

# Children with Additional Needs

## About Additional Needs

The term **additional needs** is used to indicate that a child requires extra support or services so that they can participate fully in quality early childhood care and education. This could be the result of a temporary change in circumstances or it could be an ongoing issue. For example:

- A medical condition such as asthma or allergies
- A delay in a child's development, such as difficulties with language
- A diagnosed developmental disorder such as autism
- A disability – physical, sensory, intellectual
- Problems arising from abuse, neglect, trauma, loss or grief
- Belonging to a group that might have difficulty using your service (e.g. people who speak a language other than English).

Children's services organisations adopt **inclusive practices** to make sure they meet the needs of all children, including those with additional needs. This may mean changing or extending the daily care practices of staff, or helping families to access support from other agencies.

The **inclusion** of children with additional needs into services offered to all children may have a number of benefits. These include reducing stigma, building children's self-concept, supporting children's optimal development and helping others to appreciate diversity in our community.

## Why is this important for mental health and wellbeing?

One way to support people's wellbeing is to make sure that everyone feels included and accepted in society and has fair access to a range of activities and opportunities. This is called **social inclusion** and is an important factor in our mental health and wellbeing.

To promote social inclusion, all children should be given every opportunity to have diverse experiences, to explore, socialise, learn and achieve to their ability. Children who have additional needs may require extra support to help them participate in the opportunities and activities available within their community.

Some children with additional needs are at greater risk of certain mental health problems or disorders, which may emerge in childhood, adolescence or adulthood. Promoting children's best possible development, physical health and social inclusion from the early years on may help to prevent or reduce the impact of mental health problems or disorders.

## What should I look for?

When planning for the inclusion of a child with additional needs, things to consider include:

- Does the child need the environment or equipment to be modified in any way?
- Does this child have any special routines or care requirements?
- Could you adapt planned games or activities to make sure the child can be included?
- Is there anything you could do to help this child develop confidence and friendships?
- Do the staff need any professional development to help them better support this child?
- Does the child or family need assessment or support from another agency?

## What should I do?

Children's services staff need to create an environment that is inclusive, respectful, safe and supportive for all children. It is important to acknowledge and support individual differences and needs where possible, in the practices of staff and in the policies and procedures of the service.

Strategies include:

- Promoting and modelling attitudes of respect, acceptance and understanding
- Learning more about the need or condition and how best to support the child and family
- Talking with the child's family about his or her needs, abilities and interests
- Respecting and following the advice of other professionals working with the child
- Helping the child to be included, gain a sense of belonging and develop friendships
- Being flexible and ready to adapt to any change in the child's needs or situation
- Taking action if you notice that other children are not showing respect or inclusion.

Families provide vital information about a child's care and routines, so if there are additional needs it is important to work in partnership. Families may be working with other services or agencies, and these organisations can often provide useful information too. Many children's services staff will work with an inclusion support agency to help them meet children's needs. Inclusion support agencies can assist with accessing specialist equipment and resources, developing service support plans and applying for funding to provide for additional support.

If you think that a child in your care has additional needs that are not being met as well as they could be, you should advocate on behalf of that child. To advocate means to speak out for someone else's needs or rights.

This could mean recommending changes within your own service, creating stronger links with the family or other agencies, or advocating at a broader level for tolerance and inclusion across the community. If in doubt, discuss the child's needs in the first instance with your supervisor, manager or service director.

## Where can I find out more?

The Response Ability website ([www.responseability.org](http://www.responseability.org)) has more detailed fact sheets on a range of issues affecting children and families, listed under *Education and Children's Services*.

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Nixon, D., & Gould, K. (2000). *Emerging: Child development in the first three years* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp.148-166). Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press.

Owens, A. (2007). Supporting children with additional needs. Extract from NCAC Newsletter *Putting Children First*, (23), 6-8. Retrieved 12 May, 2009, from [http://www.ncac.gov.au/pcf/Supporting\\_Children\\_with\\_Additional\\_Needs\\_Sept07.pdf](http://www.ncac.gov.au/pcf/Supporting_Children_with_Additional_Needs_Sept07.pdf).