

## Breaking down barriers

This means examining what we have identified as potentially discriminatory, and applying the knowledge, information and understanding that we have acquired to dismantle those attitudes, policies, practices and procedures that disadvantage or discriminate against children, their families or workers. Do we :

- know what to look for to identify prejudice, discrimination and disadvantage?
- discuss together what to do if we do find any discrimination or disadvantage?
- take action to remove the barriers to participation and belonging for all children and families?
- collect and evaluate the data on employment and admissions?
- collect and evaluate data on incidents of bullying/name-calling?
- observe the activities of children to ensure that they are all able to (and do) access all that is available?

Real participation involves consultation, social change, power sharing and shared decision-making. It means joining in, and being able to join in wherever possible. It means listening to children and recognising every person's equal entitlement to whatever is available with any barriers to that removed. Do we:

- observe children to assess their levels of participation?
- ensure a full range of learning opportunities is available and accessible to all children?
- take specific efforts to ensure access to learning opportunities for every child?
- involve families in their children's participation?
- take positive action with children to include one another?
- provide regular opportunities for children to consider concepts of fairness and justice, to empathise and to take their own responsibility to ensure every child is included?

## Belonging

Belonging implies that all children, their families and early years workers feel and believe that they are truly accepted for themselves and treated equally, with any of their needs addressed. Being fully accepted means that whatever our strengths and weaknesses, interests and inclinations, we feel we belong – in what we are doing, or not doing, and feeling able to take time out to be quiet and still feel we belong. It is perhaps the best measure of inclusion.

- Is our setting a place where any child arriving tomorrow will feel welcome and have all their needs met?
- Will every child see aspects of their culture, gender, religion, language, method of communication, disability, ethnicity and skin colour reflected in the environment?
- Will all children know that any disability or difference is accepted and provided for positively?
- Will workers feel that this is a place where they belong?
- Will families feel that this is a place where they belong?

## Some useful resources

Dickins, M., with Denziloe, J. (2004) *All together: How to create inclusive services for disabled children and their families. A practical handbook for early years workers.* London: National Children's Bureau, London.

Early Years Trainers Anti Racist Network (2001) *A Policy for Excellence :developing a policy for equality in early years settings.* Wallasey: Early Years Equality.

Hyder, T. (2005) *War, conflict and play.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lane, J. (forthcoming revision) *Action for racial equality in the early years : understanding the past, thinking about the present, planning for the future.* London: National Children's Bureau.

London, J. (1998) *Equal opportunities in practice.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Persona Doll Training (1998) *Unlearning discrimination in the early years.* London: Trentham Books.

Persona Doll Training (2004) *Celebrating Diversity : Inclusion in practice.* Video and support book [www.persona-doll-training.org](http://www.persona-doll-training.org)

Pre-school Learning Alliance (2001) *Equal Chances: Eliminating discrimination and ensuring equality in pre-school settings,* London: PLA.



## Participation and Belonging in Early Years Settings Inclusion: Working towards equality



"Every Child Matters"

**INCLUSION** is a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down barriers to participation and belonging.\*

Inclusion in early years settings is a goal for all early years workers – teachers and carers, managers, trainers, advisers, policymakers, development and support workers, administrators, inspectors, and local authority/EYDCP officers.

Working together with families and children themselves, we can ensure that all children participate and belong in their schools, nurseries, playgroups, children's centres and with childminders.

We can also ensure that all early years workers are equally valued in their workplace.

\* This definition was devised by members of the national Early Childhood Forum in 2003.

Thinking of inclusion as a process means that your organisation has a coherent strategy for issues of equality. The process breaks down into five crucial stages: identifying, understanding, breaking down barriers, participation, belonging. At each stage, different aspects are considered, enabling all who work in an early years setting to ensure that every child is included.

Each individual early years worker has a vital role in implementing inclusion and individual efforts added together should form a cohesive approach. Implementing inclusion entails considering all aspects of our work and how stereotypes, attitudes and assumptions may prevent inclusion.

And don't forget the significant influence families have on their children – we have to ensure that they are fully involved as well.

This leaflet considers each of the five stages in the inclusion process in turn, defining them and raising questions about their implication for practice.

## A process

Defining inclusion as a process implies that we continually work through the five stages towards the objective of inclusion. Responsibility to set this up lies, overall, with the local authority but we have a collective responsibility to establish the mechanisms which will enable real inclusion by:

- creating an ethos whereby all children, their families and early years workers feel equally valued
- writing policies that reflect anti-discriminatory regulations and positively respond to diversity and difference
- appointing, training and supporting an individual who is responsible for equality implementation – ensuring that these policies are implemented in practice
- collecting, analysing and evaluating data, (on ethnicity, gender, disability, special needs), to identify any discrimination in employment/ admissions/policies
- ensuring that training and support is available for all workers to make all this possible

## Identifying

Identifying means examining everything we do, our attitudes, ethos, policies, practices and procedures (formal and informal) to identify those aspects that might not be working towards inclusion of all children, their families/carers and workers. Have we:

- set aside regular time to consider whether we are inclusive?
- identified effective consultation processes with local communities and taken account of their needs and understanding of childcare/education?
- identified barriers to children's access – including cost, cultural sensitivity, workers from minority ethnic communities, diet?
- developed policies for equality such as admissions, bullying, name-calling etc ensuring the full involvement of families?
- monitored these policies
- ensuring workers know how to identify and address discriminatory incidents.

## Understanding

Understanding means knowing why we are doing what we are doing and how to do it, recognising and accepting that inequalities can be deeply embedded in society, and being committed to removing them, wherever possible. It means learning about differences and similarities in a spirit of trust and acceptance and trying to work together within a no-blame culture. It means knowing what the law requires. Do we:

- take part in training on all equality issues?
- feel confident about explaining what we are doing to others?
- familiarise ourselves with research, information and writings on equality? take time to find out about issues of disability, gender, ethnicity, culture, language and religion?
- make it possible to raise issues of concern about equality in both workers' and families' meetings within an ethos of listening, acceptance and encouragement?