' flipchart onto the 'needs of childhood' flipchart and categorise them. Ask participants to suggest which domain each point fits under.

## Possible answers to expect from participants

Answers will vary widely. The following example shows how the answers can be organised from one chart to the other. You may not all agree on which category each need falls under and often they will apply to more than one category.

Happy memories of childhood
Playing with siblings Being hugged Being with mother Listening to my grandmother's stories Singing songs Favourite foods Climbing my favourite tree Wearing new clothes Reading books My new bike Helping my grandad paint the fence My best friend

Needs of childhood	
Self-Help	Language and Communication
Wearing new clothes Helping my grandad paint the fence	Listening to my grandmother's stories Singing songs
Physical	Cognitive
My new bike Climbing my favourite tree	Reading books
Social	Care
Playing with siblings Being with mother My best friend	Being hugged Favourite foods

Facilitate a short whole group discussion comparing the needs of children identified here and the goals of early childhood development and education discussed at the beginning. Highlight any differences and similarities.

## **C** Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section.  
A key issue is:

- Readiness for school

### **Activity 1.4 – Readiness for school approaches**

 **90-120 minutes**

#### **Main purpose of this activity**

To consider differences between early childhood settings and schools in terms of content, teaching and learning approaches and environments.

Give participants the following instructions:

- As a whole group, brainstorm the differences between schools and early childhood settings:
  - What is taught?
  - How is it taught?
  - What do routines and spaces look like?

Write the answers on a board or flipchart.

Schools	Early childhood settings

## Possible answers to expect from participants

The following are examples of the type of answers to expect. Some of these could be used to prompt participants.

Schools	Early childhood settings
<b>What is being taught?</b> Academic content Instruction in reading and math	<b>What is being taught?</b> Interest led Observation
<b>How it is being taught?</b> More teacher directed Less playtime Tests	<b>How it is being taught?</b> Child-led play Non-directive approach Educator interacting alongside Educator observing to plan future learning
<b>What do routines and spaces look like?</b> Higher staff-pupil ratios Longer hours away from home	<b>What do routines and spaces look like?</b> Resources and environment available Freedom of movement Choice making

Give participants the following instructions:

- Form 3 groups. If the 3 groups have more than 6 people, divide into sub-groups.
- The first group will work on **handout 1a**, second group work on **handout 1b**, and the third group on **handout 1c**.

After about 20 minutes of preparation, each group presents/teaches the concepts and issues from the handout to the whole group.

Session 2:

# Work with other educators on inclusive education



# Session 2: Work with other educators on inclusive education

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Teams of educators can collaborate to ensure every child is included and every educator is working inclusively.
- Educators with specialist knowledge or skills can work as part of a team and support their colleagues to include all learners.
- Action research for inclusive education is an important way to identify and tackle barriers that learners face in accessing and participating in their early childhood setting. Action research is a way for educators to examine their practice then work together to improve it.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 11:44-15:57**



# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 2.1 – Team around the child

🕒 40 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To encourage educators to recognise the range of expertise available in their team and to consider when to seek out further expertise.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Working individually or in pairs with a colleague from the same workplace, list all the staff and educators in your early childhood setting.
- Beside each person's name, note their specific skills. Some will have different roles, some will have different training or qualifications, some will have different things they are good at or like doing more, some will have special talents and some will have experience in specific areas.

### Present the following:

**Every child develops in a unique way. This means educators encounter new challenges with every individual group of learners. Sharing concerns, achievements, ideas and experiences with colleagues helps us respond appropriately to the diverse needs of learners. If there is an issue you have never encountered before, you do not need to face it alone. You have a team to work with. Maybe one of the team can offer ideas or explain how they responded in a similar situation. Inclusive education is built on collaboration and team work.**

Facilitate a brainstorm session on the benefits of a team approach. Make notes on a flipchart or board.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

There are many benefits of a team approach. These are a few:

- Together, the team has a far richer range of skills, knowledge and experience than any individual.
- By sharing and reflecting with each other, members of the team can expand their own knowledge and expertise. The team can work towards common goals and achieve more.
- Team members bring different viewpoints and professional expertise to the conversation.
- Team members can assist and encourage each other to support good practice, professional learning and motivation.

### Present the following:

**Children have a right to learn together and this inclusive approach benefits all children. In inclusive early childhood settings, we do not have separate rooms for certain learners, or specific teachers or teacher assistants solely responsible for them. Where team members have expertise in disability or other diverse needs, their role is to be part of the team and support their colleagues to include all learners. All educators and assistants are part of the inclusion team.**

Give participants the following instructions:

**Note for trainer:** If you did **Activity 1.2**, refer to the list of diversities that was developed. Otherwise, use the example answers in **Activity 1.2** as a list for this task.

- Compare the list of diversities we developed in the **Activity 1.2** with your team's list and their individual skills.
- Identify the expertise you have in your team that might be useful for supporting some of these diversities.
- Make a list of what expertise you think is missing.
- 4 or 5 volunteers should share their answers.
- As a whole group, brainstorm where we can find the missing expertise in our communities. For example, for a child with a minority language we may need a volunteer from their language community to be part of our team, or for a child who is deaf we may need the expertise of a sign language teacher, for a child with a speech impairment, a speech therapist could offer expert advice to the team.

**Note for trainer:** While this activity does not raise the role of parents/ caregivers, siblings and other family members in the team around the child, they definitely should play a central role. If this comes up in discussion, emphasise its importance and tell participants that we will have another activity entirely dedicated to this important role (**Activity 4.b**).

### Optional adaptation to this activity – Team Diagram

 **20 minutes**

Give participants the following instructions:

One participant should share an example of a child with a particular diversity they know or work with (without giving any names or identifying details).

Participants should suggest all the people they can think of who may be able to provide help or advise according to the child's type of diversity.

Add all the suggestions to a diagram with the child in the centre.

Repeat with another child and continue as time allows.

# B Important theoretical issues to discuss

## Activity 2.2 – Shared responsibility

🕒 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To encourage educators to recognise how they can increase the participation of all learners through sharing responsibility for inclusion with their team.

### Present the following:

In inclusive early childhood settings, all children are welcomed and valued. They are supported to participate, interact, explore, play and learn alongside their peers.

Inclusive education is not a new name for special education. In special education systems, learners are categorised as being either 'normal' or 'special' and attend either 'normal' or special' education settings. In inclusive education we recognise that all learners are unique and there is just one kind of education setting. Within this inclusive setting, we recognise the need to respond to the unique and changing needs of all learners.

In this activity we will learn about 5 children who attend their local early childhood centre. They each have a difference or diversity and face barriers to learning, development and participation.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Form 5 groups. In your group, read the 5 short case studies in **handout 2a**.
- You have 10 minutes to consider the following questions for each case and note your answers.
  - How could the situation be made more inclusive?
  - In what ways could all staff share responsibility for the inclusion of this child?

After 10 minutes, ask each group to choose a representative to present the group's suggestions to the whole group.

Compile the suggestions on a flipchart and discuss any differing views.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

There are no right or wrong answers, the intention is for participants to consider how to increase the participation of each child and share the responsibility of inclusion with the wider teaching team. You can use these sample answers as examples if necessary.

**A child is blind. He has recently acquired a cane but needs to learn how to use it to get around. A trainer from the community rehabilitation centre has offered to come to the early childhood centre and give the child lessons.**

- The trainer could teach centre staff about orientation and mobility so they can support the child's learning after the lessons.
- The training for the child could take place during a group activity where all the children are exploring the environment together.
- One of the educators could be trained to give the lessons and then they can integrate them into the daily routines of the centre and also share their learning and expertise with the teaching team.

**A child speaks a minority language. Their parents want her to learn the dominant language. One of the staff speaks the child's language. This staff member spends a lot of time especially with this child to assist her in understanding others and the routines.**

- The staff member could teach some basic phrases to all other staff.
- The staff member could stick labels on common items and areas of the early childhood centre to remind staff of the names. This could also include useful phrases.
- Some songs and stories from the minority language could be purchased and used by all staff.
- A parent or community member could come in and share minority language songs, games and stories with the children.

**A child sometimes has violent behaviour. Staff are worried that she will hurt other children. So they allocate one staff member to play games with her separate from the other children.**

- All staff could participate in some professional development in behaviour management.
- In a team meeting, an action plan could be developed with roles for the whole team.
- This is an opportunity to work with children to define acceptable behaviour and what they should do if they are not happy with each-others' (or adults') behaviour.

**A child has Down Syndrome. Each week, a specialist teacher comes to visit him and works with him at a separate table to develop his language and cognitive skills.**

- The specialist teacher could train one of the staff to provide the specialist teaching. This staff member could then find ways to integrate it into daily activities.
- The specialist teacher could work with a small group of children (friends and peers of the child with Down Syndrome) rather than singling him out.
- The specialist teacher could provide a workshop to the staff team introducing the techniques and strategies that are useful for this child. The specialist teacher could visit staff periodically to get feedback and answer any questions or offer more ideas.

**A child with multiple impairments attends an early childhood centre. He has an assistant teacher who attends with him. This teacher makes sure that he can participate in whatever is happening in the centre.**

- The assistant teacher could be an extra person on the teaching team available to support any child or staff member. In this way, all work together to share responsibility for the higher level of attention and hands-on support the child needs.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Working individually or in pairs with a colleague from the same workplace, think of a situation in your early childhood centre where the diverse needs of a child are being supported by one or only a few people.
- Think of a way that the responsibility could be shared. Write this idea down so you can take it back with you to your next team meeting as a suggestion for developing more inclusive practices.
- If you cannot think of an example in your centre, use one of the case studies and make a plan of what you would do specifically if that child was attending your centre.

# C Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section.  
A key issue is:

- Action research

## Activity 2.3 – Action research

 60–90 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To familiarise educators with action research as a process for recognising and responding to barriers to inclusion and children's abilities and needs.

### Present the following:

To make education more inclusive, educators can work with colleagues, learners and caregivers to identify and tackle barriers that learners face in accessing and participating in education in their setting. Action research is a tried and tested approach for doing this.

Progress towards inclusive education settings and systems is most effective and sustainable when those required to change are involved in the process. Because inclusive education means adapting to the needs of individual learners, there is no single 'recipe' for how to do it. Instead, action research is a method that educators can use to plan and implement change. Here is another opportunity for the teaching team to work together and involve learners, parents and caregivers.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Raise your hand if you have been involved in research of any kind.
- 3 or 4 of those who responded should describe the research process they were involved in using just a few sentences.

Display **handout 2b** as a flipchart, or PowerPoint slide.

**Present the following:**

A team of early childhood educators wish to improve their practice. They want to work towards greater inclusion by increasing the presence, participation and learning of diverse children.

Action research begins by *looking* at the situation and asking what is happening.

The next step is to *think* about why it is happening and what could be done differently to make the situation better.

This leads onto *action* where educators try out different ideas for changing the situation.

Action research is cyclical, so at this point, educators *look* at the situation again to see if the ideas worked or not, what needs changing, or what needs to be done next.

Through this process, a team of educators can continually reflect on and improve the inclusion that takes place in their early childhood setting.

Ask participants to point out the similarities or differences between the action research process and the research processes that participants shared.

**Possible answers to expect from participants**

You can use these sample answers to fill gaps if necessary.

Action research	Other types of research
No fixed end point	Clear start and end point
Those in the early childhood setting are the researchers	The research is usually done by outside people
Uses existing knowledge and expertise in the setting	Researchers may not know the existing knowledge and experiences of the setting
Collaborative, team effort, may also involve children, families and community	Researchers often work alone
Researchers are also part of making changes	Researchers hand over their findings for others to act on



Give participants the following instructions:

- List the benefits of early childhood educators being the researchers leading the research.
- Participants should share their answers and the trainer can list them on a flipchart.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to fill gaps if necessary.

- It is sometimes difficult to convince educators that change is necessary or practical when those promoting the change are from outside of the educator's classroom.
- Action research can help educators recognise, understand and share effective and inclusive aspects of their practice.
- Action research can help educators to recognise and change aspects of their practice that are ineffective or not inclusive.
- Action research guides educators in systematically reflecting on their own work and making changes in their practice.
- Action research can assist educators in convincing others of the value of a change.
- Action research can help educators talk about inclusion with colleagues, children and caregivers. This is an important step in building shared commitment and understanding which is the basis for sustainable change.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Think about your early childhood setting and what aspect of your practice of inclusion could be examined through the action research process.
- Write down a possible research question to begin the cycle of action research with your team of educators.
- What information would you need for the 'look' step of the process? How could you collect it?

Ask 3 or 4 volunteers to share their ideas with the group.



Session 3:

# Understand each child's development and needs



# Session 3: Understand each child's development and needs

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Knowledge of child development helps us notice and support children's individual strengths and interests.
- Using a 'strengths-based approach' in early childhood helps us focus on children's strengths, interests and capabilities. We meet children where they are by looking for what is present to value and build on. Inclusive educators know that children have existing knowledge, skills and attitudes they can use for learning.
- Child development milestones are best used within a wider understanding that development is dynamic and complex and is part of a holistic picture of the child. In inclusive education, child development milestones are not used to make diagnoses, to compare children against each other or to exclude children.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 15:58-20:47**

# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 3.1 – Existing knowledge of child development

🕒 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To consider developmental milestones and their uses in early childhood education.

To consider ways of observing children for different milestones.

### Present the following:

**Inclusive early childhood development and education should be developmentally appropriate for each child. This means educators have knowledge about what each individual child can and cannot yet do. Educators use this knowledge to support and encourage the child's learning and development.**

**At the same time early childhood educators should have a foundational understanding of what and how children typically learn and develop. This area of knowledge is often called 'child development', and key aspects of learning and development for different stages are called 'developmental milestones'.**

Prepare 5 sets of cards cut out from **handout 3a**.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Form 5 groups. Each group focuses on a different area of learning and development. These are: self-help, social, physical, cognitive, and language and communication.
- Here is a set of cards with 'developmental milestones' for your area of learning and development.
- Your task is to sort the cards in the order they are usually learned.

After about 15 minutes, give each group an answer sheet (**handout 3b**) and ask them to check their answers.

Ask groups to share answers to the following questions:

- Was it easy or difficult to put the milestones in order? If so, why do you think?
- Were some milestones easier to order than others? If so, why do you think?

**Present the following:**

The milestones for this activity were taken from the Portage Guide which is one of many different lists of child development milestones. While no two lists are exactly the same, they all broadly represent 'typical' development. However, 'developmental milestones' are guidelines to use flexibly not rules. The unique features of each child and their families, communities and the locations they grow up in all influence the pace, order and relevance of milestones.

Ask groups to consider the following question and share their answers:

- Do you think the order given on the answer sheet was correct for children you know? If not, why?

**Present the following:**

Developmental milestones are broad guidelines that show us what to expect and help us notice anything unusual. Early childhood educators are not expected to be medical specialists who diagnose disabilities or health conditions. Still, if the development of a child is well outside what is expected, seeking support from health and rehabilitation services could prevent a developmental delay from becoming a lasting impairment.

## Optional extension activity – Observations

 **60 minutes**

Observation is a simple and effective way to assess children's interests and abilities.

### Present the following:

Have you noticed that you can sometimes walk from one place to another seeing almost nothing? You may even feel unsure how you got there.

Other times, you walk slowly and notice many sights and sounds. You notice the smell in the air and the colour of the flowers. You notice the patterns on the buildings or the way the light reflects through the trees. You hear birds chirping or an aeroplane flying overhead. You are open and receptive, and this leads to curiosity and wonder.

