



March 16, 2021

## Inclusive Learning Environments for Preschoolers

### Viewer's Guide

This viewer's guide gives you ideas for creating learning environments for preschoolers. The reflection questions and activities will help you think about ways support children's learning. Helpful resources can be found in the Resources section of this guide.

### Definition of Early Childhood Inclusion

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) together provided a shared definition of what inclusion means and looks like in early learning environments.

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*“Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.*

*The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.”*

*(DEC/NAEYC, 2009)*

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National Center on

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## Video 1: Disability Laws Video (Available on MyPeers)

Below is a list of important terms and acronyms related to disabilities laws and practices.

### Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Accepting children with disabilities into educational programs is the law. IDEA, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the special education federal law that ensures the educational needs of students with disabilities are met throughout the nation.

### IDEA Part B and Part C

IDEA Part B regulations relate to the education of children aged 3 and above with disabilities. IDEA Part C regulations relate to early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

### Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a written legal document that describes individualized special education and related services a child qualifies for. It includes annual goals and objectives and specific accommodations and modifications.

### Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

Every infant and toddler who is eligible for early intervention services has an IFSP. An IFSP is a written legal document that describes individualized early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and their families. The plan includes specific outcomes and services for children and families.

### American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This federal law requires that all childcare and early learning programs make reasonable efforts to serve children with disabilities.



Familiarize yourself with the terms and acronyms



Access this video on MyPeers



Share this video with parents and colleagues

## Video 2: High-Quality Learning Environments

Write down some of the things in this high-quality learning environment that you'd like to try!

# Strategies for Supporting Quality Inclusive Learning Environments

## Preschoolers



### A safe and supportive physical environment

#### Define spaces

- Mark boundaries to define learning spaces and activities, using furniture, tape, or other low barriers.
- Create areas for different kinds of experiences (active play, quiet play, and play with messy materials).

**Individualize:** If a child uses a wheelchair, make sure traffic lines are open and all spaces are acceptable.



### A daily schedule and consistent routines

#### Post your schedule and refer to it frequently throughout the day

- Put visual cues (photos of children or pictures) of activities on the schedule itself so that all children understand and learn the schedule.

**Individualize:** If a child has difficulty following the schedule, create an individual picture schedule.



### Engaging interactions and meaningful learning experiences

#### Foster concept development and problem-solving

- Provide children with a variety of ways to engage in language and literacy experiences.
- Design activities that allow children to engage in multiple ways of exploration and problem solving.

**Individualize:** If a child has difficulty with a concept or skill, pair the child with a peer who can model or help the child practice the skill.

*\*Source: Circle Time Magazine, Season 3, Episode*

## Try it Out!

Begin with taking time to reflect on how well your early learning environment offers equitable and inclusive experiences for children and families.

Here are some aspects of high-quality inclusive early learning social and physical environments. Think about each of these aspects and what you do or can do to increase access and participation for all children.

### A Safe and Supportive Physical Environment



Is your early learning environment welcoming and comfortable for all children, families, education staff, and consulting specialists?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Is the space arranged to allow all children to move around safely and explore?

Your answers:

What you might change:

## Inviting Materials



Are toys and materials interesting and stimulating for all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Have materials been adapted to facilitate use by all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

## A Daily Schedule and Consistent Routines



Is the daily schedule posted at children's level, so it is visible to all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Do you adjust routines to facilitate all children's participation?

Your answers:

What you might change:

## Connecting and Communicating with All Children



Have staff developed strong personal relationships with all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Do staff use a variety of ways to facilitate communication for all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

## Engaging Interactions and Meaningful Learning Experiences



Do learning activities build on children's interests and individual strengths?

Your answers:

What you might change:

What supports and modifications do you provide to make sure all children participate in regular learning activities?

Your answers:

What you might change:

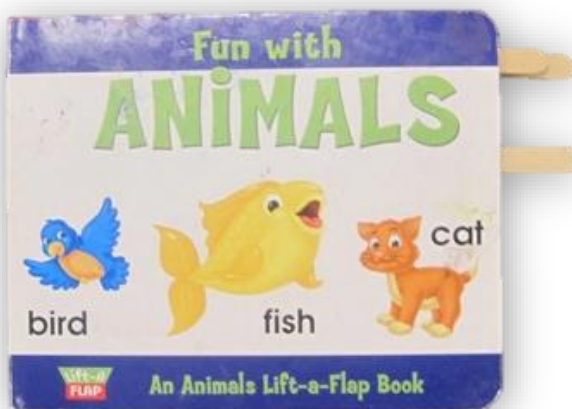


## Small Changes — Big Impact

Here is Joel. One of his favorite activities is reading books but his motor delays make it difficult to turn the pages of the book. This is quite frustrating, and Joel tends to lose interest in his favorite activity.



