PARENT CHILD PRESCHOOLS ORGANIZATION

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES: WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

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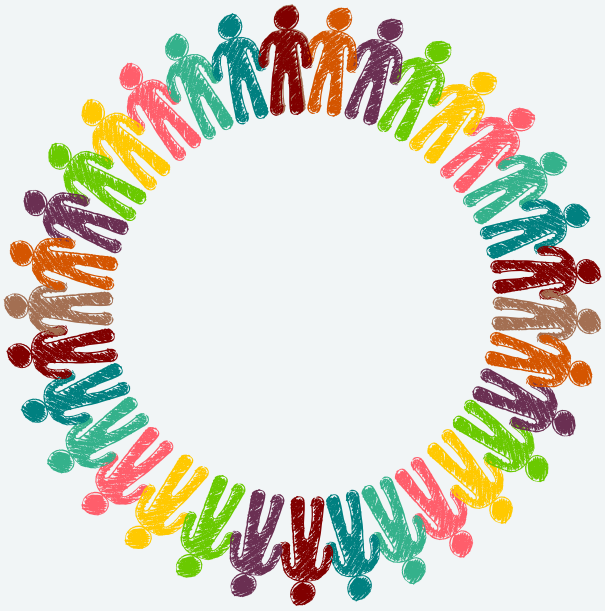
Why Now?

Humans are living, breathing, moving beings with immense creativity and potential. But many of our so-called learning systems and environments don't actually allow for the space to explore, play, fail, and repair, and in our current social-political-cultural climate, we are in need of resilient communities of care.



We as parents need to build skills as communities and coalitions to heal, repair, and re-imagine what our world and learning communities can look like. Our children are the future, how can we set them up for success to thrive and lead our beautiful and diverse world?

In this article we want to consider:

- How do we create safe, inclusive, and welcoming communities for ourselves and our families?
- How do we create safe spaces for all children to explore and express?
- How do we share our strengths and identify & advocate for our needs?
- How do we as parents model resilient and compassionate communities of care?

Exclusion - How does exclusion show up in our community?

Exclusion can be explicit, such as:

- Social norms/Expectations. Does the community follow expectations that exclude certain groups from being able to participate?
- Do policies use a "deficits" thinking model? Placing the blame on families for school struggles or challenges, rather than on the school itself.
- Language/Cultural exclusion. Are you using language that is inclusive of all abilities and cultures represented?

Exclusion can also be unintended, such as:

- Based on a lack of knowledge/experience. If you don't know about the diversity of your community, you may miss seeing the areas needing to be changed.
- Lack of or limited representation or inclusion of diverse communities and voices. Do all children or families feel represented in the community? Do they have an equal stake?
- Language matters. Are we using negative or deficit-focused language when we talk about folks who are different from us?

As parents, we are our children's first teachers. How we view, talk about, and interact with others will shape our children's view of those around them. Check in with your own prejudices or biases. Are you unintentionally "othering" folks or children who are different from you? What messages are you sending your child when talking about children who act, look, think differently from them?



How do we build Inclusion?

When thinking about how to create a more inclusive community or foster an inclusive mindset, it can be helpful to reflect on personal experience. Where have you felt a sense of belonging or community? What elements,structures, or norms were in place to provide that sense of belonging?

Maslow's Hierarchy is a good reminder that we all require having our needs of love and belonging met in order to thrive. When children know they matter, and feel safe and seen, they can then fully express themselves, learn and grow.

Let's remember!

All behavior is an expression of an unmet need. When a child is showing behavior that is different from what's expected, it can be hard to make sense of. A child is simply trying to get their needs met and doesn't yet have the skills to do so. It's important to use objective and affirming language when discussing these behaviors with our own children.
"Joey is using his hands to push over the blocks, he must have a lot of energy in his body that he's trying to let out".

Inclusion in Action

A co-op is a wonderful place to practice inclusion each and every day. When you are a parent helper in the classroom, you are not there only to support your child, but all children. As cooperative parents we see all children as "our children" and work to care and support each one as the individuals they are.

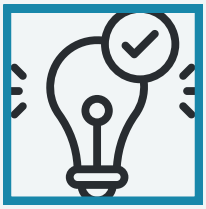
- Practice what you preach! Inclusion and exclusion start at home. How are you modeling for your child a celebration of diversity? Do you speak with strength-based language when describing the differences of their classmates? Highlighting the strengths of each child in the community is a beautiful way to bring awareness and celebration to each child's unique gifts.

- Cultivate a culture of curiosity, rather than judgement. When your child asks about someone's behavior or actions, do you model curiosity and open-mindedness? "I'm not sure why Mya only says a few words, maybe she's still learning to feel safe to talk in class. I wonder how you could help her feel more comfortable?"

- Listen, educate and raise up historically marginalized voices. What voices or experiences are being left out of your awareness? Can you find books to read with your child that bring forward a new perspective? How can you educate yourself about marginalized groups, in order to be better equipped to respond to your children's questions?

- Inclusion can take shape in small, everyday moments at home, where our children are watching and learning from us. When we can approach differences with curiosity, care, and openness, we can help our children do the same.

"I dreamed about a culture of belonging.
I still dream that dream. I contemplate what our lives would be like if we knew how to cultivate awareness, to live mindfully, peacefully; if we learned habits of being that would bring us closer together, that would help us build beloved community."
— bell hooks, Belonging: A Culture of Place


Resources to Learn More

Neurodiversity & Disability Justice

The Recess Project
Inclusion Starts Now
OT Butterfly
Youth Celebrate Diversity

Book Suggestions

- All Are Welcome by Alexandra Penfold -multi-culturaldiversity
- Blink, Plue, & Colorful You by Kathleen Latlip -gender expansive
- Talking is Not my Thing by Rose Robbins -Non speaking Communication
- Dancing Hands: A Story of Friendship in Filipino Sign Language by Charina Marquez andJoanna Que - Sign Language
- Can I Give you a Squish? by Emily Neilson - Body Boundaries
- Masterpiece by Alexandra Hoffman - Autism
- Wiggles Stomps and Squeezes Help Calm My Jitters Down by Lindsey Rowe Parker - Stimming and regulation

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