In early childhood development and education settings, there is often so much going on that it can be hard to really observe anything. You are often so busy getting everything done, moving from one child to the next while also watching the whole room to be sure everything is okay.

But when you slow down a bit, you can hear and see so much more. Watching and listening to children with curiosity and wonder allows you learn about them. You learn what interests them, what puts a smile on their faces, what they know and can do. This is observation.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in the same small groups as **Activity 3.1**.
- Use **handout 3c** and as a group, discuss which of the various types of observations might help you to find out if a child has learnt the milestones on your list. What else might you observe?
- Think about:
  - *Resources* – what resources might you make or find to help you learn more about a child's development?
  - *Specialist advice* – what specialists or organisations in your community could advise or assist you to learn more about a child's development?
  - *Parents* – how could parents help you to better understand their child's development?
- Each group should give a short presentation to the whole group about useful ways to observe child development for the area they were assigned.

## Possible answers to expect from participants

### Self help

Types of observation

- Watch children dressing up (role play and make-believe).
- Watch children arriving and leaving (taking on/off shoes, hat, jackets).
- Watch children at meal times.
- Watch children playing with dolls or toy animals (dressing them).

Resources: Large button boards, dressing up clothes, dolls, toy animals.

Specialists: Occupational therapists, physiotherapist.

Parents: Ask parents which of these skills they can do independently and with support at home. Ask if they expect them to dress/feed themselves at home?

### Social

Types of observation

- Watch children's actions, expressions, gestures and behaviours in small group settings, in pairs, and playing on their own.
- Listen to their talk and interaction.
- Join in their conversation to elicit certain responses.

Resources: Books, parachute or large cloth for group play, multiplayer games (e.g. Picture Bingo, guess who), mini shop (empty food containers, play money).

Specialists: Paediatrician, child psychologist or psychiatrist.

Parents: Ask parents which of these skills they can do independently and with support at home. Ask who they interact with at home, and in the wider family and community.

### Physical

Types of observation

- Watch children's actions in different places and with different resources.
- Join in play to allow the child the opportunity to imitate different actions. Observe their imitations.
- Use resources to allow you to observe particular skills (e.g. building blocks, crayons, book, pencil, scissors).



Resources: Offcuts of wood for building towers, variety of loose objects of various sizes and shapes from the outdoor environment along with a selection of pots, tins, boxes and trays.

Specialists: Rehabilitation services (may provide assistive equipment or help ensure the environment is accessible), physiotherapist, occupational therapist.

Parents: Ask parents which of these activities the child can do and is allowed to do at home. Which activities do they have resources for at home that the child can access?

### **Cognitive**

Types of observation

- Look at what children create, ask questions about it and ask them to tell you about it.
- Listen to what they are talking about and what words they are using.
- Provide opportunities for them to imitate you or take part in a conversation.

Resources: Books, puzzles, art supplies and building blocks.

Specialists: Paediatrician, child psychologist or psychiatrist.

Parents: Ask parents which of these skills they do at home. What type of resources and toys do they use at home?

### **Language and Communication**

Types of observation

- Listen to children's words, sounds and interactions.
- Join conversations with children.
- Watch children's body language, gestures and other ways of communicating.
- Watch children playing on their own, in pairs and groups with both children and adults to notice interaction.

Resources: Books, pictures cards, photos, drawings.

Specialists: Speech and language therapist.

Parents: Ask parents about how they express themselves at home, how they ask for things, who they talk with, what books, songs and stories they enjoy.

### Optional extension activity – Planning observations

 **15 minutes**

Tell participants: Observation is an important part of the early childhood educator's role, and can be intentionally planned.

Give participants the following instructions:

Think of a child in your care and identify an area of their development that you would like to know more about e.g. physical skills, language and communication, self-help skills, cognitive skills and socialisation.

Write down your observation plan including the following:

- What do you want to learn about this child?
- When will you observe them (during which routine, what part of the day, for what duration etc.)?
- Where will you observe them?
- Will you observe them alone, or interacting with a small group, large group, or an adult?
- Do you need to provide resources, organise an activity, plan how you will engage them in an activity?

# B Important theoretical issues to discuss

## Activity 3.2 – A strengths-based approach

🕒 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To consider the merits of a strengths-based approach for inclusive early learning settings.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in pairs.
- Choose a general skill and write it down (e.g. cooking, gardening, driving, sports, musical instrument/singing, art, or any other skill you agree on).
- Answer the following questions:
  - Related to the skill you chose, what are you best at?
  - What do you want to improve?
- Now answer the following questions:
  - Related to the skill you chose, what are you not good at?
  - What can you **not** do?

### Present the following:

For a long time child development milestones were used to find out what children cannot do, and to identify delays and gaps or deficits. This is the deficit-based approach. The problem with this approach is that it does not recognise what children can do and are interested in; two essential factors for future learning. To make early childhood development and education more inclusive and effective, we are changing the narrative. This means we are adjusting our focus away from the child being a “problem”. We look beyond a developmental delay, a diversity or a disability. We meet children where they are. We look for children’s strengths, interests, and capabilities. Instead of looking for what is missing, we are looking for what is present to value and build on. This is the strengths-based approach. It is inclusive and effective, based on what we know about how children learn.

Give participants the following instructions:

- In your pairs look at the answers you wrote.
- There were two sets of questions, decide which set of questions represented the deficit-based approach and which represented the strengths-based approach.
- Discuss whether the answers to the first two questions were more useful to you than the answers to the second two questions. Why do you think that?

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**Note to trainer:** Participants may think the deficit-based approach questions (second set of questions) are more useful. Point out that even though these indicate something the child could learn, it may not be something they are interested in, or have the skills to begin learning.

---

Now, give participants the following instructions:

- Work in 6 small groups.
- In your group, read the assumption you are given on a card [Cut out from **handout 3d**].
- Discuss the following points about your phrase:
  - Do you agree with it? Why/why not?
  - If we agree with the assumption how can it prepare us to support children better?
  - Do you have a story to share about using this way of thinking when working with children?
  - How can this way of thinking help to make sure that all children are included in early childhood development and education settings?

## Optional extension activities – Changing our focus

### Extension 1

 5 minutes

Give participants the following instructions:

- Look at the picture in **handout 3e**.
- Do you see the young lady or the old lady?

### Present the following:

It is possible to look at the same situation in two different ways. In the strength-based approach, we decide to focus on each child's strengths. This does not mean that we ignore delays, problems or challenges. Developmental milestones can be useful to identify where children need additional support. However, our main focus as early childhood educators is what children can do and are interested in. There are many reasons for this:

- If we know what children can do and are interested in we can identify learning goals and approaches that match the child's stage of development and maximize their motivation to learn.
- When we see the competencies and resources that children already have, we have a starting point for supporting them. We know what they can already do, and what they can do with support. Our role is to enable children to increase what they are able to do independently by reducing or adapting the support we provide as they develop.
- Making a list of what is 'wrong' with a child or what they cannot do, does not help us plan for their learning and development. We might feel like we cannot support the child without professionals to help us, or feel incapable of including the child at all. These types of lists are used for labelling children or deciding to exclude them from an early learning setting instead of supporting their development.

Choosing the strengths-based approach is like choosing which of the two faces in the picture to focus on. We choose to look at the child as a competent learner no matter where they are on their developmental journey.

## **Extension 2**

 **15 minutes**

Give participants the following instructions:

- Look at the pictures on **handout 3f** and note what you see.

After about 5 minutes, work through the pictures one by one asking participants what they saw.

**Note for trainer:** If participants say anything 'wrong' with a child or something that a child 'cannot' do, ask them how they can 'see' that in the picture. Usually, what we see, observe, hear and notice is that which a child is doing, can do, their facial expressions while they do things, what they are choosing, who they are with, and their behaviour related to their surroundings. We do not 'see' something that is not there.

### **Present the following:**

The purpose of this activity was to show that using the strengths-based approach is easy and natural. It simply involves prioritising seeing children for who they are and what they can do.

### Extension 3

 10 minutes

#### Present the following:

**Changing our focus to strengths requires changing the words we use.**

Give participants the following instructions:

- Using a blank sheet of paper, make a list of words you would not use to describe children in the strengths-based approach.

---

**Note for trainer:** You could offer a few suggestions to get participants started or add these words if they do not think of them: Can't, wrong, difficulty, doesn't, never, inability, inappropriate, limited, problem, abnormal, severe, defective, won't.

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- One participant reads out their words, then crumples their paper and throws it into a rubbish bin that the trainer holds up. The next participant adds any words that were not mentioned and throws their paper in the bin. This continues with all participants adding any new words and throwing their papers into the bin.

#### Present the following:

**Instead of focusing on what children cannot do we look for strengths. These include their intellectual, physical and interpersonal skills, capabilities, dispositions, interests, and motivations.**

# Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section.  
A key issue is:

- The limitations of developmental milestones

## Activity 3.3 –The limitations of developmental milestones

 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To recognise the limitations of developmental milestones and show inclusive alternatives.

### Present the following:

**While it is important for early childhood educators to be familiar with the typical path of child development, we must not apply this knowledge too rigidly. If we are not cautious, knowledge of child development can lead to practices that are not inclusive.**

Tell participants the two dangers of child development milestones for inclusive education, and write them on a flipchart or ask participants to write them:

Danger 1: Singling out children for rehabilitation or grouping children separately to provide differentiated supports.

Danger 2: Labelling children as having developmental delay.

Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- How can knowledge of child development lead to each danger?
- Why do you think this outcome is a problem/danger?
- What should the inclusive response be to each danger? How can an inclusive early childhood setting avoid this danger?
- Are there any other dangers to add to the list?



Give participants the following instructions:

- In groups of 5-6, think of an example (real or hypothetical) of each of the dangers in an early childhood setting.
- Then think of an example (real or hypothetical) where each danger is avoided through an inclusive early childhood setting.
- Share examples with the whole group.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

It is best to begin with the participants' own experiences and to encourage them to recognise how knowledge of child development must be used inclusively.

The following points can be used to prompt participants or to fill gaps if needed.

#### **Danger 1: Singling children out for rehabilitation or grouping children separately in order to provide differentiated supports.**

- Example 1: A child is observed to be very behind other children in his physical skills. A physiotherapist wants to work with him to do specific exercises and stretches so that his muscles strength does not weaken. She takes him into a separate space to do this along with two other children who need physiotherapy.
- Example 2: In inclusive education, the physiotherapist could provide guidance to one of the educators on what exercises and stretches the child needs. The educator then integrates these into the child's daily routine. Some take place alongside peers when they are all relaxing for a story, others are adapted to be part of a swinging or ball kicking game which the educator already knows the child loves.

Sometimes observations of child development can highlight the need for preventing further delay or impairment. In inclusive education, support is provided within the daily practices of the early childhood setting. Individualised or differential instruction should be part of the way early childhood educators work. Assessment of development is used for inclusion or exclusion decisions. Socially isolating children to meet rehabilitation needs can cause delays in other areas of development.

## **Danger 2: Labelling children as having developmental delay.**

- Example 1: A child is labelled as having developmental delay and so the staff do not expect much of him or challenge him to extend his capabilities. They assume he will not be able to do things.
- Example 2: In inclusive early childhood development and education, educators have high expectations of all children and ensure they are supported and challenged to develop to their full potential. Educators recognise that everyone develops differently in some way at some time, and for many different reasons.

Delayed or uneven development in the early childhood years is common. While a child's attention is focused on a skill they are attempting to master, other areas of development may appear to stall. All children have areas in which they are stronger and are weaker.

Differences between children's development can happen for many different reasons at any point in time. A wide range of factors contribute to making the development of each and every child a unique path. These include:

- Cultural differences between home and education setting: priorities, expectations, events, environments, things that are permitted/not permitted, rules, routines and traditions.
- Language differences: language spoken at home, multiple languages, minority language, sign language, second-language, language delay, and speech difficulties.
- Home environment: expectations, parent's level of education, siblings, relatives and community, resources and environment, and stress at home.
- Personal differences: preferences, individual talent, current attention on a skill stalling others, disposition, physical abilities, and social preferences.

Therefore, child development milestones should be used within a wider understanding that child development is dynamic, complex and as part of a holistic picture of the child. They should not be used to make diagnoses, to compare children against each other, or to exclude children. In inclusive education, child development knowledge is a tool for identifying capabilities, interests and needs for individualised supports which are, where possible, integrated into mainstream practice.

Some children do not follow typical patterns of development at all. Inclusive support helps to ensure this does not stop them from leading full and happy lives.

Session 4:

# Work closely with parents and caregivers



# Session 4: Work closely with parents and caregivers

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Partnering with parents and families is a key to successful inclusion. When families are involved in their child's education, children do better. When educators understand children and their family background, they can plan better educational experiences.
- Educators can access a wealth of vital information from parents and families that will give children a better chance to participate and learn. Inclusive education is more effective when families have an ongoing role in their child's learning and development.
- Inclusive educators recognise different family capabilities and needs and sometimes need to actively engage and communicate with parents and families.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 20:48-26:14**

# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 4.1 – Families and educators, a two-way relationship

🕒 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To reflect on the important information that parents, families and educators can share with each other.

### Present the following:

**Inclusive early childhood educators recognise that all children are individuals. In addition, educators recognise that children are members of their family and everything that makes up the family. This includes not only the gene pool and upbringing, but also the lifestyle, ethnic and community background and their shared experiences.**

**When families are involved in their child's education, children do better and enjoy lasting educational gains. The more educators understand children and their family background, the more they can tailor the educational experience to each individual child.**

Give participants the following instructions:

- Working in 6 or 7 groups, each group is given one 'family background' slip from **handout 4a**.

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**Note for trainer:** Add other family backgrounds if there are particular diversities common to the area.

---

- Discuss and make notes in response to the following questions:
  - What could early childhood educators learn from this family to increase the inclusion of their child?
  - What could this family learn from the educators so they feel more confident bringing their child to the early childhood setting?
  - Have you worked with children from this type of background before? Can you add anything from your experience?

- Groups should write their answers on a flip chart divided into two parts as follows:

<b>Type of family background:</b> _____	
<b>Educators could learn from families:</b>	<b>Families could learn from educators:</b>

After 20 minutes, give participants the following instructions:

- One representative from each group holds up their flipchart (or hangs it on the wall if there is space and stands by it) while the rest of the group walk around, looking at the flipcharts of all the other groups.
- The representative can clarify any of the points on the flipcharts for those viewing. After 15 minutes, the representative changes with another group member so they also get a chance to look at the other flipcharts.
- Anyone can add more ideas to flipcharts of other groups.

After 30 minutes, end the activity by asking the flipchart representatives to share their favourite 2 ideas from each category.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to fill gaps if necessary, either during the viewing stage or at the end of the activity.

#### **The child speaks a different language at home**

Educators could learn:

- Details of the language such as origin and dialect;
- Some basic phrases;
- Common words the child uses;
- Special songs or rhymes in the child's home language;
- Names and titles the child uses for important people in their life;
- How much of the dominant language the child knows;
- Any ways the family might be interested in spending time in the centre while the child is learning some basic language and routines;
- The child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.

