



Caring for Children with *special needs*

DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

Years ago, parents were told to institutionalize children with Down's Syndrome as infants. Now we know that children with Down's Syndrome and other developmental delays can have rewarding and full lives with family and friends in their community.

One 19-year-old girl, when asked how she felt about having Down's Syndrome, replied, "Great, I feel good about myself." When asked what she thinks people should know about her condition, she said, "The first thing is that I am a human being who has the same feelings as everyone else, but the most important thing is that I like to be treated like every other member of the community."

Let's look at one situation you could encounter when a child with a developmental delay comes into your program. Remember that children with developmental delays and Down's Syndrome have more similarities than differences, compared to other children in your care.

For example, Johnny, a four-year-old with a developmental delay, comes to your program with developmental skills similar to children at a chronological age of two-and-a-half years. As a child care provider, should you place him with the two-year-olds or four-year-olds?

The answer is to do both. Give Johnny opportunities to play with children who are the same chronological age, but also give him opportunities to play with younger children at the same developmental age. In other words, treat him as an individual with various levels of development in different areas, just like other children. Remember that every child's physical, social, emotional, and mental abilities are unique.

Strategies for inclusion

- Look closely at Johnny's developmental skills **and** chronological age. As a child care provider, do this by simple observation and getting information from Johnny's parents. Compare him with other children (in your mind's eye only, please). See what activities are a "best fit" for Johnny.
- Keep Johnny's day structured. Have daily routines that help him organize his day. Keep your schedule consistent so that he can learn what to do. For example, if washing hands comes right after small group play and right before snack every day, Johnny will learn that routine. Don't forget that Johnny needs free play time, too.
- Avoid sudden transitions. When it's time to move to another activity, give him plenty of warning and have clear transition routines. Signals for transition should be clear and consistent. You may have to provide a physical cue at first, such

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as taking Johnny by the hand and heading him to the sink. At the same time you might say, "It's time to wash your hands before you eat your snack."

■ Give Johnny plenty of time to practice new things that he is learning. He **can** and **will** learn, but he needs extra opportunities to master new tasks. A bit of extra staff time is probably needed here, to help Johnny practice and learn. You can practice something new with him away from the distraction of the other children.

■ Johnny may need cues to help him. For example, make sure that his cubicle is marked clearly with a picture or label that he recognizes. Use pictures as cues, such as a child hanging his coat in a cubicle; gestures and labels will help, too. Using a physical cue—holding his hand, touching his shoulder—may be needed to get his attention.

■ Make sure Johnny can try age-appropriate challenges. It is likely that some of his talents are equal to those of his age-mates. For example, he may be able to play on the teeter-totter as well as other children at the same chronological age. Ask Johnny's parents for suggestions.

■ Make sure Johnny can try developmentally-appropriate challenges, too. The goal is to provide challenges that help Johnny "stretch" his skills, but not so difficult that the task frustrates him and he stops trying. Avoid giving him what other kids think of as "baby" toys. Ask Johnny's parents and resource staff for suggestions.

■ If a special education teacher or occupational therapist is involved with Johnny's family, ask to be involved in the planning process. Child care is a significant part of a child's life—you should be a partner. If you're stuck, or having a problem in a particular area, ask the resource staff involved with Johnny's family for advice about strategies that may work.

■ Expect appropriate behavior. Don't let Johnny behave in ways you wouldn't let other children behave. For example, you aren't doing him a favor if you let him push or hit another child. Johnny has to learn how to get along. You will have to be consistent and clear, but having a developmental delay is not an excuse for bad behavior. Talk to Johnny's parents or therapist about successful strategies.

Remember that children with developmental delays are unique and special children, as are all the children under your care. There is really no such thing as a group of "typical" children. Look on Johnny first as a child, but only one of your special, unique and wonderful charges.

Technical references

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More information

This publication is part of a series, Caring for Children with Special Needs. You may find other fact sheets in this series with helpful information. For the most current update of these fact sheets, check the National Network for Child Care website at: <http://www.nncc.org>

- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Feeling Comfortable (overview)-NNCC-98-06
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: The Americans with Disabilities Act-NNCC-98-07
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Allergies and Asthma-NNCC-98-08
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Attention Deficit Disorder-NNCC-98-09
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Challenging Behaviors-NNCC-98-10
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Chronic Illnesses-NNCC-98-11
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Developmental Delays-NNCC-98-12
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Hearing Impairments-NNCC-98-13
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: HIV or AIDS-NNCC-98-14
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Physical Differences and Impairments-NNCC-98-15

- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Seizure Disorders-NNCC-98-16
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Speech and Language Problems-NNCC-98-17
- Caring for Children with Special Needs: Visual Impairments)-NNCC-98-18



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<http://www.nncc.org>

Developed for The National Network for Child Care by

Doreen B. Greenstein, Ph.D.

Developmental Psychologist

Cornell University Extension Services

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Youth and Family Network

Edited by

Laura Miller

Communications Specialist

Iowa State University Extension

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