



# EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT INDICATORS OF HIGH QUALITY INCLUSION AND EXEMPLARS

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Early Care and Education Environments Indicators detail the critical practices to implement in early care and education environments based on evidence-based practices. They are designed to support efforts to improve classroom teaching practices and environments to maximize the access, meaningful participation, and developmental outcomes of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings.

## INDICATOR 1: Promotion and Affirmation of Individual Differences

Personnel promote acceptance and appreciation of children's individual differences and varying abilities with a focus on children's strengths and contributions to an enjoyable, engaging and positive learning environment.

### Exemplars:

- Personnel routinely comment on the accomplishments of all children to the entire learning community.
- Personnel display all children's work.
- Personnel call attention to all children's contributions.
- Personnel identify all children's preferences and continually use these during instruction.
- Personnel actively facilitate belonging of all children in the learning community regardless of severity or type of disability and/or presence of challenging behavior.

For more information, visit <http://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion>

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## INDICATOR 2: Family Partnerships

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Personnel develop authentic and culturally responsive relationships with families that involve daily communication about children's learning and development and frequent celebrations of the child. Families are provided with multiple and varied opportunities to provide input into their child's learning and supports.

### Exemplars:

- Personnel create an environment for open and two-way communication with families by using a variety of strategies to communicate with families and by offering opportunities for families to share information about themselves and the child.
- Personnel affirm the languages spoken by families in the program and use multiple forms of communication based on the preferences of families, including in person, paper, and electronic (e.g., email, text, app) information sharing.
- Personnel build and sustain trusting, responsive relationships with families.
- Personnel assume familial competence. Jargon-free information is shared with families about the program and about decisions the early care and education environment team makes related to strategies used with the child, and families are seen as a source for ideas, materials and support for planning and developing early care and education environment activities.
- Personnel include and involve families in early care and education environment activities at the extent to which families want to and are able to be involved. Providers offer a multitude of ways for families to be involved (e.g., observing, volunteering, developing materials outside of the early care and education environment). Opportunities for involvement are culturally and linguistically affirming.
- Personnel involve families as members of their child's educational team by inviting them to meetings regarding important programming decisions, sharing important information, asking families for their ideas, opinions, and guidance and involving them in the development and evaluation of goals, placements and other aspects of the individualized plan/IEP.
- Personnel encourage families to be involved in program leadership and regularly share information about opportunities to do so with families.

## INDICATOR 3: Social Emotional Learning and Development

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Personnel foster positive and culturally responsive adult-child relationships, establish predictable routines, and intentionally teach a range of social emotional skills. When children engage in challenging behavior, a team-based approach is used to understand what the child is communicating, how to adapt the environment, and what social emotional skills to teach and/or strengthen.

### Exemplars:

- Personnel foster positive and culturally responsive adult-child relationships as demonstrated by a ratio of a minimum of 5 positive statements (e.g., tell children how awesome they are and catch children being good) to every 1 negative statement.
- Personnel respond to at least 80% of children's bids for attention or communication.
- Personnel establish predictable routines through the use of visual schedules that are posted and used by personnel and children throughout the day.
- Personnel intentionally teach a range of social emotional skills in small and large group, using prepared curricular materials and/or activities that target particular social emotional skills (e.g., understanding emotions, problem solving, entering play, taking turns).

- After establishing an authentic relationship with the family, personnel use a team-based approach to understand individual children’s challenging behavior, adapt the environment, and plan individualized instruction to teach or strengthen the child’s social emotional skills.
- Personnel include families as members of their children’s behavior team. Any time that an individualized positive behavior support process is implemented, families are included as active members of the team at all steps of the process.
- Personnel regularly acknowledge and comment on children’s emotional states.

## **INDICATOR 4: Meaningful Interactions with Peers**

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Personnel use various strategies to promote interactions between children without disabilities and children with disabilities. This includes organizing the environment and teaching specific social skills to children that promote peer interactions for all children, encourage peer interactions with multiple exchanges, and increase the complexity of peer interactions.

### **Exemplars:**

- Personnel include peer social interaction goals on the IEP.
- Personnel teach appropriate peer social skills through group lessons to all children (large and small group) and role-playing opportunities.
- Personnel teach children a variety and complexity of play skills to support participation and peer interactions across all children in the early care and education environment.
- Personnel select and arrange activities that promote interactions.
- Personnel select and arrange materials that promote interactions.
- Personnel plan for consistent social opportunities within routines (e.g., table captain, clean-up partner, snack set up, etc.).
- Personnel model phrases children can use to initiate, respond and continue interactions.
- Personnel teach all children to be instructional agents to capitalize on strengths and abilities of all children.
- Personnel encourage peer partners/buddies (e.g., peer transitions, buddy play, clean up partners, etc.).

## **INDICATOR 5: Curriculum**

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Personnel develop or modify and implement teaching plans that optimize the amount of time all children spend engaged in activities (small and large group, play, and other routines (e.g., arrival, snack)) and across all domains of learning. The planned activities consider the specialized equipment, assistive technology (low and high tech), and materials children with disabilities benefit from.