The family could learn:

- How language learning is encouraged in the centre;
- What languages are spoken by educators;
- What language resources the centre has;
- How educators will get language help if needed;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

#### **The child has unique customs and culture at home**

Educators could learn:

- Family value systems;
- Important traditions, celebrations and events;
- Songs, stories and history important to the child;
- Protocols, dietary requirements, or significant practices;
- Religious beliefs and customs;
- Any ways the family might be interested in spending time in the centre to assist educators in finding ways to value and represent the child's culture in the centre routines, décor, resources and practices;
- The child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.

The family could learn:

- That the centre values and celebrates diversity;
- That the centre wants to embrace all different backgrounds and find ways for the child to be proud of their heritage;
- Which educators or staff (and maybe other children) share a common background;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

### **The child has a blended family**

Educators could learn:

- Names and details of significant people in the child's life;
- Where the child lives, if there is more than one home, and who are all the main caregivers;
- The child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.

The family could learn:

- That educators celebrate diversity and value input from all significant people in the child's life;
- That the family are all welcomed;
- That the educators will respect family expectations such as who has custody, who can pick the child up and who makes decisions;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

### **The child has a learning impairment**

Educators could learn:

- The ways the child learns best;
- Favourite items, songs, stories or activities;
- Ways in which the child communicates;
- Other people (e.g. specialists, support agencies) who have been involved with the family;
- The child's capabilities and strengths;
- Family goals and aspirations for their child;
- The child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.



The family could learn:

- The experience, knowledge and expertise of the teaching team;
- The individualised approach that the educators use;
- That educators celebrate diversity and look forward to getting to know their child;
- That all children learn best together and children are supported play and learn alongside their peers;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

### **The child has been unwell for a long time**

Educators could learn:

- Any special precautions educators, setting staff and children should take;
- Any extra or different care needs the child has;
- Medications or dietary requirements;
- Emergency response plans;
- The child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.

The family could learn:

- The experience, knowledge and expertise available on the teaching team;
- The centre medication policy;
- The emergency response plans;
- The individualised approach that educators use;
- That children are supported to learn and develop at their own pace;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

### **The child has recently moved to the country**

Educators could learn:

- About the child's journey and background;
- Significant details of the country of origin, the move, current living situation, the impact on the child and any resulting support needs (language, culture);
- Significant people in the child's life beyond their immediate family;
- Any ways the family might be interested in spending time in the centre to assist educators to value and represent the child's home country in the centre routines, décor, resources and practices;
- The child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.

The family could learn:

- That the centre welcomes children from all backgrounds;
- That the centre values and celebrates diversity;
- That the centre wants to embrace all different backgrounds and find ways for the child to be proud of their heritage;
- Which educators or staff (and maybe other children) share a common country of origin;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

### **The child has a physical disability**

Educators could learn:

- The child's capabilities and strengths;
- Family goals and aspirations for their child;
- How to use or appropriately use any assistive device the child uses (for example, wheelchair);
- Other people (specialists, rehabilitation) who have been involved with the family;
- Child's interests, temperament, personality and perspective.

The family could learn:

- The experience, knowledge and expertise available on the teaching team;
- The individualised approach that the educators use;
- That educators celebrate diversity and look forward to getting to know their child;
- That all children learn best together and children are supported play and learn alongside their peers;
- The type of education and care that will be provided.

# B Important theoretical issues to discuss

## Activity 4.2 – Parents and families as experts

🕒 90 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To recognise the expertise that parents and families can contribute to their child's early years education.

**Note for trainer:** Before you begin this activity, prepare 9 different copies of **handout 4b**. Add a different phrase from the list below in the space provided on each handout.

1. decision making
2. providing long term support
3. advocating
4. setting goals
5. planning for the future
6. determining the capabilities
7. understanding the temperament, motivation and interests
8. the health and wellbeing
9. communication

For example: Parents or families are experts in decision making for their child because.....

**Present the following:**

Often, when parents or caregivers enrol their child in an early childhood centre they think it is now the role of the educators to ensure their child learns and develops well. However, parents/family are the child's first educator and throughout their child's education families continue to have a powerful effect on their child's learning and development. Children benefit when families feel confident and competent in their parenting abilities. Children benefit when families have a role in their child's ongoing learning and development.

Although educators are experts in the learning and development of children in group settings, parents and families are the experts when it comes to knowing their individual child. For this reason, they are a vital resource for inclusive education. Educators who want to make sure that children have the best chance to participate and learn build partnerships with parents and families.

In Activity 4.1 we considered the expert knowledge parents and families have for children starting at an early childhood setting. However, this is just the beginning of the partnership. Many people assume that the role of parents and families is to help with fundraising, be on committees or do the school gardens. Inclusive early childhood educators recognise that parents and families are a crucial and ongoing resource for children's learning and development.

Distribute 9 copies of **handout 4b** around the room.

Give participants the following instructions:

- If you are holding a handout, write your suggestion for completing the sentence on the very bottom line of the page.
- Next, fold your answer so that it cannot be read by the next participant and hand the paper on to someone else.
- The papers should be handed around the room with participants adding their suggestions on the bottom, empty line, then folding it so that their answer is hidden.
- This continues until all the lines are full.
- The last participant to write on a page presents a summary of the suggestions written to the whole group, noticing how the answers are similar or different.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to fill gaps if necessary.

#### **Parents or families are experts in decision making for their child because....**

It is the right and responsibility of parents or families to make important decisions for their child.

They have been making all the key decisions for the child who is still too young to do so themselves.

They are involved in all the different aspects of the child's life, care and development so can bring all of these to the table to make informed decisions.

They know details about the wider family situation that may influence decisions.

#### **Parents or families are experts in providing long term support for their child because....**

They have a deeper understanding of the family aspirations, culture, and expectations.

They have a detailed knowledge of all different aspects of the child's life.

They plan to be involved in the learning, participation and education of the child long term.

They know what has been achieved so far.

#### **Parents or families are experts in advocating for their child because....**

They have unconditional love and regard for them.

They are involved with all the different settings where their child learns.

They feel a parental responsibility to stand up for and defend their child.

They communicate with the different people who support the child.

#### **Parents or families are experts in setting goals for their child because....**

They know about how the child learns.

They know what the child has already learned, has already succeeded in.

They know the strengths of their child.

They have seen what the child is attempting to do, and what they are interested in.

They know what is achievable in their home environment, what resources are available and what limitations.

**Parents or families are experts in planning for the future for their child because....**

They are invested in their child's long-term success.

They know their own family ambitions, plans and needs.

**Parents or families are experts in understanding the temperament, motivation and interests for their child because....**

They may have similarities with others in the family.

Sometimes children are more relaxed at home and more likely to express their deeper feelings.

The child spends more time in the home, so there is more opportunity to get to know these sides of them.

**Parents or families are experts in determining the capabilities for their child because....**

They interact and see them more than most others.

The child might be more relaxed in the home and demonstrate capabilities not seen in other contexts.

The child might have capabilities specific to the routines and activities in the home.

**Parents or families are experts in understanding the temperament, motivation and interests for their child because....**

They may have similarities with others in the family.

Sometimes children are more relaxed at home and more likely to express their deeper feelings.

The child spends more time in the home, so there is more opportunity to get to know these sides of them.

**Parents or families are experts in the health and wellbeing for their child because....**

This has been the responsibility of the parents and family right from before birth.

With children this age, when health is involved, the parents or family must always be involved.

For most families, their child's health and wellbeing are of the highest priority and something they are very focused on.

If their child has had illnesses or has disabilities, they will have been involved in every stage, they will know all the people who have been involved and all the details of their child's journey.

**Parents or families are experts in communication for their child because....**

They usually interact with them the most often.

They have been the consistent people in the child's life since birth.

They know the home language of the child and the common routines, phrases and activities the child is familiar with.

The child might be most comfortable and relaxed with their parents and family.

**Present the following:**

**Parents and families have a wealth of expertise to contribute to their child's early learning and development at the early education setting. How can we benefit from their expertise? Parents and families may not realise the important role they have, or they may feel that their expertise is unwelcome. Early childhood educators can empower parents and families to participate.**

Give participants the following instructions:

- Make pairs for a discussion activity. If possible, pair with someone you do not normally work with.
- Tell your partner about one occasion where you benefited from the expertise of a child's parent or family member.
  - How did you seek the parent or family's input?
  - What did you learn?
  - How did you use that information?
  - What were the results for the child and/or you?

Invite volunteers to share their examples with the whole group. Make notes on a flipchart and highlight any common points. To summarise, identify what ways educators most and least often involve parents and families. For example, educators often benefit from parents' expertise on children's health and wellbeing, but rarely about goal setting.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Individually, identify and write down a type of parent and family expertise you have rarely or never accessed.
- Consider which family you would like to make a conscious effort to learn from.
- Plan your approach. Will you arrange to meet with them? Will you speak with them informally? Will you watch them interacting with their child? Will you share a learning story with them and ask for their input into it? etc.

Ask 3 or 4 participants to share their plan with the whole group.

# **C** Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section.  
A key issue is:

- Engaging families

## **Activity 4.3 – Engaging families**

 **45 minutes**

### **Main purpose of this activity**

To consider different methods for engaging and communicating with parents and families in early childhood settings.

### **Present the following:**

Inclusive early childhood educators are aware of how important it is to engage parents and families. This is especially true for children with diverse needs or from diverse backgrounds. They know that building partnerships with families does not just happen; it needs to be actively worked on. They also recognise that families vary in the amount they can be involved and their ability to contribute. Inclusive educators respond to each family's capabilities and needs.



Give participants a blank sheet of A4 paper. Give participants the following instructions:

- Fold your paper to make 3, roughly equal-sized columns. Next, tear the paper, so that you have 3 separate sheets.
- Write three lists, a different list on each sheet of paper:
  1. Methods that you have used to communicate with families
  2. Methods that parents have used to communicate with you
  3. Methods of bringing educators and families together for shared activities
- Everybody's lists should then be sorted according to the three headings and spread out around the room for all to browse. For example, three tables could be designated, one for each heading, or three corners/areas of the room.
- Participants move around the room and browse through everyone's lists. They should look for three methods they have never used before that they would like try.

To finish, ask participants to each share one idea they will try.



Session 5:

# Organise a welcoming, stimulating learning environment



# Session 5: Organise a welcoming, stimulating learning environment

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- There are so many low-cost and no-cost resources that can be used to support the learning and development of all children. Just a few principles can be followed to make sure these resources are designed and organised in ways that will include all learners.
- In the early years, children learn and develop best when they can play in a stimulating and interactive environment.
- Educators can use small groups to make sure there are plenty of opportunities for quality interactions. In individual and small group settings, educators can respect individual needs and learning paths.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 26:15-28:32**

# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 5.1 – Low-cost environments can be rich

🕒 60–90 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To consider low-cost and no-cost resources for the learning and development of all children.

Give participants the following instructions:

- In groups of about 5 people, use a flipchart to draw one area of an early childhood centre. It can be part of the centre you work in, or another area. Do not draw the whole centre, just one part. For example, it might be the art area, or the outdoor space, the book corner, or the music shelf.
- Draw the resources that might be in the space (e.g. toys and objects for children to use).

After about 20 minutes, give participants the following instructions:

- Pass your flipchart to another group.
- Examine the drawing (if needed, ask someone from the group who drew it to come and explain it).
- Work as a group to create a new list of equipment and resources that cost very little or nothing that could be in this space but are not there now (for example, things you find in the natural environment, in the community, or in your homes). They can be things you need to adapt, or used as they are. They should cost nothing or very little.

After about 20 minutes, give participants each a sheet of A4 paper and the following instructions:

- Display the flipcharts on the wall.
- Fold your piece of A4 paper in three parts. At the top of each part, write one of the following headings:
  1. Resources I have used before
  2. Resources I have seen before
  3. Resources I would like to use
- Walkaround and look at the lists of low-cost equipment on the flipcharts. Make notes of the ideas under the correct heading on your paper – for you.

### Present the following:

**Inclusive early childhood settings can be resource-rich environments without great expense. The richness of the environment is about how inviting, how stimulating, how diverse, how organised and how meaningful it is to children.**

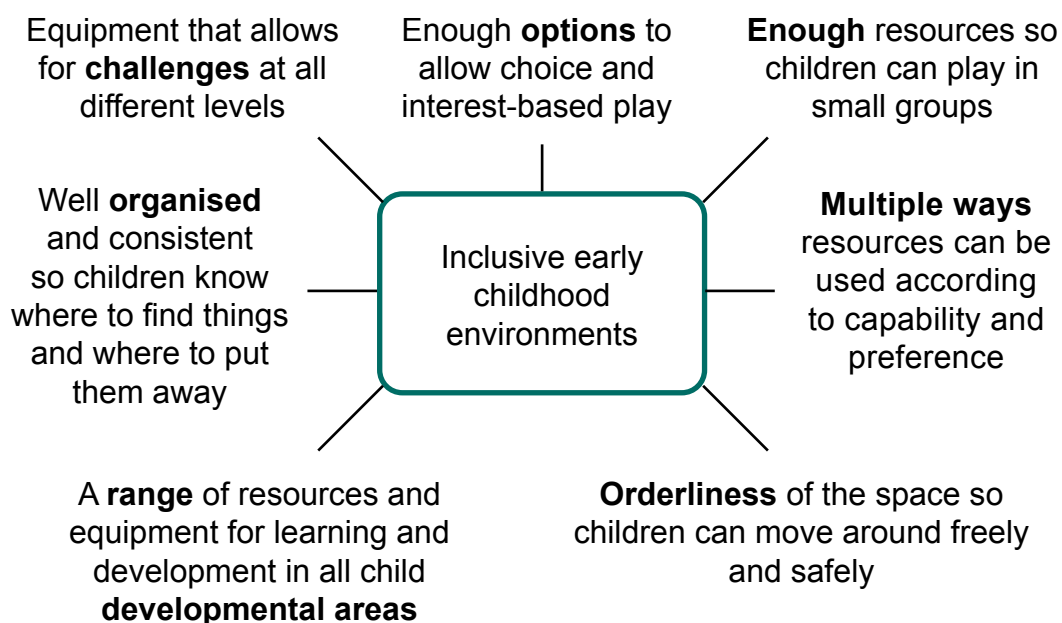
Write “inclusive early childhood environments” in the middle of a flipchart/board.

Give participants the following instructions:

- As a whole group, brainstorm some of the ways that we can make sure that our environment, equipment and resources are not excluding anyone.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to prompt or fill gaps if necessary.



Give participants the following instructions:

- Use the ideas from the brainstorm to evaluate the drawings you made of your centres. In what ways are the resources inclusive?
- Each participant should have 3 post-it notes (or small pieces of paper and tape).
- Draw a star on each post-it along with an explanation of how you think the environment is inclusive (for example. ★The space is orderly, or ★ There is equipment for practicing skills in the child development area of physical skills). Participants can distribute their 3 stars across any of the drawing flipcharts.

**Present the following:**

**Low cost resources mean that inclusive learning and development can happen in any setting. Educators can show parents they can do the same at home. Inclusive education is about the organisation of resources, the way they are made available and the ways children are supported to interact with them. It is not about how much they cost.**

# **B** Important theoretical issues to discuss

## Activity 5.2 – Child-led play

🕒 45 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To reflect on the nature of play and its central importance to inclusive early childhood education programmes.

