



## **Teacher Information Packet**

Celebrating extraordinary lives



Dear Educators,

The Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati (DSAGC) is providing you with this Information Packet to help you accommodate the needs of your students with Down syndrome. The following newsletter, booklets and handouts are intended to offer an assortment of information to assist you in providing the best learning environment for your student. The following items are contained in this packet:

- DSAGC tri-annual newsletter for educators - "Strategies For Success"
- DSAGC Booklet - "Supporting The Student With Down Syndrome in Your Classroom"
- DSAGC Booklet - "Getting To Know Me." Please offer this booklet to the child's family to complete. It will provide introductory information to help you learn more about your new student's skills and strengths.
- TouchMath information
- "Ideas, Samples & Designs II" - Curriculum adaptation sample pages for language arts.
- "Suggestions for Subject Adaptation"
- "Modifying Curriculum and Providing Student Supports"
- "Making Relationships a Priority"
- Is This Inclusion? Questioning Removal, Rejection and Exclusion
- Communication is the Key
- My Teacher Wants to Know

We welcome your feedback and input on this packet. Please contact us at [sally@dsagc.com](mailto:sally@dsagc.com) to be placed on our mailing list or to provide a suggestion. We believe that when we all work together we can achieve the best outcome for our children.

Thank you for your interest!

Sally K Tilow  
Outreach Coordinator  
DSAGC

# Ready For School!



## Today, Sarah Rode the Bus to School

It was her first day of kindergarten. Sarah has had other “firsts” in her life. Since she was nine months old, you have helped her learn to:

- Eat with a spoon
- Blow bubbles
- Put on her coat
- Run across the playground
- Write an “S”
- Make friends
- Talk with her DynaMyte.

Those building blocks have provided a solid foundation. When Sarah was born, I cried every day for 9 months. I cried again today. This time they were tears of gratitude. Sarah is well prepared.

**Educators impact their student’s lives in many ways.**

**Keep up your great work!**



## Other Programs and Services offered by the Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati

Healthcare Connections  
Parent-To-Parent Program  
Early Matters Program  
School age Matters Program  
Outreach Program  
Parent E-mail Network  
National Adoption Awareness Program  
D.S. Press Newsletter  
Helpline/Information and Referral  
Website: [www.dsagc.com](http://www.dsagc.com)  
Lending Library  
Advocacy and Public Awareness

### For More Information

DSAGC  
644 Linn St. Suite 1128  
Cincinnati, OH 45203  
Phone: 513.761.5400  
Fax: 513.761.5401  
Email: [sally@dsagc.com](mailto:sally@dsagc.com)

*The Mission of the DSAGC is to empower individuals, educate families and enhance communities as together, we celebrate the extraordinary lives of individuals with Down syndrome.*

A special thanks for portions of this text goes to:  
Down Syndrome InfoSource, Inc  
NDSS  
PREP Program

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DSAGC and permission is obtained.***



## Supporting the Student with Down Syndrome in Your Classroom



## Information for Teachers

## What is Down Syndrome?

Down syndrome is a genetic condition that occurs in 1 of every 733 births. It affects people of all ages, races and economic levels and is the most frequently occurring chromosomal abnormality. More than 350,000 people have Down syndrome in the United States alone.

The most common form of Down syndrome, Trisomy 21, occurs when there are three instead of two number 21 chromosomes in every cell of the body. Instead of 46 chromosomes, a person with Trisomy 21 has 47. This extra genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome.

## Common Myths

Although information about Down syndrome is increasingly more accurate, there are still a few misconceptions that the general public may have about this condition.

- Babies with Down syndrome are born only to older mothers.

False.

The average age of a mother giving birth to a baby with Down syndrome is 28. 80% are under 35. However, the incidence does increase with maternal age.

- People with Down syndrome are severely retarded. False.  
Most people with Down syndrome have some degree of mental retardation, however, it usually falls into the mild to moderate range and is not indicative of the many strengths and talents each individual possesses.
- People with Down syndrome are always happy.  
False.  
People with Down syndrome have feelings just like everyone else in the population. They respond to positive expressions of friendship, and they are hurt and upset by inconsiderate behavior.
- Children with Down syndrome are such angels.  
False.  
Most parents would disagree with this statement. Like all children, children with Down syndrome have good days and bad days. They are individuals with their own unique personalities and talents.

