



CREATING INCLUSIVE ACTIVITIES

Meaningful participation is the foundation of inclusivity. Activities should be proactively designed to support a diverse range of strengths and needs. All activities should offer multiple ways to connect and engage. No matter the setting, the focus should be on process versus product and strike a balance between healthy, productive competition and cooperative activities.

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK

When planning activities, answering these 5 basic questions creates more inclusive experiences for ALL children!

1 TIME - How long or short will an activity need to be?



Make sure to adjust the timing of an activity based on the needs of your group. Use visual schedules, checklists, and timers to support structure and flow. Have “back pocket” games ready in case an activity runs shorter than expected or a completion plan ready in case it goes longer. Remember to build in specific time for breaks and transitions before, during, and after activities. Always try everything beforehand to realistically gauge length and implementation.

2 TOOLS - What equipment do I need to change or add for an activity?



Plan for sensory, intellectual, motor, or physical accessibility needs that might impact a child's participation. Also consider how to incorporate different tools, materials, or equipment to support different levels of skill, types of communication, and ways to engage. Again, always, try out equipment, materials, and technology first to see how things work, boost your comfort level, troubleshoot problems, and brainstorm adaptations.

3 CUES - What will help reinforcement?



Cues are excellent reinforcement tools to maximize group engagement and attention. Use of hand signals, picture cards, props, timers, verbal cues, sounds/songs, and actions can help with organization, behavior management, and transitions. Keep cues simple and predictable. Rehearse and practice often- consistency is key.

4 TRANSITIONS - How do we get to it, through it, and away from it?



Prepare children before the activity as to the initial instructions. Maintain your enthusiasm to help them move through it. Take time to process the activity to ease the transition away from an activity. The greatest learning happens when we prepare a child for the activity and prepare the activity for a child.

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5 SUCCESS

How do we (re)define success?



Success is a step forward. It is important to define what success is for each child or they will define it as a group at the highest level possible, which means that many will walk away from an activity feeling like a failure. A reachable challenge will encourage children to grow but also allow them to be successful. Those challenges should be individualized and increase over time to promote continued progress, greater confidence, and improved self-concept. Be sure to celebrate big and small successes-- children who are used to failing have the hardest time recognizing when they succeed.

5 PROGRAMMING TOOLS

The following are 5 simple tools to embed into your programming to instantly take steps toward serving children with disabilities more effectively.

1 "FIDGETS"



Some children with disabilities benefit from tactile stimulation. The use of these objects can help increase focus and engagement in an activity. For some, it is as simple as having something to hold onto. For others, they may use it as a tool in a game or other programmed activity. We suggest discussing the use of fidgets with the child's family as they may have had success with a particular item. Fidgets are also useful for keeping children physically engaged that may require more "seat" time than usual. Consider making fidgets with readily available supplies or as an arts-and-crafts activity. When using them, review instructions for individual use, prohibit sharing/exchanging, provide storage options (bags/buckets/boxes, etc.), and plan for sanitization, disposal, or replacement if collected.

2 TASK CARDS



Task cards are blank checklists that are handy for sit-down activities like arts and crafts that require a step-by-step process. A blank circle that can be used as a clock to tell how much time is left can be helpful to use, also. Task cards can be designed for group or independent activities. They promote sequencing, self-regulation, and task completion. Who doesn't love to cross items off a to-do-list when they're done?

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3 PICTURE SCHEDULES



Picture schedules add visual representations of the activities, places, and spaces the children will engage in throughout the day. Picture schedules are beneficial for visually-oriented learners and help bridge reading or language barriers. These schedules are sequentially-oriented instead of time-oriented so if there is a time change, this will not affect children who get used to routine. Picture schedules can be created and presented virtually or in-person and can be interactive, temporary, or reusable. They are also outstanding assets to managing group interactions and transitions when verbal/auditory interaction may be impeded by large spaces, lots of noise, big groups, etc.

4 PICTURE STORIES/ACTIVITY SCRIPTS



Picture stories and activity scripts help communicate concepts and procedures in clear, familiar, easy to comprehend ways. They often detail major steps to an activity or event, demonstrate basic behavioral expectations, and promote a positive mindset about an upcoming activity. Using age-appropriate vocabulary, common terminology, a predictable structure, and relevant pictures promote consistency and understanding. Reviewing these before, during, and after an activity or event minimizes behavioral or emotional issues that might arise. They are universally applicable to all activities, ages, and settings.