### Present the following:

**Play is a basic and natural human need. Children in their early years learn and develop best through play.**

**Through play, children express their imagination, curiosity and creativity, interact with others and explore the world around them. They can learn and develop in all the important ways. Indeed, there is no better way to support the learning and development of children in their early years than by allowing them the time, space and resources to play.**

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in pairs to think of as many words connected to play as possible. The following questions can help you think of words.
  - Why do children play?
  - When do children play?
  - Who do children play with?
  - What do children play?
  - What do children play with?
  - What does play feel like for children?
  - What does play look like?
  - How do children learn and develop through play?
- Cut out a cloud shape from a blank piece of paper and fill it with words that you used to describe play. Display all the word clouds from all pairs.



## Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to prompt or to fill gaps if necessary.

joy	communicate ideas
smiling	social interaction
laughing	relationships
motivation	choices
thrill	decision-making
pleasure	exploration
challenge	acquire knowledge
frustration	share
satisfaction	negotiate
deeply involved	resolve conflicts
engaged	self-advocacy
making sense	group skills
expand understanding	leadership
express understanding	resilience
finding meaning	coping skills
connecting to things known	conquer fears
practice skills	imagination
try out possibilities	curiosity
discover new challenges	creativity
deeper learning	

Example word cloud:



**Present the following:**

There are two different kinds of play, which are often confused. The first kind is child-led. Other names for this are child-directed, self-directed and child-initiated. This is where children take an active role and ownership in their own play. Most often, this will be play that is the child's idea, with things and people the child chooses. The child will be in control of the situation and will make the decisions. The second type of play is adult-initiated play, for example activities or games. Even though these activities might be fun and playful, they are not play.

Educators have an important role when it comes to enabling children to learn and develop through play. They do not lead activities or introduce a game. Instead, they set up an environment and materials to stimulate a child's interest. When the child chooses what they will do, the educator follows the child's lead. They interact with the child in ways that support and build on the child's ideas. Enabling children to choose for themselves and participate in decision-making is central to play. It is also a child's right, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Give participants the following instructions:

- In pairs, think about the early childhood setting you work in. When and where do children make choices? Answer the following questions to guide your thinking:
  - During which parts of the routine are children free to choose?
  - Which resources and equipment can they choose to play with?
  - What decisions are co-decided?
  - What things are they not allowed to do?
  - What activities do the educators decide on?
- Write down three different parts of the programme that could be changed in your workplace so that children have more choices.

## Optional extension activity – Fishbowl discussion

 30 minutes

### Present the following:

**Like the right to participate in decisions which affect them, learning through play is so important it has been elevated to the status of a “human right” through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Despite this, play is not always central to early childhood development and education programmes.**

Give participants the following instructions:

- Using the fishbowl method, discuss some of the obstacles to play being central in early childhood programmes. Consider possible solutions.

Fishbowl method:

- All participants arrange their chairs in a large circle. There are three chairs placed in the middle for three volunteers.
- The volunteers are given a topic to discuss and begin discussion.
- When another participant wishes to add to the discussion, they go and tap the shoulder of one of the three volunteers and take their place.
- This continues until no one else has anything to add to the discussion.
- The facilitator records any final suggestions or solutions if there were any.
- Three new volunteers are then chosen and a new discussion topic introduced.

The following discussion topics are suggested (other topics can be chosen that participants suggest or that have arisen during previous sections of this topic):

- Many people think play is frivolous and that it takes time away from proper learning.
- Many educators have not seen learning through play in practice and lack confidence in implementing the techniques in their classrooms.
- Sometimes there are too many children and not enough educators to spend time playing with individual children or small groups.
- Some education officials and administrators do not realise the importance of play and expect educators to use more formal instructional methods.
- Many classrooms have workbooks and charts, but not so many hands-on materials or objects for children to explore.

# C Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section. A key issue is:

- Small groups

## Activity 5.3 – Small groups

🕒 90–120 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To reflect on how grouping children can support play, quality interaction and learning.

**Note for trainer:** For this session, you need a large number of small items (called ‘counters’ in this activity) to represent children. For example, lentils, beans, small stones or seeds, or board-game counters. How many you need depends upon the number of participants in your session and the number of children at their early education settings.

### Present the following:

To ensure that children are learning and developing as much as they can through play, educators make sure children have opportunity for a range of interactions. For example, children can play alone, alongside or with other children in small or larger groups. Adults can also join in children’s play. When adults talk and play along with children, they can add ideas and build on their natural curiosity. These interactions can extend or deepen a child’s understanding and support their social, emotional and communication skills.

Because all children have different interests and abilities, they do not often choose to play and learn together in a large group. Educators can find creative and practical ways to allow and manage small groups and individual play with the space available. They also need to ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for educators to interact with children.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in a group of 3-5 people who work at the same early education setting, if possible.
- Work together to draw a simple outline/map of the space in your early childhood setting.
- Take 'counters' from your trainer, one counter per child who attends your centre. Use the counters to show where children spend their time during the day, including where they form small groups or play alone.

After 15 minutes, give participants the following instructions:

- Present your map and show the whole group the ways you group children at your centre.
- Other participants should add suggestions or ideas of how the space could be organised differently to allow more opportunity for children to play in small groups.

#### **Possible answers to expect from participants**

Ideas could include:

- Moving furniture around to create smaller play areas and quiet spaces.
- Free movement between inside and outside.
- Combining two groups so that one educator can take a group of children outside and another interacts with small groups inside.
- Outside space can also be organised with some small group play areas.
- Multiple learning stations to suit 5 or 6 children.
- Mixed age grouping can mean older children can help younger.
- Organising the roles and responsibilities of staff to allow for interaction without compromising routines such as eating, sleep, hygiene etc.

Cut up the 10 examples on **handout 5a**. In this activity, you give each of the 10 groups one of these examples.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Form 10 groups (or pairs, depending on numbers).
- Take an example from the trainer. Discuss the following questions in your group
  - Could we do this in a large group setting? How easy would it be? How effective would it be?
  - Could we do this in a small group setting? How easy would it be? How effective would it be?
- Each group should prepare a presentation demonstrating how small groups make this type of interaction possible, OR how large groups make this type of interaction difficult or ineffective. Groups could use role play, present a drawing or cartoon, make a simple puppet show, or share a story from their experience.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

**The following is an example discussion and presentation:**

#### **React to individual needs**

Discussion:

Could I **react to individual needs** in a large group setting?

Depending on what the individual need was, to some extent educators could do this. However, they would be limited in how many individual children they can do this for. Children who are more assertive may receive more frequent responses. The individual need of one child might override another child's need (e.g. One child needs to move and make some loud noise, while another child wants some quiet space). In a large group setting children may be more dependent on the educator to lead an activity, which makes educator less able to observe and interact with individual learners.

Could I **react to individual needs** in a small group setting?

In a small group setting, when a need arises, educators can either respond to a child's need in the group if it is okay with the other children, or the child can move to another space to do what they need to do. Educators can interact with the child to help them find a way to meet their need in a way that is considerate of others. Other children may have different needs, which educators can also respond to. In a small group (such as 5 or 6 children) there is enough time to listen and respond to the needs of each child. Other groups can continue playing independently.

**Presentation:****Role play:**

The educator (played by a participant) has paper and pens for the children to draw on. He/she is handing them out and says “this should be an easy to do in a large group”. One child (played by a participant r) says they want three pieces of paper, another says they need everyone to move aside so they can lie on the floor to do their drawing, another child starts shouting that everyone be quiet so they can concentrate on their drawing, another child asks for all the pens so they can choose their own colour... etc. Finally, the flustered educator says “let’s do this in small groups!”

**Present the following:**

**Interactions with children in a large group will usually be an activity led by educators. There will be the expectation that all children produce similar results.**

**In inclusive education we aim to respect individual needs and learning paths. Children can still be together with shared space, materials and time. However, by using small groups, we can allow space for individual processes and outcomes.**





Session 6:

# Plan the day and differentiate learning sessions and activities



# Session 6: Plan the day and differentiate learning sessions and activities

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Educators can design age-appropriate routines in inclusive early childhood settings that give children a sense of predictability and security. The same routines can also be flexible enough to recognise different children with different needs.
- Early childhood educators can make activities inclusive by responding to each child differently depending on their capabilities and needs. Some children might need support to participate. Some children might need a barrier to participation removed.
- Educators play a vital and expert role in supporting children to learn through their own play. Educators can intentionally teach children by interacting with them in their play and or by setting up enticing activities.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 28:33-32:54**

# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 6.1 – Routines

🕒 60–90 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To encourage educators to think about how routines can both include and exclude.

To consider ways in which they can be used to support inclusive education.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Pass a ball (or another object) around the group.
- When you hold the ball, share an example of a routine from your early childhood setting, which the trainer lists on a flipchart or board.

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**Note for trainer:** If needed, provide a few examples like mealtimes, sleep, clearing up. Routines can also be rules (e.g. when children are allowed outside), processes (e.g. how to wash hands) and where things belong (e.g. where the books are stored).

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- Pass the ball to the next participant who tells us about another routine, which is added the flipchart or board.
- Continue until there are no other routines to add.
- Now, begin to pass the ball again. This time when you hold the ball tell us one way that routines are helpful for children, staff and families in early childhood settings.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to fill gaps if necessary.

#### **Reasons why routines are helpful for children.**

Consistency  
Predictability  
Sense of control  
Decrease stress  
Security  
Sense of belonging  
Expectations  
Sense of continuity  
Allow independence  
Responsibility  
Helps with transitions  
Helps with managing behaviour  
Order  
Confidence

### Present the following:

**Routines can be a great tool for inclusive education. They provide comforting boundaries and predictability so that children feel safe and are more ready to learn. So much can be learned within routines, and routines can unite children with different backgrounds and interests into the same space with a common goal. For example, a shared eating routine brings children together at a table providing the opportunity to interact, to share, to imitate and learn from each other and to cooperate.**

Ask for a participant to stand and share an example from their experience of children learning through routines.

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**Note to trainer:** Prepare an example in case no one volunteers.

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**Present the following:**

Routines can also exclude children. This happens when routines become rigid. Diversity in early childhood settings means different children with different needs. Routines can be a framework, but educators should use them flexibly and be ready to adapt in response to individual needs. For example, if a child is hungry when it is not meal time, there should be flexibility to provide the child with food. Or, if a child cannot reach the shelf to put a toy away, the child can tidy up the toy somewhere different. Or, if a child is distressed by loud music, they should not be required by a routine to participate in a group music routine.

Ask for a participant to stand and share an example from their experience of a routine that is not age-appropriate.

**Note to trainer:** Prepare an example in case no one volunteers.

**Present the following:**

When routines are not age-appropriate, or are not relevant to the needs of the children, they take time away from learning and development. Routines which are too rigid, not meaningful or engaging for children, educator-dominated activities and school-like instruction, do not respect the diversity of children or the importance of child-led play.

Ask for a participant to stand and share an example from their experience of a routine that is not age-appropriate.

**Note to trainer:** Prepare an example in case no one volunteers.

**Optional extension activity – Making visual routines****Present the following:**

Almost any routine can be displayed visually, using pictures, words, symbols or photos. Visual routines and rules help all children remember the routine, and behave appropriately. They are especially important for particular children.

- Children with Down Syndrome and children with Autism often benefit from a visual reminder of expectations.
- Children who are learning the smaller parts of a task benefit from a visual routine that breaks down a larger task into small steps.
- Children and families who are new in an early childhood setting and/or have limited competence in dominant language/s.
- Labels and written routines can help educators to use consistent language which will support young learners.
- Labels and prompts for routines written in other languages can help educators support children from minority language groups. They can also help educators and other children learn key words in the minority language.
- Labels can also be presented in sign-language. This can help educators or other children learning to sign.
- Visual routines can also be designed as checklists which children can use to mark off.
- Auditory reminders of routines can assist those who are blind or have a visual impairment such as a clean-up song to prompt children that it is time to tidy up, or a rhyme the educators say every day before eating.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Using paper and coloured pens, design and draw the following:
  - One visual timetable covering the whole day programme.
  - One visual routine broken down into small steps (for example, the steps required for washing hands correctly, or the steps required for clearing the lunch table, the tidy up routine, preparing to go home).
  - Three different types of labels for one thing (for example, scissors: written, drawing and another language).

# B Important theoretical issues to discuss

## Activity 6.2 – Responsive teaching

🕒 60 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To encourage educators to reflect on the role of early educators to differentiate through the way they respond.

Display the picture on **handout 6a** by PowerPoint or print out.

**Note to trainer:** Prepare 5 pieces of paper, with one of the 5 aspects of learning and development written on each (language, physical skills, social skills, self-help skills, cognitive skills). Put the pieces of paper inside a hat or soft bag to use in this session.

### Present the following:

You may have heard the term ‘differentiation’. In inclusive early childhood development and education, differentiation means educators responding to children’s understanding, skills and motivation in individualised ways to support their inclusion, development and learning. Differentiation, sometimes called responsive or adaptive teaching, is fundamental for effective teaching and learning.

Responsive teaching is central to inclusive education in early education settings. It means that educators respond to each child differently depending on their capabilities and needs. Educators provide support, arrange environments and resources, and remove barriers so that each child can participate, learn and develop.

Let’s imagine what responsive teaching looks like in the following scenario: It has recently rained and there is a puddle of mud. A group of children are very excited about it.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Divide into 5 groups.
- One person from each group, takes a piece of paper from the trainer's hat/bag. Written on the paper is one of the five learning/development areas (language, physical skills, social skills, self-help skills, cognitive skills).
- With your group, brainstorm the skills from your learning and development area that children could use and develop when playing in a muddy puddle.
- A representative from each group shares their ideas with the whole group. Other participants or the trainer can add further suggestions.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to prompt or to fill gaps if necessary.

#### **Language and communication**

Vocabulary for mud, water, dirt, messy, dirty, squishy, clean, rain, splash, boots

#### **Physical skills**

Fine motor skills, squeezing, poking, pouring, coordination, messy play, jumping, stamping, balancing

#### **Social skills**

Taking turns, avoiding splashing others, playing in close proximity to others, helping another who slips

#### **Self-help skills**

Washing hands, putting boots on and off, changing clothes

#### **Cognitive skills**

Water + dirt = mud. More water makes mud thinner, more dirt makes it thicker



### Present the following:

You realise that there are multiple learning and development opportunities to be had through playing in a mud puddle. So, instead of telling the children to keep away from the mud, you permit them to play in it.

Do not tell children what they should do or decide on an activity to do with the mud. Remember that play is led by the child and that children have a range of abilities and interests. Be ready to support children to learn from the activity according to where they are at. So, you wait, and are ready to respond.

Expect to support different children in the group in different ways. Your goal is to make sure that all who wish to participate can do so. Some children might need support to participate. Some children might need a barrier to participation removed.

Print enough copies of **handout 6b** so that there is one for each group. Cut up into slips and give them face down to each group.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Groups choose 3 example children from the face down slips. Read these examples of children who may want to play in the mud puddle.
- In your groups, discuss each child and make notes of how you could be responsive to the child and support them to participate and learn.
- Each group shares their responses with the whole group.

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to prompt or to fill gaps if necessary.

**One child is hesitating to join in and you notice he is wearing a very clean and tidy shirt. You know that his family is not wealthy.**

Suggest to the child to borrow another shirt then put their own shirt back on later. Offer the child an apron or shirt they could wear on top.

**One child has a dry skin condition. You are concerned that the mud or water could irritate her skin, but she really looks like she wants to join in.**

Offer the child boots so they can stamp in the puddle and a stick to stir the water. The child may have their own gloves to use for these types of activities, you could suggest this.

**One child is guarding the puddle and not allowing other children to join her play.**

Discuss with the child which areas other children could play in and what could be her designated area. Turn the guarding activity into a game and suggest more children help her to guard the puddle against an imaginary creature. The child could make tickets for all the other children to come and enter the mud puddle.