## Great Resources for Teachers

Please call the DSAGC at 513.761.5400 for information on any of these items. Many are available for loan in our library.

- Bruni, Maryanne. **Fine Motor Skills in Children with Down Syndrome**, Woodbine House, 1998.
- Buckley, Sue. **Down Syndrome Issues and Information**, The Down Syndrome Educational Trust, 2000. [www.downsed.org](http://www.downsed.org)
- Hammeken, Peggy. **Inclusion: 450 Strategies for Success**, Peytral Publications, 2000.
- **High Noon Books** Adapted chapter novels. [www.academictherapy.com](http://www.academictherapy.com).
- Horstmeier, DeAnna. **Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome**, Woodbine House, 2004.
- Kumin, Libby. **Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome**, Woodbine House, 2003.
- Medlen, Joan. **The Down Syndrome Nutrition Handbook**, Woodbine House, 2002.
- Oelwein, Patricia. **Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome**. Woodbine House, 1995.
- Olsen, Jan. **Handwriting Without Tears Teacher's Guide**. [www.hwtears.com](http://www.hwtears.com)
- Sandall, Susan & Schwartz, Ilene. **Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs**, Brookes, 2002
- Sandall, Susan. Young Exceptional Children Monograph #1. **Practical Ideas for Addressing Challenging Behaviors**, Sopris West, 1999.
- Tien, Barbara. **Effective Teaching Strategies for Successful Inclusion - A Focus on Down Syndrome**, The PREP Program, 1999.
- Winders, Patricia. **Gross Motor Skills in Children with Down Syndrome**, Woodbine House, 1997.

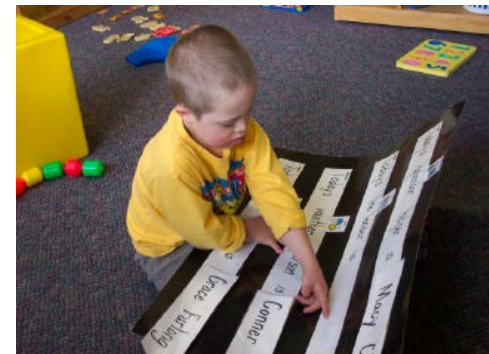
## The Home and School Partnership

The Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati (DSAGC) strongly believes that creative collaboration between all team members is the best strategy for success. Each child possesses a unique potential and when the parents, teachers, assistants, specialists, school administrators, bus drivers, etc. all work in the best interest of the child, your student will have a productive year. Please contact the DSAGC if we can assist you in any way.

*Keep your expectations high.  
Children with Down syndrome have  
lots of potential!*

## Is it Downs, Down's or Down?

The correct terminology is Down syndrome. There is no apostrophe and there is no capital "s" in syndrome. The syndrome is named after the physician, Dr. John Langdon Down, who identified the common characteristics as a syndrome in 1866. A child with this condition is a child with Down syndrome, not a Down's child or the Down's kid in Mrs. Hall's class. Parents will greatly appreciate your sensitivity when you address their child as a "person first" and not merely as a syndrome.



*"When our son was born I thought there would be a lot of things he couldn't do. Actually he is just like any other kid. It just takes him a little longer to get there."*



## Health Concerns That May Affect Learning

For the most part, people with Down syndrome are very healthy individuals. Medical advances in the past years have greatly improved the overall fitness of these individuals and they are now living full and active lives in the community. However, there are some medical concerns that are specific to Down syndrome that may have an affect on classroom behavior and learning.

**Hypotonia** - Almost all children with Down syndrome have hypotonia or low muscle tone. This may impact their muscle strength, endurance, stability on their feet, readiness for action, balance and coordination. Low muscle tone can also affect fine motor skill development. As a result, you may notice more fatigue in children with Down syndrome. However, it is also possible for a child to have both low muscle tone and hyperactivity. ADHD occurs in individuals with Down syndrome with the same frequency as the general population.

## A Word About Hugs

As with all children, it is also important to help children with Down syndrome learn appropriate social boundaries. Although hugging your teacher is encouraged in the early grades, children need to learn when this has become inappropriate and how to replace hugging with more appropriate social gestures. A hand shake, pat on the back, high 5, thumbs up sign, etc are all great replacements to hugging.