### **Exemplars:**

- Personnel select themes that reflect children’s interests, abilities, familial/cultural norms and developmental levels.
- Personnel make necessary adaptations to ensure that all children can access and participate in all curricular activities.
- Personnel modify materials to enable manipulation by children with a range of motor skills.
- Personnel use signs, gestures and visual cues during activities when appropriate.

- Personnel use visual, verbal and gestural cues with materials to help children participate more independently.
- Personnel reduce distraction by limiting materials in the environment when necessary.
- Personnel integrate individual children's adaptive, augmentative communication systems into all early care and education environment routines, ensure that pictures or AAC systems are readily available to individual children at all times.

## INDICATOR 6: Instruction

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Personnel present in the early care and education environment use child-led, culturally responsive, embedded, evidence-based and data-driven instruction during naturally occurring routines (e.g., small and large group activities, play, adaptive) to provide all children with sufficient opportunities to learn the skills that the team, including the family, has identified as important in a timely manner. Instructional supports are individualized, effective, considerate of varied learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile, etc.), and delivered by all staff.

### Exemplars:

- Personnel recognize children's strengths, needs, interests and abilities through observation, recording information, and identify reinforcers to inform instruction.
- Personnel develop or modify curricular activities that address curricular goals as well as targeted goals and objectives on the individualized plan/IEP.
- Personnel follow children's lead by responding to ongoing play and initiations in a manner designed to increase and improve quality of engagement.
- Personnel embed instruction and targeted goals into naturally occurring opportunities for learning (e.g., works on language, social and fine motor skills while practicing at the snack table).
- Personnel plan repetition, modeling and imitation to assist in skill development.
- Personnel break tasks down into smaller steps for teaching purposes interspersing familiar and less familiar materials.
- Personnel use evidence-based instructional practices (e.g., least to most prompting, intentional teaching, mand model, etc.).
- Personnel create opportunities to address all stages of the learning cycle: acquisition, fluency, maintenance and generalization.

## INDICATOR 7: Collaborative Teaming

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Personnel demonstrate dispositions consistent with positive communication and collaboration (e.g., flexibility, coachability, ethics) with team members including the special educator, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, teaching assistant and families to gather and share information, review data, plan, implement and embed instructional supports and adaptations for individual children within the naturally occurring routines of the early care and education environment.

### Exemplars:

- Team members develop norms for meetings consistent with the team's values and goals.
- Team members meet formally and as a whole to plan lessons and curricular activities, make adaptations, determine effective instructional strategies and review data.

- Team members have informal and ongoing conversations to exchange ideas, share observations, and discuss new strategies.
- Team members are willing to share their role with other team members and accept the responsibilities of others to the benefit of children and families.
- Team members communicate information regarding children's needs, interests, and programming goals with all staff members.
- Team members give and accept feedback from other staff and demonstrate a high level of coachability.
- Team members participate in team discussions about children's preferences, interests and learning as well as the practices that support overall development.
- Team members actively seek input from families in decision-making and generalization to other environments.

## INDICATOR 8: Assessment

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Personnel use ongoing observation and authentic assessment practices that span all areas of development and are culturally responsive, non-biased, and in children's primary language to understand children's learning and development. Data about individual children's learning are monitored and inform the use of adaptations or additional supports for children.

### Exemplars:

- Personnel collaborate with families to identify what assessments to use and when they should be used.
- Personnel collaborate with their instructional team to identify and engage in ongoing assessment for all children.
- Personnel identify and use culturally and developmentally appropriate assessments and assessment processes (e.g., use of translators) that are reliable and valid.
- Personnel regularly engage in developmental screening and take appropriate follow-up actions.
- Personnel use an appropriate assessment tool(s) to identify objectives and goals related to the general education curriculum and across developmental domains for all children including children with disabilities.
- Personnel engage in regular progress monitoring related to all children's goals and objectives, including individualized plan/IEP goals.
- Personnel use data from progress monitoring to make environmental or instructional adaptations.
- Personnel use data from progress monitoring to make changes to goals and objectives, including, but not limited to individualized plan/IEP goals.

## **INDICATOR 9: Culturally Responsive and Identity Affirming Practices**

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Personnel use culturally responsive and identity affirming practices, including: (a) being conscious of the ways in which race, ethnicity, social class, gender, language, immigration and refugee status and disability are constructed and the impact of various intersecting identities (e.g., race and disability or gender and disability) on individual children and their families' experiences, (b) learning about and improving their own awareness of implicit and explicit biases, (c) forming relationships with children and families from various cultures, and (d) providing learning activities that connect to children's experiences, funds of knowledge, and cultural/familial norms.

### **Exemplars:**

- Personnel identify the ways in which race, ethnicity, social class, gender, language, immigration and refugee status, and disability are socially constructed.
- Personnel describe how social constructions impact children and families with social privilege or social oppression in their environments.
- Personnel describe the impact of various intersecting identities (e.g., race and disability or gender and disability) on individual children and families' experiences in their environment.
- Personnel participate in professional development in or outside of their program focused on improving their own awareness of implicit and explicit biases.
- Personnel form and sustain positive relationships with children and families with various identities.
- Personnel use learning activities and materials in large and small groups that connect to children's experiences, funds of knowledge, and cultural/familial norms beyond token holidays, foods, costumes, etc.