**One child uses a wheelchair and is trying to lean down far enough to touch the mud with his fingers.**

Put some mud on a tray on a table where he can reach it.

Provide physical assistance to the child so he can play in the mud out of his wheelchair. Suggest driving through the mud with the wheelchair to make splashes. Other children could do the same with bikes or trolleys.

**One child wants to join in, and keeps running and picking up mud to throw at others while laughing.**

Offer a big bucket to throw mud into. See if he can fill it up.

Make a mud throwing target.

Discuss with the child the feelings of the other children when they have mud thrown on them.

**One child is very carefully pouring mud into a small container and looking nervously at other children coming close to his concentrated activity.**

Offer to carry a bucketful of mud to an area away from the other children.

Help other children to notice that he does not want people to knock over his container.

Offer different sizes of container so that he could see how much they hold. Offer different utensils for filling – spoons, funnels, jugs.

**One child is standing touching the water with his feet and fingers. He watches the other children, but appears to be somewhat bored.**

Play with the mud in some different ways near the child, this might give him some ideas of fun ways to play (e.g. poke it with sticks, make mud pies, coat hands in mud, make mud hand prints on the concrete or on tree trunks).

Invite the child to join in the play of another child.

# C Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section. A key issue is:

- Intentional teaching

## Activity 6.3 – Intentional teaching

 60–90 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To raise educators' awareness of two approaches for extending children's learning and development as part of a child-led approach: 1) extending spontaneous play; and 2) setting up activities to stimulate children's curiosity.

### Present the following:

When children play, spontaneous learning takes place. This happens while children are exploring, discovering and thinking for themselves. Early childhood educators can also deliberately extend children's learning through interacting with children, and plan intentional learning and development activities. Within a child-led or play-based programme, they do this in two ways:

- extending spontaneous play
- setting up an activity to stimulate curiosity.

Intentional teaching through extending spontaneous play happens when an educator interacts with a child with the aim of extending their understanding or capability within the child-led activity. For example, an educator might point out to a child that the block tower the child built is made of only square blocks. They could offer some triangle-shaped blocks and wonder if the child can find a place in their tower for these different shapes.

Intentional teaching through setting up an activity happens when educators set up resources or equipment to attract children to explore new things they may not have thought of themselves. For example, a table could be set up with some pictures of sunflowers and a vase with sunflowers in it. There could be pots of dirt and sunflower seeds. Children who show an interest could plant a seed, and watch it grow. This activity is not required of children, it is an opportunity. The more interesting, motivating and exciting it looks to be, the more chance children will choose to engage with it.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Form pairs.
- Read the examples in **handout 6c** and choose 3 that interest you both.
- Together with your partner plan intentional teaching for the 3 examples you chose.
- Next, plan one method of extending spontaneous play and one method of setting up a stimulating activity for each example.
- Join another pair to share and compare ideas. Are the activities educator-led or child-led? Do educators enable children to extend their play, their understanding and skills?

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**Note for trainer:** For participants who are used to educator-directed approaches, take care that this activity does not come across as judgmental. The key message is that educators play a vital and expert role in enabling and supporting children's learning, but early childhood development and education should be child-led as far as possible.

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### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these sample answers to prompt if necessary.

**This week there is a culturally significant day which is important to some children and families in the centre. You wish to acknowledge and value this day.**

Extending spontaneous play:

Educators mention the day as part of the children's activities. For example, when children are laughing and having fun on the swings, the educator comments how glad she/he is that they are having fun especially since today is a super special day. They mention the name of the day and why it is special. When children are singing, or dancing to music the educator could notice how nice the songs are and ask if any of them know the special song that is connected to the cultural day. The educator can ask if children have any questions about the day and see if other children can answer. The educator helps children to express their ideas if needed, and provides some answers themselves.

Setting up an activity:

A table is placed in an unusual place so that children notice it. It is set with paint and collage materials in colours that relate to the colours used for the significant day. Large pieces of paper are ready in shapes that will acknowledge the special day. If children choose to engage in the art activity, the artwork they produce is displayed in the entrance way alongside a banner with the name of the significant day.

**Flu season is approaching and you want to raise children's awareness of hand hygiene.**

Extending spontaneous play:

Whenever the children are washing their hands, educators emphasise the important steps in the process using consistent language and a picture-based list of the steps required is displayed near to the handwashing basins. When educators are interacting with children, they point out the times when they might need to wash their hands, or ask the children 'now our hands are dirty, what shall we do?'.

Setting up an activity:

Educators set up buckets of water and bars of soap with blown up gloves in them so that children can practice washing the 'hands'. A large paper hand is cut out for children to decorate (or make dirty) using bowls of dirt, or glue and pieces of leaves, bark, sticks, etc. Educators can ask if children know why washing hands is important and help them to express their ideas using familiar language and examples.

**A child attending the centre is from a minority ethnic group. You notice the other children excluding him from their play.**

Extending spontaneous play:

When children are engaged in spontaneous play, educators invite the child into the activity and point out something that he can help with. Educators introduce the child by name to other children. They point out his strengths and interests to others in small group activities.

Setting up an activity:

A large piece of material or a parachute is placed in the middle of the room or in the outside play area. Children who show interest are encouraged to hold the edges then attempt to bounce a ball on it without it falling off. The educator uses the activity to point out how we need each other and when we all play together, it works better.

**A deaf child has recently started attending the centre and he communicates using sign language. None of the other children know any sign language yet.**

Extending spontaneous play:

Educators use signs to name and label things as they interact with children in their play. They could also answer questions with signs, ask questions with signs, or directly say 'this is how you say that in sign language'.

Setting up an activity:

A book of signs is added to the bookshelf. When children show an interest in it, educators demonstrate the signs and encourage children to try them. Songs that are sung frequently with the children are signed at the same time.

**A child is very interested in playing with dinosaurs. He likes to play alone and does not allow others in his space.**

Extending spontaneous play:

When the child is playing with a dinosaur, another toy dinosaur is given to a different child to play with. If the child does not notice, the educator points out to him what the other child is doing with his dinosaur. They suggest that the dinosaurs might be friends and like to play together.

Setting up an activity:

A big box of dinosaurs could be placed in the play area. The educator could draw the child's attention to what other children are doing with the dinosaurs. (e.g. 'look, Jane is balancing her dinosaur on top of her head', 'Oh I see those boys have made a little house for their dinosaurs').

**A child is showing an interest in drumming and making loud noises with sticks and boxes.**

Extending spontaneous play:

The educator imitates the beat the child is making, but in a quieter way. The educator suggests the child take the game outside, so they can be loud and no one will be bothered by the noise.

Setting up an activity:

A local drummer is invited to visit the centre with a variety of instruments for the children to engage with. She/he plays the instruments and if children are interested to, they respectfully try out the instruments.

**A group of girls are enjoying pretending to be cats for the entire day at the centre.**

Extending spontaneous play:

The educator extends their knowledge of cats and their characteristics and abilities. For example, when they are climbing, the educator could point out that cats almost always land on their feet, or when they are running, they could talk about how cats stalk and can walk soundlessly.

Setting up an activity:

The educator might wear cat ears and a tail themselves one day and when children show an interest in them, show them a table set up with materials for children to make cat ears and tails for themselves so they can dress up as cats. Faces could even be painted with whiskers.





Session 7:

# Use real world objects to stimulate learning



# Session 7: Use real world objects to stimulate learning

## Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- The more senses that are engaged, the more children can learn. The best resources to help all children participate and learn are multi-sensory resources.
- Young children learn and develop best when their learning is connected with the real world. Educators can provide opportunities for children to engage with the real environment, with real people, real places and with real and familiar resources.
- Easily available, low-cost and open-ended resources enable children to play creatively and spontaneously. With no prescribed way of using them, all children can explore these materials in ways suitable to their interests and abilities.



**Facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities. You could re-watch the related segment of the video found at 32:55-37:00**

# A Basic workshop activities

## Activity 7.1 – Multi-sensory resources

🕒 40 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To consider how the resources at the centre support multi-sensory learning and how they can be improved.

### Present the following:

It is often said that children are ‘hands on’ learners. Really, children use all their senses to explore the world around them, so we might say children are multi-sensory learners. Educators use this knowledge to promote learning and development because, the more senses that are engaged and stimulated, the more connections are made in children’s brains. In addition, children prefer different senses over others at different times so providing a sensory-rich environment helps all children participate and learn.

Write ‘multi-sensory’ in the middle of a flipchart and give participants the following instructions:

- Brainstorm all of the ways that objects differ, which the trainer will write on the flipchart/board (e.g. size, shape, thickness, colour, brightness, weight, sound, taste, smell, texture).

Using crayons or markers, colour each group of sensory properties on the flipchart a different colour (e.g. yellow = taste, red = touch, blue = smell, green = sight, pink = sound). Use the same colour for similar properties (e.g. How something feels: texture, thickness, softness, weight should all be coloured red to represent touch).

### Present the following:

Multi-sensory learning resources are real-life objects. Worksheets and workbooks are not multi-sensory in the same way because they use language and pictures to represent ideas. Children in their early years learn primarily through sensory exploration of real-world objects.

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**Note for trainer:** This session emphasises the need for children to engage with a variety of real-world objects for their multi-sensory development. It is intended to challenge the practice of using worksheets and workbooks with young children. At the same time spoken language e.g. talk, songs, poems and stories; written language e.g. signs, words in books; and pictures e.g. posters, storybooks, photos, paintings etc. are an important part of a sensory rich learning environment. As children develop, they will increasingly want to engage with more abstract representations and educators should be responsive to this.

---

Give participants the following instructions:

- You have 5 minutes to move around the room and collect as many real-life objects as you can.
- Volunteers name an object they collected and describe the different sensory properties it has. For example, a **tea cup** looks red, round and shiny, it feels smooth, hard and a bit heavy. It smells like tea. It makes a hard sound when I tap it. **A set of keys** looks pointy and jagged, it feels shiny and cold to touch. It sounds jangly when you shake it, it smells like metal.

Ask for 5-6 volunteers. Encourage them to use creative language to describe the senses and not worry if words are 'correct' or not.

**Present the following:**

Some children depend more heavily on one or more of their senses for learning due to a physical impairment. For example, a child who is blind may be more engaged when the resources have textures and auditory features. A child who has low vision may appreciate bright colours and toys which light up.

All children prefer some senses over others at different times. For instance, some children crave messy play, others like smooth, soft and furry surfaces.

Some children find certain sensory input disturbing and/or distressing. For example, loud noises, messy play, bright lights or particular colours.

In inclusive education, we recognise that children have different sensory interests and needs. We learn about the preferences and needs of the children we work with and ensure multi-sensory learning resources are available for them to explore.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in groups of people who normally work together, if possible.
- With your group, make a list of the resources you have in your centre for the following types of play:
  - Water play
  - Building blocks
  - Ball play
  - Books
  - Painting
  - Gluing
- Use coloured markers to indicate which senses the different resources on your list stimulate. Use the same colour coding as the main brainstorm flipchart. The more colourful your list is, the more multi-sensory resources you have.
- Join another group so that two groups are working together in a 'super group'.
- Describe your list to the other group.
- Brainstorm together how resources could change, or add to your resources, to make them more multi-sensory. For example, cups can be different colours rather than all the same. Balls can be big, small, soft, hard, furry, noisy, etc. When something stimulates a sense, you could increase the stimulation. For example, a blue ball is visually stimulating, but a glittery or shiny ball might be even more visually stimulating. You could use ideas from the other group or you could think of more innovative ideas. Tip: try to think of low-cost ideas e.g. what resources are easily available in homes, the community and natural environment?

### Possible answers to expect from participants

You can use these ideas to assist groups if they need more ideas.

#### **Water play**

Coloured water, warm water, ice cubes, lavender oil scent in the water. Cups, jugs, funnels, sieves, tubes.

#### **Building blocks**

Heavy and light blocks, very small and very large blocks, coloured blocks, soft blocks, blocks with sound inside them (e.g. hollow with beans inside that can shake around).

#### **Ball play**

Balls with bells inside, balloons, light up balls, soft balls, squishy balls, balls with bumpy surface, oversized ball.

**Books**

Colourful pictures, textured pages, lift the flap, large size books.

**Paints**

Bright colours, pastel colours, thick paint, runny paint, scented paint, painting textured objects – leaves, corrugated cardboard, rocks, finger painting, sponge painting.

**Gluing**

Leaves, scented flowers, crinkly paper, shells, pieces of cut material, cotton wool.

# B Important theoretical issues to discuss

## Activity 7.2 – Real-world learning

🕒 90 minutes

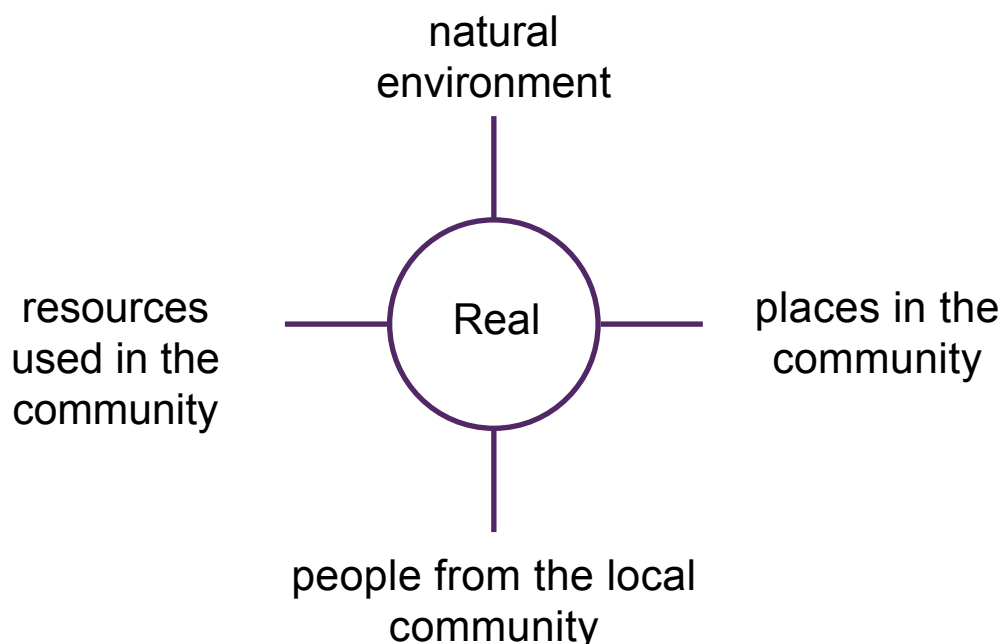
### Main purpose of this activity

To think of ways to increase connections between what children are learning in early childhood education and real life.

### Present the following:

Young children learn and develop better when there is a clear connection between an educational resource or experience and their daily lives. This helps children to make sense of resources and experiences, to extend their capabilities in their daily lives and develop a love of learning. Real-world learning connects the classroom to activities, places and people that are meaningful to children.

Present the following on a flipchart and explain that these are four real-world connections we can support in early childhood settings:



Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in groups of people who normally work together, if possible.
- Draw a basic map of where your early childhood centre is located in the community.
- Draw places which are in walking distance that you could take the children to explore. These could include parks, nature reserves, beaches, forests, farms, nature walks, orchards, community gardens, ponds, streams, large trees, or significant landmarks. Focus on places in the natural environment.
- Briefly present your map to the whole group.