## Curriculum Adaptation Simplify, Supplement, Alter

There is no magic formula for adapting your classroom curriculum for your students with Down syndrome. Each student's needs will be unique. The process is simple, but it does require that all team members work collaboratively.

**Subtle adaptations** - Subtle accommodations to daily work will assist your student without drawing attention to the adaptation. For instance, textbooks with the same cover but different contents will minimize the variation.

**Same timetable/same subject** - Materials and methods may vary but if all students work on the same subject matter at the same time a student's sense of competence will increase.

Allow **adequate response time**. Some students need time to process your question. Be patient.

**Visual accommodations** work best for your students with Down syndrome. Visual schedules may help compensate for memory difficulties.

**Heart** - Congenital heart disease is reported to occur in 30 to 60% of children with Down syndrome. Many defects correct on their own or are surgically repaired. If a child has not yet had the surgery to correct an abnormality you may notice fatigue in your student and proper rest intervals during the school day may be helpful. Consult with the child's parents as to the status of any heart abnormalities.

**Vision** - 30 to 50% of children with Down syndrome have eye abnormalities which are the same types as those seen in other children, only they occur more frequently in children with Down syndrome. Children with Down syndrome are more likely to need glasses than are children in the general population. They may be difficult to fit with glasses due to the flat nasal bridge. Notify parents if you notice:

- Tipping of the head when working.
- Covering one eye or closing one lid while working.
- Squeezing or squinting.
- Eye rubbing.
- Excessive stumbling.
- Crusty eyelids (Blepharitis).

**Hearing** - The majority of children with Down syndrome have some type of hearing loss. This may be attributed to a combination of frequent middle ear infections and structurally short and narrow ear canals from which fluid has difficulty draining. Please consult with your student's speech therapist to maximize your student's speech and language development.

**Thyroid** - The incidence of thyroid disease is significantly higher in children with Down syndrome than in the general population. 15-30% of children with Down syndrome are treated for thyroid disorders. A child with hypothyroidism may show signs of lethargy in the classroom. Symptoms of hyperthyroidism may include weight loss and heat intolerance.

**Upper Respiratory Infections** - Children with Down syndrome frequently show symptoms of respiratory difficulty especially in the winter months. A chronic runny nose and congestion will certainly affect a child's stamina and ability to concentrate. However, if the nose is running clear and there is no accompanying fever the child will not be contagious.

**Pain Tolerance** - A recent study has confirmed what parents already knew. Individuals with Down syndrome express pain more slowly and less precisely than general population.



## Fine Motor Skills

Several factors may affect the fine motor skill development of children with Down syndrome.

- Low muscle tone, or hypotonia
- Shortened limbs - hands may be 10 to 30% shorter
- Ligament or joint instability.

These factors may contribute to difficulty with small muscle activities such as handwriting. In addition, children with Down syndrome may have wrist bones that develop more slowly, decreased skin sensation or a delay in the maturation of the palmar reflex. Please consult with your student's **Occupational Therapist** for suggestions on developing these skills.

## Gross Motor Skills

**Desk height** - It is important that all children have a comfortable workspace. It is especially important for a child with low muscle tone because proper support will help to alleviate fatigue.

**Foot Support** - Check to see that your student's feet are not dangling from his chair but rather resting flat on the floor. Proper foot stability will not only lessen fatigue but will also provide trunk support.

**Hypotonia**- Low muscle tone may affect some body parts more than others.

A student with Down syndrome may have difficulty sitting for an extended time on a floor without proper back support. Provide something to lean against.

W sitting should be discouraged as it stresses joints in the knees and hips.

Please consult with your student's **Physical Therapist** for suggestions on increasing gross motor skill development.

However, they are not insensitive to pain. They may not exhibit signs of distress when exposed to painful stimuli. Their pain threshold appears to be higher than the general population.

Therefore, a teacher may have to be alert to other signals from the child to determine if they may not be feeling well or are injured.



## How Do Children with Down Syndrome Learn?

As with all children, there is a wide range of abilities, behavior and physical development among children with Down syndrome. However, as a general rule, most children with Down syndrome:

- Are visual learners. Pairing pictures with spoken word may be helpful.
- Require simple directions.
- Are not as strong with auditory memory and auditory processing. Allow adequate response time.
- Have fewer short-term memory channels. Break down directions into smaller steps.
- Have difficulty retaining directions or information that is only presented verbally.
- Have a slower rate of learning than typical peers.