What can Teacher Matthew do to support Joel so that he can have access to his favorite books, read independently, and feel included in his learning environment?



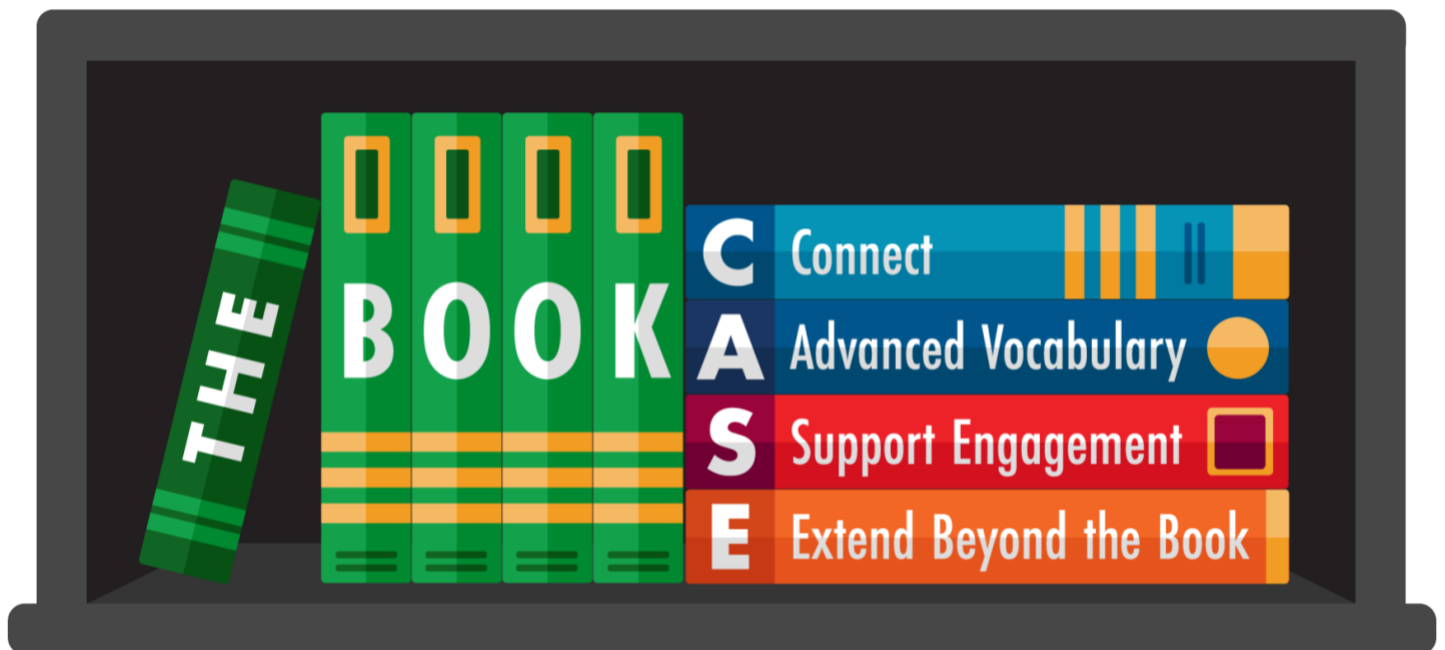
### Try This!

Put pieces of sponge or glue popsicle sticks onto books to help make turning pages easier!

## Video 3: Predictable Schedule and Routines

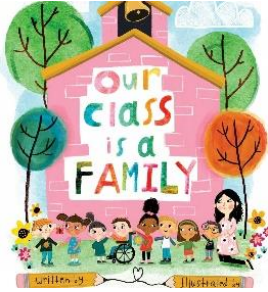
Write down some of the things this caregiver does or says that you would like to try during this routine!

