

# HELLO!

OUR CHILDREN SHARE THE SAME TEACHER THIS YEAR, AND I'M EXCITED TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME INFORMATION ABOUT INCLUSION AND DISABILITY RIGHTS. WHETHER YOUR CHILD HAS ALREADY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DIFFERENCES THEY'VE SEEN OR SEEM COMPLETELY AMBIVALENT TO CLASSMATES' DIFFERENCES, IT'S ALWAYS IMPORTANT TO START A DISCUSSION ABOUT INCLUSION AND ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCES. THIS GUIDE MAY GIVE YOU A FEW IDEAS OF WHAT TO SAY AND WHEN TO SAY IT.

## **What is inclusion?**

Inclusion is belonging.  
Inclusion is a civil right.  
Separate is never equal!  
Federal and state law requires that students with disabilities be educated alongside their typical peers to the maximum extent possible. Using supports and accommodations in the regular classroom allows students with and without disabilities to benefit from an inclusive education.

## **How can we support a child with a disability?**

Everyone needs support! But it's only helpful if the person wants to be helped. If anyone is having trouble doing something, give them extra time to figure it out or ask if they need help. Be clear in what you are saying. Find out what your friend likes to do. Just hang out together and see what happens. The most important thing to remember is to help if they want it, and to teach them how to be your friend.



## **Won't a student with a disability negatively impact my child's learning?**

It's the elephant in the room. Many teachers and parents still believe typical learners will be negatively impacted by the presence of a student with a disability. Here's what you should know: all of the evidence-based research since research began on the topic 40 years ago shows inclusive education benefits ALL students. When a well-supported teacher uses Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and teaches to ALL students, everyone benefits. In fact, a 2010 study showed that typical learners actually made significant gains in math and reading when students with significant disabilities were present. Researchers hypothesize that extra help and supports in these classes created gains for all students. Studies also show soft skills such as empathy and leadership also increase in typical learners. See [www.inclusionrevolution.com](http://www.inclusionrevolution.com) for more studies and UDL tools.

## **How do I refer to someone with a disability?**

Using the word "disability" is ok, because having a disability is an integral part of someone's identity and something we should all embrace. Self-advocates with Autism prefer to be called Autistic, whereas other people with disabilities like "Person First" language. So instead of saying "that Down's kid" you would say "that student with Down syndrome." The best option of course is to find out the person's name and use it. Unless having a disability is central to the discussion, there's no reason to bring it up. People with disabilities are human just like you, and enjoy talking with others, being included, and having others care about their hopes and concerns.

# *Disability is Diversity*

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CREATES SCHOOL COMMUNITIES AND CLASSROOMS THAT EXPRESS BOTH IN WORDS AND DEED THAT DISABILITY AND DIVERSITY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR HUMAN COMMUNITY. DISABILITY IS NEITHER BETTER OR WORSE, IT JUST IS.  
-TIES CENTER

## **Is a disability inspirational?**

My child is not an inspiration; he/she is your child's classmate and hopefully friend. Disability advocates reject the idea that having a disability somehow makes the person inspirational. Although this may seem well-meaning, the idea can often be condescending, objectifying, and isolating. Disability rights advocates are still fighting for equality and inclusion more than 40 years after institutions were closed and important laws were passed. This inspirational narrative doesn't add value to their status.

## **Resources to Learn More:**

[www.inclusionrevolution.com](http://www.inclusionrevolution.com)

[www.thinkinclusive.net](http://www.thinkinclusive.net)

[www.disabilityrightswa.org](http://www.disabilityrightswa.org)

Kids Meet a Woman with Down syndrome (5:58)  
<https://youtu.be/zTE4OHpC2EU>

When Is It Okay to Say the R-Word? <https://youtu.be/i0-WE0mQtrl>

Everyone Counts: My Friend Isabelle (3:59)  
<https://youtu.be/IEB2bk29AMQ>

## **What do I say when my child asks about your child?**

People with disabilities are more alike than different. For children, this is especially important because attitudes develop during childhood by watching and listening to peers, teachers and family. Here's some useful tips when talking to your child:

1. Curiosity is natural, so answer your child honestly
2. If you don't know how to answer ask someone with a disability or their loved one
3. Use respectful words
4. Point out similarities
5. Emphasize strengths
6. Medical devices are not toys
7. Bullying is wrong. Full stop!

Don't wait for your child to come to you to start a discussion about inclusion and disability acceptance. You don't have to talk specifically about the disability at this age. Just tell your child that disability is natural and being friends with those that are different than ourselves broadens our perspective. More than 80% of students with intellectual disabilities are still segregated in public schools today, and the result is an 80% unemployment rate for that same group. My child's future success in part depends on you stepping up and helping to normalize and embrace disability.