*Children with Down syndrome are a little different but a lot the same!*

## Communication

Each student with Down syndrome is a unique individual and the same speech therapy approach will not be effective for every student. Therapy is always individualized based on a child's particular strengths. Students with Down syndrome clearly want to communicate and many will need special techniques, strategies and exercises to assist them in their communication development. Refusal to comply or stubborn behavior may actually be caused by a student's frustration with their ability to communicate effectively. The **Speech Therapist** will be able to offer suggestions for strategies to use in your classroom.





# Getting to Know Me !



644 Linn St Suite 1128 Cincinnati, OH 45203  
513-761-5400 [www.dsagc.com](http://www.dsagc.com)  
[Sally@dsagc.com](mailto:Sally@dsagc.com)

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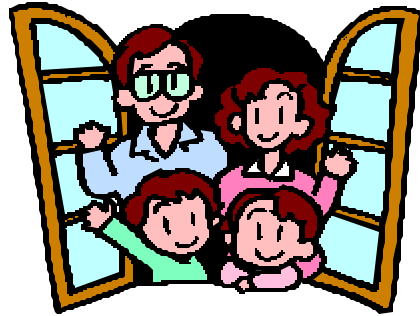
Dear

We are pleased to share our **Getting To Know Me** booklet with you. This booklet includes a lot of information about our child \_\_\_\_\_ and our family. We hope that this information will help you to get to know our child and some of his/her interests, strengths and skills. If you have any questions, please call me at home \_\_\_\_\_ or work \_\_\_\_\_. The best time to reach me is \_\_\_\_\_. I look forward to working with you this year. Please let us know how we can help make this a great school year.

Sincerely,

*This booklet has been prepared by the DSAGC  
to help you welcome your new student.  
It may be reproduced if credit is given to the DSAGC  
and permission is obtained.*

# Here is my family



My name is \_\_\_\_\_

My Mom's name is \_\_\_\_\_

My Dad's name is \_\_\_\_\_

I have \_\_\_\_\_ brothers. Their names are: \_\_\_\_\_

I have \_\_\_\_\_ sisters. Their names are: \_\_\_\_\_



We have a pet. My pet's name is \_\_\_\_\_



Other family members or friends that I want you to know about

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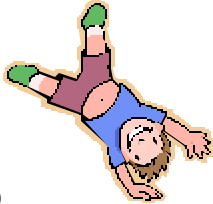
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# Things I like to do

My favorite activity \_\_\_\_\_

My favorite color \_\_\_\_\_

When I go outside, I like



to \_\_\_\_\_

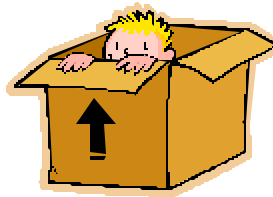
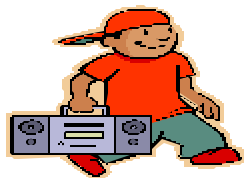
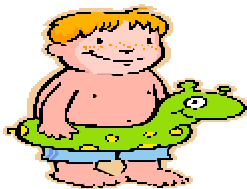
MY favorite hobby or activities \_\_\_\_\_

Three things that motivate me are

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# Health Considerations

Here are some things that you may need to know about my health

Surgeries

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Current Medication

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Allergies

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ATL X-ray    Yes \_\_\_\_\_    No \_\_\_\_\_    Date \_\_\_\_\_



I wear glasses \_\_\_\_\_



I wear a hearing aid \_\_\_\_\_

Other things you may need to know about my health

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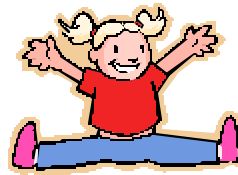


# My Feelings

Things that make me feel happy

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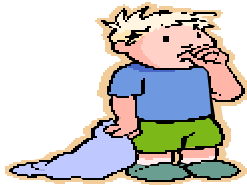
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Things that might upset me

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I feel sad when

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I respond positively when

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Things I may be a little afraid of