## The BookCASE



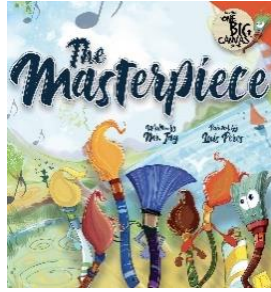
Books are a great way to engage with children. There are books about many things in our world, too. So, matching books with the themes and activities helps meaningful learning experiences. Choosing books on topics that preschoolers are interested in is another way to help them feel included and that their interests are important.

## Selected Books from the BookCASE



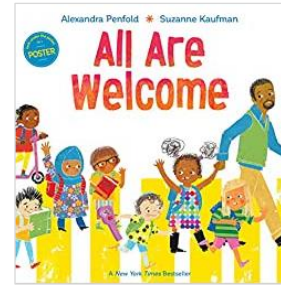
### ***Our Class is a Family*** by Shannon Olsen

*Our Class is a Family* is a book that will help build and strengthen an inclusive class community. Children learn that their classroom is a place where it's safe to be themselves, it is okay to make mistakes, and it's important to be a friend to others.



### ***The Masterpiece*** by Mr. Jay

This story helps children recognize and understand what autism is, and impress upon them the importance of showing kindness to those who are different, wrapped into a fun and rhyming story with lighthearted, engaging characters.



### ***All Are Welcome*** by Alexandra Penfold

In this book, we discover a school where—no matter what—young children have a place, have a space, and are loved and appreciated. A true message of inclusion and belonging!

## Exploring the BookCASE with *The Masterpiece*

### **Connect**

*The Masterpiece* can support several Head Start ELOF goals in the social emotional domain. For example, Goal P-SE 9: Child recognizes self as a unique individual having own abilities, characteristics, emotions, and interests and Goal P-SE 3. Child engages in and maintains positive interactions and relationships with other children. Reading books with young children also supports ELOF Goal P-LIT 4. Child demonstrates an understanding of narrative structure through storytelling/re-telling and Goal P-LIT 5. Child asks and answers questions about a book that was read aloud.

### **Advanced vocabulary**

There are a few advanced vocabulary words to highlight such as “studio” and “canvas.” There are some describing words like “littered,” “continuous.” There are also some feeling words like “ignored” and “admired” that you can talk to children about.

### **Support engagement**

Teachers and family childcare providers can support engagement by reading the story with excitement. Pause before reading the rhyming word to see if children can fill it in by themselves. Pretend to hold paint brushes and ask questions about how the “paintbrush” characters are feeling. This supports perspective taking skills.

### **Extend**

Teachers or family childcare providers can tell the children they are going to the art “studio.” Give children a large piece of paper and encourage the children to paint together. As they are painting, the teacher or family childcare providers can encourage friendly and inclusive behaviors they see the children display. Another version of this is “buddy art” where two children paint or draw together on one piece of paper.

## Explore the BookCASE on Your Own

The preschoolers in my learning environment love this book:

Make the CASE:

Connect:

Advanced vocabulary:

Support engagement:

Extend:

## Explore the BookCASE on Your Own

The preschoolers in my learning environment love this book:

Make the CASE:

Connect:

Advanced vocabulary:

Support engagement:

Extend:

**Books I would like to add to my learning environment:**



# Helpful Resources

## Online Resources

Environments That Support High-Quality Inclusion

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/environments-support-high-quality-inclusion>

Head Start Center for Inclusion

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities/article/head-start-center-inclusion>

How to Engage Young Children with Disabilities in STEM Learning Within Distance Learning Environments

<https://stem4ec.ning.com/blog/how-to-engage-young-children-with-disabilities-in-stem-learning-w>

STEMIE: Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education

<https://stemie.fpg.unc.edu/>

## Mobile Apps

ELOF2GO Mobile App

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/elof2go-mobile-app>

MiELOF Mobile App (Spanish)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/preparacion-escolar/articulo/aplicacion-movil-mielof-en-espanol>

Text4Teachers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/text4teachers>

Text4Teachers (Spanish)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/practicas-docentes/articulo/text4teachers>

Ready DLL Mobile App

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/ready-dll-mobile-app>

Ready DLL Mobile App (Spanish)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/cultura-e-idioma/articulo/aplicacion-movil-para-los-dll>

## Online Communities

MyPeers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>

- Teacher Time Community
- Head Start Disabilities and Inclusion Network