

Benefits of Inclusion for Children with Special Needs

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Inclusion occurs when children with special needs are fully included in their neighborhood schools and communities, and have the right to participate in the same daily programs and activities available to all children giving them a life as normal as possible. Researchers have determined that when children with special needs are placed in an inclusive classroom they experience many benefits that enhance many essential skill areas required for development specifically language and communication, cognitive and behavioral, and social skills.

Studies on inclusion have indicated that during their formative year's children develop language more effectively if they are with children who speak appropriately and accurately for their age group. Children in these settings demonstrated improved language and communication skills by being able to use more words and phrases learned from observing those peers around them, which also gives them the skills needed to express themselves. As a result they are better able to interact and communicate with others and made gains in their reading ability.

Within an inclusive setting, children often enhance their academic achievement and develop improved functional skills due to higher expectations and more stimulation that motivates them to be more physical due to being around peers and not just family members, which aids as a stress reliever. More importantly children improve their cognitive and behavioral development, and are better able to accept individual differences by noticing similarities that exist between themselves and other, and therefore, accept others for who they are. Children will develop patience, compassion, and gain the skills required to deal with obstacles. Inclusive environments also encouraged positive interactions and learning for all children improving performance on standardized tests, mastery of individualized program plan goals and added motivation to learn. Research has also found that when a child spent more time in the regular classroom they had higher cognitive skills, fewer behavioral problems, and did not regress like they may do when in the home environment.

Inclusive schooling is the most effective way for children with special needs and their peers to develop a relationship. Children are more likely to learn social skills in an environment that is as close to normal conditions of growth and development, and therefore, children with special needs learn more from being around their typical peers giving them the chance to have positive peer interactions and create friendships outside of their family. Children in inclusive classrooms love being in a social setting, being around people, and often thrive off this environment by participating as an active member in class. As well the frequent interaction with peers provides children with a way to practice and improve social skills such as sharing and cooperating with other children and create richer friendships.

Through all the studies conducted on inclusion of children with special needs researchers have concluded that these children should be educated with peers to the greatest extent possible, since it is evident that children positively improve their skills and development, specifically social skills and relationships with peers, when placed with others their own age. Successful inclusion is thought to also occur when:

- Child made progress on individualized outcomes or goals
- Child made gains in personal development and gained knowledge and skills typical for all children
- Child welcomed by peers and accepted as a full member of a program
- Child appears to be comfortable and happy in this environment

Overall, all three skill sets are learned through the same means of observation and imitation of those around a child, especially their peers, and each of these skill areas are required to aid a child in reaching their full potential.