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# Places I like to go

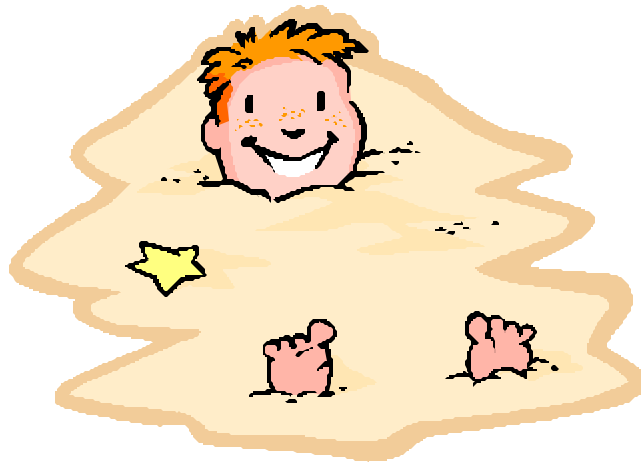
Here are some places that I like to go with my family

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My favorite place to go in my neighborhood is

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# Communication

Here are some things you may need to know about the best way for you to communicate with me.

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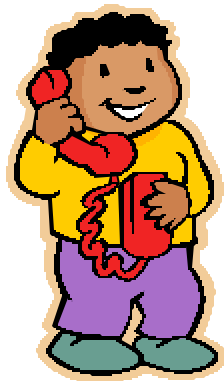
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# Things I can do for myself

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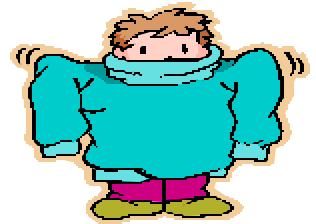
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# Things I would like to learn to do

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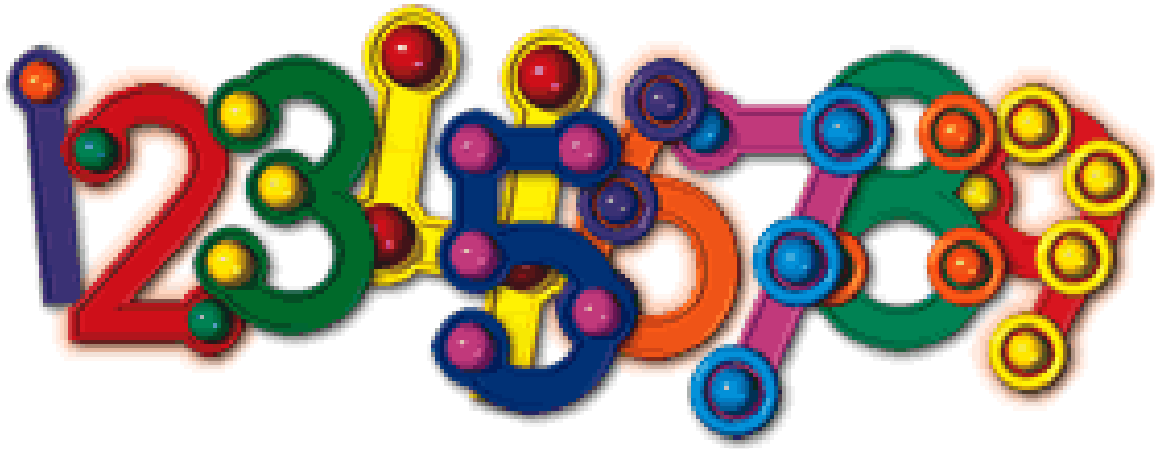
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# Family Pictures

644 Linn St. Suite 1128 Cincinnati, OH 45203  
513.761.5400 [www.dsagc.com](http://www.dsagc.com)  
[sally@dsagc.com](mailto:sally@dsagc.com)



## TouchMath







### Here's how it works:

Each number from 1 through 9 has TouchPoints corresponding to the digit's quantity:

- Numerals 1 through 5 use single TouchPoints, or dots.
- Numerals 6 through 9 use double TouchPoints, symbolized by a dot inside of a circle.
- Students touch single TouchPoints once and double TouchPoints twice, each while counting aloud.

By touching the TouchPoints and counting aloud, the teacher engages the visual learner, the auditory learner and the kinesthetic learner.