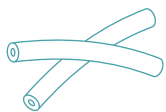
5 INDIVIDUAL/ALTERNATIVE CHOICE



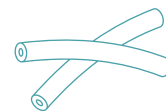
Children are decision makers. Create an environment where children are encouraged to make choices and have some say in plans and activities. Choice-making promotes a positive outlook, ownership, and sense of control. It decreases resistance, minimizes disruptions, and reduces anxiety. Inclusion is a natural extension of providing individual and alternative choices for participation. By providing a variety of options to engage in activities children with a variety of needs can experience success. Giving children multiple ways to complete a task, or play a game, or learn a skill diffuses common fears associated with trying something new, doing something wrong, or being different. Children rarely “opt out” of participating if provided alternative ways to “opt in.”



IN-PERSON ACTIVITY EXAMPLE



NOODLE HOCKEY



✓ Inclusive ✓ Physically Distanced ✓ Active ✓ Cooperative ✓

Competitive

Objective: Alternative to hockey. Each team works together to try and score as many points as possible.

Age Range: all ages

Equipment: one pool noodle per person, 1 playground ball-slightly deflated, 2 hula-hoops, and 2 empty gallon-water jugs, cleaning/sanitizing supplies

Organization: Place two hula-hoops about 50 feet apart and place a plastic jug upright in the center of the hoop.

Description: Divide the group in half. For simplicity try to give each team the same color of pool noodles. Teams line up on sides and the leader/referee/counselor starts the game with a face-off in the center of the playing area. Each team will start out on one side of the designated centerline. Two players will face each other for the “roll in” start. The leader stands away to the side of the two center players. Use a whistle and hand signal/flag to stop and start play. (A train whistle is fun and unusual to use!)

One point is scored when the ball hits the bottle, inside the hoop area. Scores can happen from any area around the hoop. Players are not allowed inside the hoop area. If a defending player moves the hoop and causes the bottle to tip over, it is two points for the opposing team. (Don't make a big deal about points.)

No touching allowed- only pool noodles can be used to hit the ball and players must stay a pool noodle apart. All swings must stay below the waist. All swings that occur above the waist are first pointed out and then a quick 60-second or so penalty is assessed. Assign a designated area for players to go during this time.

There is no need for goalies in this game, but you could let one person stand around the hoop to “tend goal” to encourage participation.

Tips:

- Add more balls to decrease difficulty and/or increase participation.
- Substitute foam hockey sticks, garden rakes, snow shovels, push brooms, etc. to accommodate diverse motor abilities.
- Remember to demonstrate & rehearse signals/cues.
- Demonstrate & rehearse appropriate use of equipment. (Only demonstrate what children “should do.” Don't draw attention to what they “shouldn't do.”) Build in time for children to explore/play with the equipment safely/appropriately before & after the activity—they're going to do it anyway so providing a structured opportunity for “free play” not only honors their curiosity and creativity but reduces impulsivity and disruption during the activity itself..



VIRTUAL ACTIVITY EXAMPLE

GUESS WHAT?!

✓ Inclusive ✓ Creative ✓ Active ✓ Cooperative ✓ Competitive

Objective: Variations of “Pictionary” and “Charade” style games. Individuals display drawings, images, demonstrate movements, or describe objects for others to guess.

Age Range: all ages

Independence level: high

Assistance level: low



Equipment: Webcam, video conference platform, word/object lists for ideas, drawing materials, space to move. (If you are just using drawing, www.skribbl.io is a great resource.)

Organization: Break video conferences into “rooms” or small groups. Use screen sharing or white board tools if possible or instruct participants to have drawing materials or pictures handy.

Description: Pre-assign or solicit participant suggestions of objects, animals, etc. Designate one person to demonstrate while others guess. Demonstration styles may include drawing, pantomiming, describing, or showing depending on age, communication styles, sensory needs, motor abilities, etc. For example, I might choose to draw a dog, act out a dog, describe a dog, or hold up cut-out pieces of a picture of a dog. Participation styles may also vary depending on the needs of the group. For example, you might allow everyone to shout out responses during the demonstration. Or, you might mute everyone to limit call out during a demonstration until it’s time to guess. Furthermore, participants could hold up response cards or submit guesses to a chat screen instead of vocalizing answers. Management styles may range from highly structured during which individuals are called on to respond to loosely structured where the whole group responds freely.

This can be a “no score” game or you can vary scoring options to include most correct guesses, hardest object to guess, etc.

Tips:

- Remember to demonstrate & rehearse signals/cues.
- Demonstrate & model the activity first. (Only demonstrate what children “should do”. Don’t draw attention to what they “shouldn’t do”.)
- Know & plan for children’s communication & participation needs ahead of time.
- Go with easiest interaction options first (low tech vs. high tech) to minimize technology problems due to video platform accessibility hurdles.
- Provide downloadable images or materials suggestions such as greeting cards, magazine images, coloring book pages, etc. for participants needing cut-out options.