Next:

- In your group, brainstorm people from the community who could visit the centre to interact with children and share hands-on learning. This could include people from diverse occupations (e.g. farmer, shopkeeper, doctor, teacher, scientist, dancer), community organisations (e.g. fire, police etc.) and people who can share a skill or interest with the children (e.g. music, weaving, art, sports, stories).
- Discuss how you could make sure these visits are play-based, rather than adult-led.
- Briefly present your list to the whole group and share your ideas for keeping visits play-based.

Next:

- Think about your centre's outdoor environment. Are there gardens or natural spaces which children can explore? Where can they go alone, and where do they need adult supervision? Draw a basic outline of what there is available.
- Briefly present your analysis to the whole group.

#### **Present the following:**

**Often, early childhood classrooms contain man-made materials and toys with little connection to the real world. However, it is not always possible to visit places outside the centre. Early childhood educators can include resources that encourage real-world ways of exploring. These are things that are familiar and relevant to children. Instead of a plastic drum, use a drum commonly used in the community. Instead of plastic sand-pit toys, use realistic spades, buckets and wheelbarrows. Instead of expensive water play sets, there might be pots, jugs and funnels commonly found in people's kitchens. These resources are more engaging for children, and can be low-cost too.**



Write the following list on a board or flipchart.

- Plastic tea-set
- Super-hero dress-up clothes
- Colouring-in pictures
- Climbing frame
- Rattles, bells and plastic drums

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work individually. Think of real-world resources you can use for each of the items on this list.
- Share your ideas for the trainer to write on the board.
- Make a personal list of real-world resources you would like to get for your centre.

Give participants the following instructions:

- As you listen to the following story, make notes of the learning and development that could be happening for the children involved.

Read out **handout 7a**, real-world learning about apples.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Discuss as a large group what the children could have learned.
- Discuss what skills they have used and practiced.
- Discuss why this way of learning and developing is important for the children.

Remind participants:

Real-world learning enables children to explore, experience and think about the world around them. Children choose if and how to participate and there are no required results.

# Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some specific issues raised in this section. A key issue is:

- Loose parts

## Activity 7.3 – Loose parts

 60–90 minutes

### Main purpose of this activity

To highlight that resources for multi-sensory and real-world learning are available in our communities.

### Present the following:

One of the oldest types of play is called ‘loose parts’, where children play creatively and spontaneously with what they find. Natural environments come with ‘loose parts’ freely available. When children are visiting forests or beaches, they use sticks, stones, shells, and leaves to invent, problem-solve and construct. In man-made environments, we might need to provide the ‘loose parts’.

‘Loose parts’ vary depending on who uses them, where they are and what interests them. They can be offered by educators or collected by children. There is no prescribed way to use loose parts, children make the decisions. They can be moved, carried, combined, lined up, stacked, taken apart and put together in any number of different ways. They have no boundaries. The flexibility of ‘loose parts’ make them ideal for inclusive education. No matter the age, level of ability or needs, children can explore materials in ways suitable for them.

‘Loose parts’ can be purchased, but more commonly they are found or recycled and collected. Community groups, nearby businesses and parent networks can help collect items. ‘Loose parts’ are not an alternative to expensive toys for countries with fewer resources. In countries all around the world, these items are valued because of their real-world and multi-sensory qualities. ‘Loose parts’ allow children to do the thinking instead of following the limited instructions of manufactured toys.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Go outside and collect a handful of items from the garden. Ideas include rocks, flowers, seeds, twigs, leaves.

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**Note to trainer:** If the venue does not have an outside area or is not suitable for this activity, ask participants to bring 'loose parts' from home or bring your own bucketful of items.

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- In pairs, play with your items and try to find three different things to do with your items (for example, build a house, arrange them in a pattern, count them, make a line).
- Think of three different skills that children can use and develop while playing with your items.

Move around the pairs. If possible, take photos of the items and the ways they are being used. These photos could later be shared or distributed to the participants, or even displayed immediately for other participants to see.

Prepare six large flipcharts with the following headings:

- Natural
- Plastic
- Wooden
- Glass and ceramic
- Fabrics
- Packaging
- Containers for storing and displaying

Display the flipcharts around the room or spread around tables.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Circulate around all the flipcharts and try to add at least two ideas of 'loose parts' to each chart. Write or draw your ideas. (The trainer might need to give a few examples for each flipchart to get participants started. **Handout 7b** offers some ideas of natural resources.)
- Take your own photo of each chart as a resource for yourself, or make your own list of 'loose part' items you could find.

## Possible answers to expect from participants

The following examples could be used to prompt participants.

### **Natural resources**

Stones, shells, feathers, pinecones, leaves, sticks, acorns, flowers, seeds, dried beans, moss, pods, logs

### **Wood**

Corks, clothes pegs, wooden beads, chair legs, wooden blocks, wood scraps

### **Plastic**

Milk caps, bottles, PVC pipes, empty spice containers, curtain rings, hair rollers, straws, cd cases, beads, lollipop sticks, funnels, cups

### **Metal**

Nuts and bolts, washers, tin foil, muffin tins, magnets, keys, bottle caps, forks, spoons, metal lids, doorknobs, hair clips, cans, paper clips, pots, springs

### **Glass and ceramic**

Tiles, glass beads, gems, marbles, slate, flowerpots, sea glass, tiny bottles, jars

### **Fabrics**

Offcuts, scarves, ribbons, laces, elastic, thread, rope, wool, rubber bands

### **Packaging**

Egg cartons, paper rolls, cereal boxes, paper scraps, wrapping paper, bubble wrap, boxes, string

### **Containers for storing and displaying**

Boxes, trays, baskets, muffin trays, ice trays, boxes, crates, tins, jars, lunch boxes, pots.

### Present the following:

There are a few things every educator introducing 'loose parts' should consider:

The first and perhaps most important is the age of the children. Small 'loose parts' can be a choking hazard for children under the age of three or for children more likely to put them in their mouths. 'Loose parts' do not have to be small!

Depending on the level of supervision you are able to provide the children, you must decide when and where to use them. You might choose only 'loose parts' that children can play with unsupervised. Some centres are entirely designed around 'loose parts', others may introduce them in only one area at a time, and others may keep them stored away and bring them out when educators can supervise their use.

When deciding which 'loose parts' to introduce, educators might want to consider whether the 'loose parts' can be gathered up relatively easily after children have played with them. Can they be used and reused in different ways without breaking or becoming dangerous, or do they get used up and continuously need replacing?

### Optional extension activity – Concerned educator role play

Give participants the following instructions:

- Role play: The trainer takes on the role of a 'concerned educator' who does not really think that 'loose parts' will be a good idea in their early childhood centre. The trainer presents one of the concerns they have (see list below).
- One volunteer stands up and begins trying to change the mind of the 'concerned educator'. Another participant can stand to take over from them, and this can continue with more volunteers until the 'concerned educator' admits they are convinced.
- The trainer then presents another concern.

Concerns the trainer could use, or add others which arise during discussion:

- It looks very messy with these types of resources!
- The children will become chaotic and noisy playing like this!
- It will take too long to find and organise 'loose parts'!
- Children will hurt themselves or hurt each other!
- Children will get dirty!
- People will think that we do not want to spend money and we are just giving the children rubbish!



Annexes

# Film transcript and handouts



# Film transcript

## Inclusive practice in early childhood development and education

### **The importance of early childhood development and education**

Early childhood development and education are very important.

Children are learning even before they are born.

The way we support children's development and learning during their early years influences their later learning and development.

Parents and caregivers want to give children the best start in life.

They want to make sure children have opportunities to develop, learn and reach their full potential.

They need support with this.

Early childhood development and education settings play an important role in maximising these opportunities.

Around the world, countries have made commitments – like the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child – to ensure that early childhood development and education provision is available and inclusive for every girl and boy.

All young learners – girls and boys, whatever their race, language, religion, disability refugee or other status – should be able to learn together in their local community.

There are many different types of early childhood development, care and education provision. Different names are used.

In your community you may be familiar with 'kindergarten', 'nursery', 'playgroup', 'pre-school', 'early learning centre', 'daycare', 'childcare' or another name.

Whatever we call them, all settings must be inclusive.

In this video you will experience some simple ways in which early childhood educators, in any setting, can improve their day-to-day practice and become more inclusive.



## What should inclusive early childhood development and education be like?

Inclusive early childhood development and education enables all children to learn alongside their peers – from a young age.

This means they learn to welcome and value diversity from their earliest years, which in turn helps to lay the foundation for an inclusive society.

This is why it is important that early childhood educators understand and embrace diversity.

Young children benefit in so many ways from the experience of learning together in diverse groups.

It is certainly enriching for children to be in a group. When they are in the group, they draw so much energy from each other. They complement each other and become whole like pieces of a puzzle that come together to become a new picture.

*(Olha Serova, Pre-school No. 2, “Romashka”, Mykolayivka)*

Our family are so happy with the preschool. Lee-Ann is very happy. She has friends now and can play with other children rather than being at home every day.

*(Thabisile Malambe, Mother of Lee-Ann, Hhelehhele Community Pre-school, Hhelehhele Chieftdom)*

I like morning meetings as an activity, and we try to conduct them regularly. The idea of the morning meeting is to help each child in the circle to feel free, valued, important and welcome.

*(Oksana Bura, Headteacher, Pre-school No. 134, Lviv)*

Good quality, inclusive early childhood development and education has play at the heart of everything.

We learn by playing with the kids. If you want to teach the kids, you have to know how to play with them. They learn by playing.

*(Ntombie Potgieter, Teacher, Lunju Neighbourhood Care Point (NCP)/Kindergarten, Lunju)*

Playing is the most effective way for young children to develop and learn.

That is why it is very important that early childhood educators know how to guide and facilitate learning and skills development through play.

Kindergarten is all about playing. We teach children through play. And even though they play, they still learn.

*(Olha Lavrynenko, Headteacher, Pre-school No. 2, ‘Romashka’, Mykolayivka)*

When playing children interact with each other, they experiment. Through play, they learn about the world. And a teacher acts as a partner in the play.

*(Yana Zadyraka, Methodologist, Pre-school No. 2, 'Romashka', Mykolayivka)*

While playing they get together they get to know each other very well, they learn to socialise. Physically they become much stronger. Playing is the best way for them to be physically fit. That's why it's so important to give them time to play. As they play together they communicate. They socialise, they learn to do things in groups, they learn to do things together. To share, which is very important for them as they grow up.

*(Thuli Gamedze, Teacher, Mahlabaeni Neighbourhood Care Point (NCP)/Pre-school, Goboyane, Big Bend)*

Making connections between home, life, the community and learning is another important way that inclusive early childhood educators help to build a child's desire for learning.

Early childhood educators focus on children's interests to nurture their creativity and curiosity – skills that will help the children as they grow.

Early childhood educators also support the physical and emotional wellbeing and the health and safety of all young children in their care.

To do this they need to understand the individual needs of every child.

## **What should early childhood development and education *not* be like?**

Early childhood education is actually more than just preparation phase for the primary school.

We can see that in some contexts that early childhood education does not promote diversity, it does not centre around fun and play, it does not lay the foundation for enjoying learning.

This may not benefit the chance to develop emotional resilience or develop lifelong love for learning.

Children may be taught in large groups using teaching and learning approaches intended for much older children.

Some early childhood education programmes try to prepare children for school by teaching school level reading and maths.

Parents may want this for their children but it's not appropriate for the age group and can mean that children miss out on really important age appropriate learning and development through play and exploration for example.

These are the core skills that prepare them for school life.

There is evidence that starting academic [learning] early does not give the children an advantage.

It's not actually inclusive because it imposes rigid developmental expectations onto young learners who are very diverse.

So if we want to ensure inclusive education in early childhood education we need to avoid the instructional nature of these settings.

We've got to avoid turning early education settings into formal schools.  
(Ayman Qwaider, *Inclusive Education Consultant, EENET*)

## What can you do?

### Work with other educators on inclusive education

Every early childhood educator needs to learn about inclusion principles and practices.

This might be achieved through attending training workshops or through self-study programmes – maybe watching films like this one!

You can also learn a lot about inclusion from your colleagues.

When a new educator comes to work at our kindergarten, we make them understand that learning cannot be boring. For example, if they are teaching about a tree, they cannot just stand near the tree and read a lecture about it. Instead, kids should interact with the tree; measure it, play games with the tree leaves. All learning happens through play. This way it is easier for both children and teachers, and it is more interesting than listening to long explanations.  
(Lesia Kovalchuk, *Headteacher, Pre-school No. 37, Lviv*)

You may have a colleague in your setting who has experience with children from particular backgrounds, or with teaching children with specific disabilities.

You can ask them for ideas and advice on how you can better support the learners in your class or group.

But do not expect colleagues with specialist expertise to take responsibility for teaching your learners.

It is still your responsibility to help all your learners develop and learn.

When you work with other educators as a team, you can share concerns, ideas and experiences.

This can help you respond more appropriately to any difficulties you experience supporting children's learning and development.

We meet often to discuss objectives and draft individual development plans for each child. We set goals for each child and every three months, or even more often, we meet to discuss progress towards goals, whether we have used the right teaching and learning methods to support the child's development. Sometimes the goal was wrong, and we have to adapt it.

*(Lesia Kovalchuk, Headteacher, Pre-school No. 37, Lviv)*

Usually, an early childhood development and education setting is less formal than a primary or secondary school.

This gives you, and the educators you work with, more opportunities to be flexible with how you organise and facilitate learning, and how to address inclusion challenges.

For example, you can use team-teaching, so that you work together with colleagues to plan and facilitate learning activities.

And you can bring different groups of learners together for different activities.

Here, learners from a pre-school and from a secondary school are participating in activities together – having fun and learning from each other.

## **Understand each child's development and needs**

Inclusive early childhood educators need a basic understanding of children's social, physical, intellectual, communication and emotional development.

Every child develops at a unique pace, so regular observations of each learner should be carried out.

You need to observe young children to understand and monitor their individual development, interests, strengths, and needs.

This should not involve measuring one young child against another.

I monitor children to assess what they know and how they are getting on. When we start using a new teaching method, we observe the classroom dynamics and whether the children like and learn better with the new approach. We also observe so that we can identify children's creative and other abilities.

*(Yana Zadyraka, Methodologist, Pre-school No. 2, 'Romashka', Mykolayivka)*

You need to notice if a child is developing certain skills more slowly, more quickly or differently than expected.

You can then adapt teaching and learning approaches for the child.

You might ask the child's parents or caregivers, and other educators with more specialist experience, to help you with adapting teaching and learning activities for the child.

Providing effective early support to a child can help prevent a developmental delay from becoming more pronounced over time.

You can help identify when young learners need support with rehabilitation or health matters.

You definitely do not need to be a medical expert, but you can work with other service providers to jointly understand and address the child's needs.

I'm with Lee-Ann's mother today to see the progress. First of all we identified the child and assessed the child, their health and their physical [abilities/needs] also. From there we work with a team from Cape Town. They make the wheelchair. After that we fit [it for] the child. Now the child is at the school.

*(James Tsabedze, Programme Officer, Vusumnotofo, Piggs Peak)*

There are simple things you can do to observe children's development.

- You can watch children's actions, expressions, gestures and behaviours.
- Listen to their language and communication skills when they are talking and interacting with each other.
- Watch them on their own, in pairs and in groups.
- Watch the children doing a range of activities that show you their social, physical, intellectual, communication, and emotional skills.
- You can take notice of what seems to interest or bore the children.
- Watch how they interact with adults or older children.
- And join in with their play or conversations.

