



Inclusion is about proactive approaches

Proactive approaches in children's services means educators are working towards ensuring that all children and their families have the best start possible. This requires taking time to reflect on current enrolment and orientation practices, build on what is working well, and consider what else can be done to make this experience a positive one for all families.

Relationships are crucial to everything educators do for children and families. It is through respectful and trusting relationships that families are more likely to feel safe and share their hopes, dreams and desires for their child. This is true of all families, regardless of their cultural background, family structure, or the unique and varied needs, strengths and abilities of their children.

It is through relationships that educators are able to exchange valuable information with families that will assist them to ensure they are adequately prepared to include all children. These conversations acknowledge the child's parent/s as their first and most influential teacher. They offer valuable insights and perspectives that educators might not have previously considered.

For some families, telling someone they have only just met about their child can be daunting. If a family's previous experience has not been positive, they may be reluctant to tell the whole story for fear of their reaction. Families not familiar with the way children's services operate may also have different ideas and expectations about what will happen and what is expected of them. This can add to their uncertainty and anxiety.

Enrolling a child with diverse abilities can also create concerns for educators, despite good intentions and a genuine commitment to ensuring an inclusive approach. Educators may not be sure about what to ask or the best way to ask it. They may also be concerned that they don't have the information, skills or expertise needed to include children with particular disabilities and diverse needs.

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Some tips for getting started

- Maintain open and respectful communication with families
- Be mindful of language: avoid jargon, labels and technical terms that may isolate others
- Ask about strengths and interests, hopes and desires, as well as areas of need or concern
- Use relevant community language resources to enhance communication with families

Questions for reflection

- What can you do to ensure every family feels welcome and has a sense of belonging?

- How do you share information with families enrolling a child into the program?
- How do you support families to communicate freely and confidently in conversations about their child?

Key Points

- Work in partnership with families to utilise their expert knowledge of their child
- Remain sensitive and respectful to the context and needs of individual families
- Create a culture where asking questions is encouraged and valued
- Take time to regularly review and improve on enrolment and orientation procedures

If teams are unsure or have any further questions they can contact the *ACT Inclusion Support Agency (ISA)* for further assistance on **6287 3330** or via email **inclusion@commsatwork.org**

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The ACT Inclusion Support Agency is managed by Communities@Work and is an initiative of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) funded by the Australian Government.