## **Work closely with parents and caregivers**

Family and home are the biggest influences on a child's early development.

For this reason, there should be strong connections between learners' experiences at home and in the inclusive early childhood development and education setting.

If learners feel supported and comfortable, they are more likely to make progress with development and learning - especially during their early years.

You need to make lots of connections between the learning you facilitate and the children's lives and homes.

Draw on the customs, languages, games, events, people and objects that the young children are familiar with at home.

To do this, work closely with parents and caregivers.

They are the experts.

They know their own child better than anyone else.

They can tell you what the child is familiar with at home.

You and they can share insights into the child's interests, achievements and challenges.

I am pleased about how the relationships between the kindergarten team and myself as a parent have developed. I share with them about what happens at home, how Illia is doing, and, in turn, the teachers tell me about his day, what he has learned, what we should focus on, and we support the development of the child together.  
(*Nina Arsentieva, Community Pre-school No 74, Kharkiv City*)

Of course, some parents ask for advice, for example, "what can I do at home to help my child in a certain area?" We discuss and spell everything out: what to do, how to organise their activities at home, how to introduce the child to something.  
(*Natalia Kovaliova, Teacher, Pre-school No. 2, 'Romashka', Mykolayivka*)

You and your colleagues can encourage parents and caregivers to play an active role in their child's development and learning by making the education setting an inclusive and welcoming place for the parents and caregivers.

You can provide opportunities for them to get involved in activities, learning and discussions in the setting.

It is also important that you are pro-active and reach out to families.

You or your colleagues may need to make home visits to better understand what is helping or hindering a child's development and learning at home, or what is preventing them from attending or participating in your class or group.

There are different life situations, different families. Everyone comes to the kindergarten with their own problem or joy in the morning. We always find a common tongue: parents, children and us working together as a team.  
(*Natalia Kovaliova, Teacher, Pre-school No. 2, 'Romashka', Mykolayivka*)

Sometimes you may need to work with caregivers who are not children's family members, to find out about their lives at home.

Children who do not live with their families may face additional barriers to inclusion in education.

I work here in Nqaba Yethu children's home as a manager for the home. We have 15 children. We take all kinds of children. We try and bring them together and make them have a home. Most of the children that we have here, they have to start at pre-school level which is very important for every child. We try to go to the school regularly, just to be in contact with the teacher and understand what is wrong. Maybe sometimes it's taking a bit longer for the child [to learn] which means for you there is something more you have to do with the child regarding his school work.

*Makhosazana Vilakazi, Children's Home Officer, Nqaba Yethu Children's Home, Big Bend*

## **Organise a welcoming, stimulating learning environment**

Inclusive early childhood development and education settings need to be welcoming, fun, and promote interest and enjoyment in learning.

As an inclusive early childhood educator, there are lots of things you can do to achieve this.

For example:

Organise the space so that different areas are used for different activities.

During the day, children can move around freely and engage in activities in various areas. They work sitting at their desks or can sit on the mat or in the nature corner.

*(Oksana Bura, Headteacher, Pre-school No. 134, Lviv)*

Use outside spaces for learning through play, and for children to relax and have fun.

Create an area where you keep a selection of play and learning materials.

Keep all the materials well organised.

Being organised helps children to become independent, feel reassured, and learn where they can find or put things.

Provide different seating arrangements, so that children can choose to sit on the floor or at a table, or maybe sit on chairs in groups with their friends, whatever is most accessible or comfortable for them.

Sometimes, early childhood development and education sessions take place in temporary settings like community meeting rooms, or in temporary structures like tents in refugee camps.

But you can still find ways to create an inclusive, fun, stimulating, colourful environment for children for each session.

## **Plan the day and differentiate learning sessions and activities**

Young children find routine important.

Having a certain amount of predictability in the day helps them feel secure.

As an inclusive early childhood educator, you need to be well-organised so that the sessions and environment do not feel chaotic or confusing for your learners.

A strict timetable is not necessary or appropriate.

But you can plan times when learners will be inside and outside, and their eating times.

And you can make sure throughout the day they have opportunities to engage in different types of play.

In our kindergarten, as probably in any other preschool, there is a certain daily routine. After exercises, they have breakfast. After breakfast, there are learning sessions. The learning sessions are varied and diverse; we try to make them fun. We use many teaching aids to make them interesting for the children.

*(Viktoria Kapustina, Teacher, Community Pre-school No 74, Kharkiv City)*

You also need to have clear expectations for the children, so they know what they are allowed and not allowed to do.

Make sure all sessions are centred around play.

Give children the chance to choose what activities they want to do or what materials they want to use or play with.

When children have opportunities to do play-based activities involving things that interest them, they will be more engaged.

Such activities can also support them to develop specific skills, like counting.



We know that children learn differently. Some learn more when you sing, when you are using the songs, or the rhymes, some learn more when they see something. Others learn more when they play something with their hands. That's why we make sure that everything is being done so that we can reach each child in his or her differences. *(Thuli Gamedze, Teacher, Mahlabaneni Neighbourhood Care Point (NCP)/Pre-school, Goboyane, Big Bend)*

Of course we use differentiated approaches. When the teacher prepares a learning session, they must take into account that there is a child with special needs, and the learning process must be adapted to the needs of the child. *(Lesia Kovalchuk, Headteacher, Pre-school No. 37, Lviv)*

Give children the chance to choose the pace of activities – whether they want to do something fast and active, or slow and relaxing; whether they want to be quiet or make a noise.

Let them complete what they are doing – don't rush them to move onto another activity.

When children have a chance to choose the nature and pace of play-based learning activities, the activities are more accessible and suit their needs and abilities.

Sometimes you may want to encourage children to become more lively or to calm down.

Activities involving music and movement can be useful for this.

You need to make sure that children are active participants in every session.

## **Use real world objects to stimulate learning**

Young children learn better when there is an obvious connection between what they are learning and real life.

We try to ensure outdoor learning opportunities. We have a very nice outdoor area with different plants and trees, giving children different learning options. We provide the means for learning. We have a nature trail where children can learn by stopping at different places and doing various tasks, like games, entertainment, experiments, observations, treasure hunts, or some creative assignments. This way, they move along the trail and learn about various natural phenomena and objects. *(Oksana Bura, Headteacher, Pre-school No. 134, Lviv)*

We use some of the items we collect outside or anything that is rubbish. In preschool you make it good to work with it. Here in the preschool we do not have learning materials but I go around collecting whatever I can find outside and we use it to make toys and then we play with the toys we have made. We collect stones and when the children play with them it helps them to learn numbers. In the preschool, when we play outside, we use old tyres. The children love to push and roll them.

*(Hlob'sile Masuku, Teacher, Thembelihle Pre-school, Dingizwe)*

As an inclusive early childhood educator, you need to provide children with real life objects to use throughout the day.

Using objects like this can help young children to learn about colours, shapes, textures, smells, sounds, and weights.

Multi-sensory objects may be particularly useful for learners who have difficulty seeing or hearing.

Touching and manipulating objects as part of a learning activity can also help children who need more support with fine motor skills, or who have difficulty understanding or remembering things.

Using these simple ideas, early childhood educators can work to become more inclusive and supportive of the learning and development of all children.

# Handout 1a

Instructions:

- Read the handout aloud in the group or each participant read silently.
- Discuss the issues raised and ensure everyone understands.
- Find three examples from group members' experiences to illustrate this issue. If no one can think of any examples, create some.
- Choose a representative to present the issue to the whole group and another to describe the examples.
- Groups can be as creative as they wish. For example, they could use a flipchart to write the main points, they could facilitate a question and answer time, they could role play, draw or act out the main points.

## **Early childhood development and education builds the foundation for a bright future**

The early years are often called the foundation years. That is because, the knowledge, attitudes and skills learned in these crucial years form the basis for all future learning. Early years learning has a life-long impact on children's health, behaviour, their ability to form relationships and their success in education and employment. That is why there is increasing importance being given to early childhood programmes worldwide. What is often misunderstood, however, is that for these benefits to happen, the approach and focus of early years education must be both age-appropriate and appropriate to the individual child.

In early childhood, children learn best through exploration, play, stimulation, interaction with other children and educators, using their imagination and creativity. Children learn best when educators recognise, respect and respond to their unique abilities and interests. Once the ball of learning is rolling, a child in a stimulating and supportive environment will flourish.

# Handout 1b

Instructions:

- Read the handout aloud in the group, or each participant read silently.
- Discuss the issue raised and ensure everyone understands.
- Find three examples from group members' experiences to illustrate this issue. If no one can think of any examples, create some.
- Choose a representative to present the issue to the whole group and another to describe the examples.
- Groups can be as creative as they wish. For example, they could use a flipchart to write the main points, they could facilitate a question and answer time, they could role play, draw or act out the main points.

## **Ready for school or schools ready for children?**

Many people promote teaching academic subjects (especially literacy and numeracy) in early childhood settings using the same 'instructional' approaches used in schools. Critics point out that direct instruction is inappropriate for small children who best learn the foundational skills for literacy and numeracy through play and exploration, often with the support of other children and adults. The practice of using formal school-like instruction in early childhood settings is called 'schoolification'.

Supporters of the 'schoolification' of early years education believe it can give children an advantage when they enter school. However, research has shown that starting academic learning early does not, in fact, give any advantage. Children who are not developmentally 'ready' to learn through direct instruction do not learn effectively in this way. Moreover, restricting their opportunity to learn foundational pre-literacy and numeracy skills in an appropriate way undermines their success in the future. In addition, the experience of struggling and failing to achieve unattainable goals undermines children's motivation to learn. A narrow focus on academic learning can restrict children's opportunities to learn and develop the range of skills they need to thrive in and out of school. For example, a child who has difficulty controlling their emotions or cooperating with other children is at a disadvantage in a school setting.

Age-appropriate learning in the early years focuses on the process of learning as well as the content. The child's own interests and development is what guides educators to plan and implement learning experiences. Educators are not instructing children from a narrow curriculum, instead they are allowing children to explore and make sense of the world around them and providing them with the support they need along the way.

Early childhood development and education is not just preparation for school. It is also about supporting children to experience life and thrive in the present.

# Handout 1c

Instructions:

- Read the handout aloud in the group, or each participant read silently.
- Discuss the issue raised and ensure everyone understands.
- Find three examples from group members' experiences to illustrate this issue. If no one can think of any examples, create some.
- Choose a representative to present the issue to the whole group and another to describe the examples.
- Groups can be as creative as they wish. For example, they could use a flipchart to write the main points, they could facilitate a question and answer time, they could role play, draw or act out the main points.

## **Is schoolification supportive of inclusion?**

Schoolification, or school-like teaching in early childhood settings can lessen the opportunities for children to be included and support the inclusion of other children. A large part of inclusion involves child to child support, interaction between children and with the teacher, imitation and teaching one another. There is little room for these types of interactions in formal instruction.

Play-based learning, on the other hand, allows children to relax, play, and talk in a natural way. The role of educators in play-based learning is to play alongside children, support them to enjoy their learning experiences and to act as role models. Educators can provide tailored support to individual children when needed, while other children work in groups or independently.

A sense of belonging is a central part of ensuring that children, with all their diversities, experience inclusion. To belong, a child's individual interests, strengths and development are valued and celebrated. In this context, a child who is developing at a different rate or pace is supported and welcomed. But formal instruction with predetermined content to be learned could set the same child up for alienation and a sense of failure. It introduces a system of winners and losers.

Inclusive education calls for schools and early childhood settings to be responsive to the individual. So rather than making children ready for school, perhaps schools should be making themselves ready for children, all children.

# Handout 2a

## Shared responsibility for inclusion

Print enough copies so that each group receives one.

### Case studies

A child is blind. He has recently acquired a cane but needs to learn how to use it to move around independently. A trainer from the community rehabilitation centre has offered to come to the early childhood centre and give the child lessons.

A child speaks a minority language. Her parents want her to learn the dominant language. One of the staff speaks the child's language. This staff member spends a lot of time especially with this child to assist her in understanding others and the routines.

A child sometimes has violent behaviour. Staff are worried that she will hurt other children. They allocate one staff member to play games with her separate from the other children.

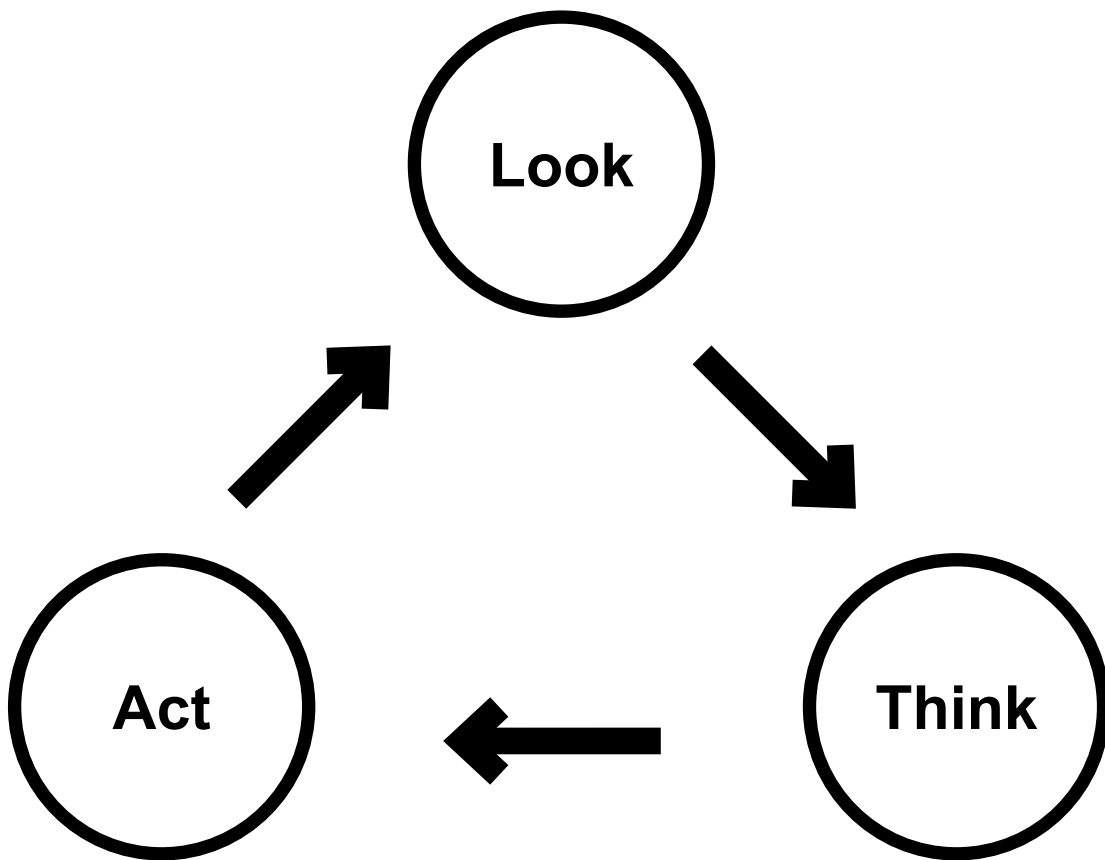
A child has Down Syndrome. Each week, a specialist teacher comes to visit him and works with him at a separate table to develop his language and cognitive skills.

A child with multiple impairments attends an early childhood centre. He has an assistant teacher who attends with him. This teacher makes sure that he can participate in whatever is happening in the centre.

# Handout 2b

## Action research

Display on a flipchart or PowerPoint slide.





# Handout 3a

## Child development cards

Print and cut out so one group receives this set of cards.

### Self Help

<b>Pulls off socks</b>	<b>Finds front of clothing</b>	<b>Unbuttons own clothing</b>
<b>Pushes arms through sleeves, legs through pants</b>	<b>Puts hat on head and takes off</b>	<b>Laces shoes</b>
<b>Holds out arms and legs while being dressed</b>	<b>Takes off simple clothing that has been unfastened</b>	<b>Buttons own clothing</b>
<b>Unbuttons large buttons on a board</b>	<b>Dresses completely except for fastenings</b>	<b>Puts on shoes</b>

Print and cut out so one group receives this set of cards.

**Social**

<b>Comforts playmates in distress</b>	<b>Hands book to adult to read or share with him/her</b>	<b>Chooses own friends</b>
<b>Vocalises in response to attention</b>	<b>Will take turns</b>	<b>Plays with 2-3 peers</b>
<b>Shows response to own name by looking or reaching to be picked up</b>	<b>Makes a choice when asked</b>	<b>Shares object or food when requested with another child</b>
<b>Imitates movements of another child at play</b>	<b>Imitates peek-a-boo</b>	<b>Repeats rhymes, song, or dances for others</b>

Print and cut out so one group receives this set of cards.

**Physical**

<b>Claps hands</b>	<b>Marks with a crayon</b>	<b>Turns pages one at a time</b>
<b>Builds tower of 3 blocks</b>	<b>Snips with scissors</b>	<b>Grasps pencil between thumb and forefinger, resting on third finger</b>
<b>Reaches for preferred objects</b>	<b>Puts down one object deliberately to reach for another</b>	<b>Builds tower of 5-6 blocks</b>
<b>Transfers objects from one hand to another in sitting position</b>	<b>Turns pages of a book several at a time</b>	<b>Dumps object from receptacle</b>

Print and cut out so one group receives this set of cards.

**Cognitive**

<b>Shakes a sound-making toy on a string</b>	<b>Draws a V stroke in imitation</b>	<b>Names three shapes</b>
<b>Copies a circle</b>	<b>Finds object hidden under container</b>	<b>Counts to 3 in imitation</b>
<b>Matches three colours</b>	<b>Points to self when asked “where’s (name)?”</b>	<b>Names eight colours</b>
<b>Points to one body part on request</b>	<b>Draws a vertical line in imitation</b>	<b>Names big and little objects</b>

Print and cut out so one group receives this set of cards.

**Language and Communication**

<b>Names 5 other family members</b>	<b>Carries out a series of two related commands</b>	<b>Describes items as open or closed</b>
<b>Uses “no” or “not” in speech</b>	<b>Answers question “What’s this?” with object name</b>	<b>Tells how common objects are used</b>
<b>Combines two different syllables in vocal play</b>	<b>Tells familiar story without pictures for cues</b>	<b>Says “I”, “me” or “mine” rather than own name</b>
<b>Repeats sounds made by others</b>	<b>Points to 12 familiar objects when named</b>	<b>Says five different words</b>

# Handout 3b

## Child development answer lists

### Self help

Holds out arms and legs while being dressed  
Puts hat on head and takes off  
Pulls off socks  
Pushes arms through sleeves, legs through pants  
Puts on shoes  
Takes off simple clothing that has been unfastened  
Finds front of clothing  
Unbuttons large buttons on a board  
Unbuttons own clothing  
Buttons own clothing  
Dresses completely except for fastenings  
Laces shoes

### Social

Vocalises in response to attention  
Imitates peek-a-boo  
Shows response to own name by looking or reaching to be picked up  
Imitates movements of another child at play  
Hands book to adult to read or share with him/her  
Plays with 2-3 peers  
Shares object or food when requested with another child  
Makes a choice when asked  
Will take turns  
Repeats rhymes, song, or dances for others  
Comforts playmates in distress  
Chooses own friends

## **Physical**

Reaches for preferred objects  
Puts down one object deliberately to reach for another  
Transfers objects from one hand to another in sitting position  
Dumps object from receptacle  
Turns pages of a book several at a time  
Claps hands  
Builds tower of 3 blocks  
Marks with a crayon  
Builds tower of 5-6 blocks  
Turns pages one at a time  
Grasps pencil between thumb and forefinger, resting on third finger  
Snips with scissors

## **Cognitive**

Shakes a sound-making toy on a string  
Finds object hidden under container  
Points to one body part on request  
Points to self when asked "where's (name)?"  
Draws a vertical line in imitation  
Copies a circle  
Matches three colours  
Names big and little objects  
Counts to 3 in imitation  
Draws a V stroke in imitation  
Names three shapes  
Names eight colours

## **Language and Communication**

Repeats sounds made by others  
Combines two different syllables in vocal play  
Says five different words  
Points to 12 familiar objects when named  
Answers question "What's this?" with object name  
Names 5 other family members  
Uses "no" or "not" in speech  
Carries out a series of two related commands  
Says "I", "me" or "mine" rather than own name  
Describes items as open or closed  
Tells how common objects are used  
Tells familiar story without pictures for cues

# Handout 3c

## Types of observations

Print a copy of this handout for each group:

- Watching children's actions, expressions, gestures and behaviours
- Looking at what children create (e.g. paintings, sand creations, playdough, clay, blocks buildings, etc.) and listening to how they describe them
- Listening to children's talk: what they talk about and the language they use
- Joining in with children's play or conversations
- Watching how children behave on their own, in pairs and in groups
- Noticing what children enjoy doing and find difficult (e.g. working alone or with other children, drawing, building, imaginative play, moving, being still, listening, choosing, making themselves understood)
- Watching how they interact with adults or older children



# Handout 3d

## Assumptions

Print and cut out these cards so that each group can get one card each.

<b>See the learner, not the problem.</b>
<b>Children are expert learners.</b>
<b>Children have existing knowledge, skills and attitudes they can use for learning.</b>
<b>Start with what is present, not what is absent.</b>
<b>Children grow and develop from their interests and abilities.</b>
<b>All children can learn with the right support.</b>

# Handout 3e

## Change your focus

Print copies of this handout or display on a screen.<sup>1</sup>

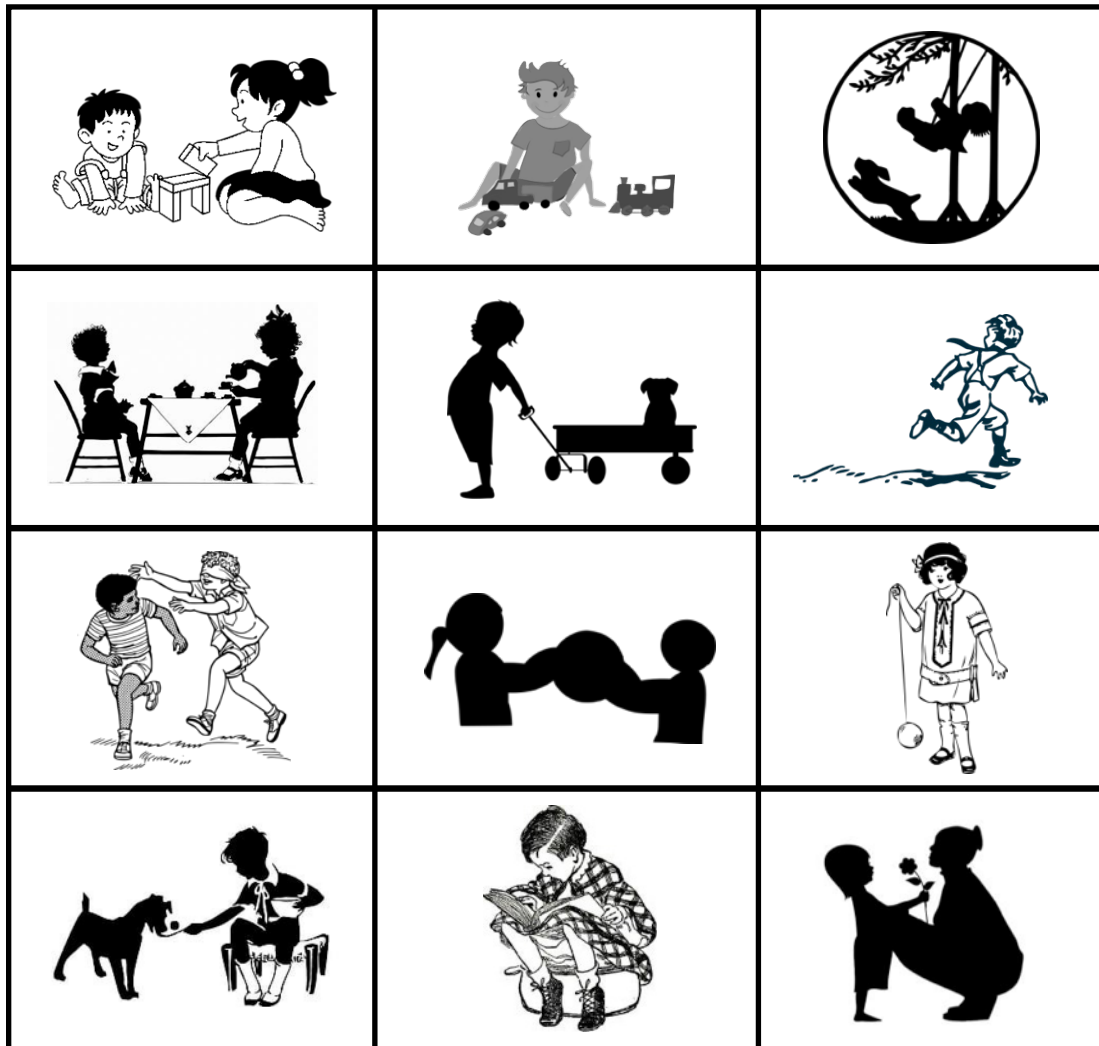


<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Younggoldwoman.jpg>

# Handout 3f

## What do you see?

Print a copy of this handout for each participant.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Pictures all sourced through creativecommons.org

1. <https://publicdomainvectors.org/en/free-clipart/Children-playing-image/66726.html>
2. <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/boy-child-children-preschool-toys-1443459/>
3. <https://publicdomainvectors.org/en/free-clipart/Child-on-swing-silhouette-vector-image/16410.html>
4. <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=161360&picture=tea-time>
5. <https://freessvg.org/child-pulling-wagon>
6. <https://www.needpix.com/photo/28690/boy-silhouette-kid-running-play-playing-child-joy-fun>
7. <https://svgsilh.com/image/37705.html>
8. <https://svgsilh.com/image/145067.html>
9. <https://www.needpix.com/photo/26238/girl-young-ball-game-playing>
10. <https://www.pickpik.com/boy-dog-friends-pet-animal-love-94907>
11. [https://www.flickr.com/photos\\_internetarchivebookimages/14762567894](https://www.flickr.com/photos_internetarchivebookimages/14762567894)
12. <https://www.wallpaperflare.com/silhouette-adoption-diversefamily-child-motherday-female-wallpaper-agjpf>

# Handout 4a

## Family background

Print and cut out so each group receives one slip of paper.

<b>The child speaks a different language at home</b>
<b>The child has unique customs and culture at home</b>
<b>The child has a blended family</b>
<b>The child has a learning impairment</b>
<b>The child has been unwell for a long time</b>
<b>The child has recently moved to the country</b>
<b>The child has a physical disability</b>

# Handout 4b

## Parent and family expertise

Print 9 copies and insert a phrase from the following list into the blank space in each copy:

1. decision making
2. providing long term support
3. advocating
4. setting goals
5. planning for the future
6. determining the capabilities
7. understanding the temperament, motivation and interests
8. the health and wellbeing
9. communication

Parents or families are experts in \_\_\_\_\_

for their child because ....

# Handout 5a

## Interactions

Print and cut out so each group receives one slip.

<b>Ask questions and allow time for children to give long extended answers.</b>
<b>Have meaningful conversations with children about things important to them.</b>
<b>Follow a child's lead in a discussion.</b>
<b>Have real two-way conversations with plenty of time for the child to talk.</b>
<b>Give time for children to express and contribute their ideas.</b>
<b>React to individual needs.</b>

**Notice when a child needs more help.**

**Allow children to choose where, what and how they play.**

**Help children to appreciate the contribution of their peers.**

**Intervene when exclusion occurs and support children to resolve problems.**



# Handout 6a

## Inclusive muddy puddle

Print out large or display on a PowerPoint slide.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Source: Creative Commons <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1190505>

# Handout 6b

## Example children

Print enough copies for each group and cut out slips.

**One child is hesitating to join in and you notice he is wearing a very clean and tidy shirt. You know that his family is not wealthy.**

**One child has a dry skin condition. You are concerned that the mud or water could irritate her skin, but she really looks like she wants to join in.**

**One child is guarding the puddle and not allowing other children to join her play.**

**One child uses a wheelchair and is trying to lean down far enough to touch the mud with his fingers.**

**One child wants to join in, and keeps running and picking up mud to throw at others while laughing.**

**One child is very carefully pouring mud into a small container and looking nervously at other children coming close to his concentrated activity.**

**One child is standing touching the water with his feet and fingers. He watches the other children, but appears somewhat bored.**

# Handout 6c

## Intentional teaching scenarios

Print enough copies for each pair to receive one.

This week there is a culturally significant day which is important to some children and families in the centre. You wish to acknowledge and value this day.

Flu season is approaching and you want to raise children's awareness of hand hygiene.

A child attending the centre is from a minority ethnic group. You notice the other children excluding him from their play.

A deaf child has recently started attending the centre and he communicates using sign language. None of the other children know any sign language yet.

A child is very interested in playing with dinosaurs. He likes to play alone and does not allow others in his space.

A child is showing an interest in drumming and making loud noises with sticks and boxes.

A group of girls spend an entire day at the centre pretending to be cats.

# Handout 7a

## Real-world learning about apples

Print one copy to read aloud.

A group of children from an early childhood centre go on a trip to a local apple orchard. The orchard is owned by the family of one of the children.

Children are given baskets and head off to explore around the trees. The trees are not easy to climb, but some children try. Some apples have fallen and the children collect a few. They find holes in them and bugs have eaten them. A group of children form around some apples with worms in them. An educator breaks the apple open so they can see how far in the worm has eaten.

A worker brings a small ladder and assists the children to climb high enough to pick apples. She shows them how to tell which ones are ripe. When they picked an unripe apple, she cuts off some small pieces so that children can taste the sourness if they want to. With baskets full of ripe apples, all the children can taste their ripe apples.

Back at the centre, an educator provides a peeler and bowls so that children who are interested can join in with peeling apples ready for preserving. Later in the day, an educator and the children slice apples for the children to eat at lunch time and each child takes a few apples home to share with their family.

Over the following week the apples are prepared in different ways, dried, made into apple vinegar, apple pie and stewed apple, all for the children to taste. For each recipe, an educator sets up a table with some part of the process that children can assist with. The educators make copies of the recipes for children to take home.

The orchard owners later deliver a potted apple tree to be planted in the early childhood centre garden and cared for by the children.

# Handout 7b

## Natural resources – loose parts

Use for an example<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup>Source: Ngamotu Kindergarten, New Zealand