In TouchMath computations, students always touch the numbers in the touching/counting pattern specified for a particular numeral, as demonstrated here:

-  The one is touched at the top while counting: "One."
-  The two is touched at the beginning and the end of the numeral while counting: "One, two."
-  The three is touched at the beginning, middle and end of the numeral while counting: "One, two, three."
-  The four is touched and counted from top to bottom on the down strokes while counting: "One, two, three, four."
-  The five is touched and counted in the sequential order pictured: "One, two, three, four, five." Memory Cue: To help in remembering the fourth TouchPoint, it may be referred to as the "belly button."
-  The six begins the use of dots with circles. The encircled dots should be touched and counted twice, whenever they appear. Six is touched and counted from top to bottom: "One-two, three-four, five-six." Memory Cue: Touch at the top, middle, bottom.



The seven is also touched and counted top, middle, bottom: "One-two, three-four, five-six," followed by the single dot: "seven." Memory Cue: The single TouchPoint can be thought of as the nose. Teachers sometimes tell young or remedial students to go back and "touch him on the nose" to help them remember the final TouchPoint.



The eight is touched and counted from left to right: "One-two, three-four, five-six, seven-eight." Memory Cue: Tell the young or remedial students that the eight looks like a robot. Count his eyes first, then his arms.



The nine is touched and counted from top to bottom: "One-two, three-four, five-six, seven-eight," followed by the single dot: "nine." Memory Cue: Tell the young or remedial student that the nine is the tallest number and the only number with a "hat". They should begin counting at the hat and continue straight down the body. Again, the single TouchPoint can be thought of as the nose.

In TouchMath addition, students count forward. In subtraction, they count backward. In multiplication and division, they count in sequences. Students touch, count and repeat the problems and answers aloud to ensure success.

The TouchMath method:

- Simplifies and clarifies all areas of computation
- Develops left/right directionality
- Reduces number reversals
- Reinforces number values
- Eliminates guesswork
- Helps develop a positive self-image

This powerful teaching strategy supplements any textbook series and complements the manipulative approach.

Because of this technique's effectiveness, TouchMath has become the most accepted and widely used basic math supplement in general classrooms, special education, Chapter 1 programs, and home learning environments, throughout the United States and in many foreign countries.

Ultimately, this proven method will help you to better prepare your students for the more complex, technology-driven, math-dependent careers of the future.

### **Multisensory Approach**

TouchMath integrates visual cues into our a one-step-at-a-time approach, ensuring that each skill is easily mastered before introducing the next skill. When the multisensory approach is punctuated with visual cues, negative habits such as reversals and guessing are effectively avoided. Students remain optimistic and self-confident as they assimilate new information. High self-esteem encourages the development of more complex math skills later.

## Appendix I

## Suggestions for Subject Adaptation

Lesson Plan	What Other Students Are Expected to Learn	Knowledge for Student with Down syndrome	Process	Demonstration
Story writing	Write a story about a special event	To recognize beginning, middle and end of a story	Use beginning, middle, end boxes Word webs Real life pictures Use of a scribe Colour code beginning, middle, end	Tell their story to the class using boxes/pictures to cue student
Novel study	Read and summarize one chapter of novel	Answer 5 "what" questions on assigned chapter	Listen to taped chapter 3 times Highlight pertinent text Draw main character Complete fill-in-the-blank worksheets Answers at the top	Answer questions by: - multiple choice - fill-in-the-blank test - oral test
Spelling	Memorize 18 theme spelling words for a Friday test	Choose 7 one-syllable theme spelling words for a Friday test	Comprehension check Raised letters Sand box Games like Bingo and Hangman Add words to personal dictionary	Take spelling test using: - scribes - letter files
Science	Photosynthesis	Learn how plants grow, why they need sun and water and why plants die	Hands-on: plant a seed Picture summaries of growth Comparison study: one plant gets water and sun but the other does not	Oral report on the comparison study Fill-in-the-blank test
Science Research Project	Choose a mammal and 5 sub topics to research and report on	Choose a mammal and 3 sub topics to report on	Brainstorm 10 questions with the student Sort into categories Prepare 3-step job cards for each category Information search in library Prepare a scrapbook/poster of collection info.	Display project Oral or video tape presentation
Social Studies	Provinces of Canada	Calgary	Student focus: What do I do? Where do I go? Map of neighbourhood with home, school, store and sports Measure distances Relate community to city: downtown, zoo, river, mountains	Map or 3D model Photo album of "where I go" and "what I do" in my community

# *Ideas, Samples & Designs II*

*Best Practices for Inclusive Education*

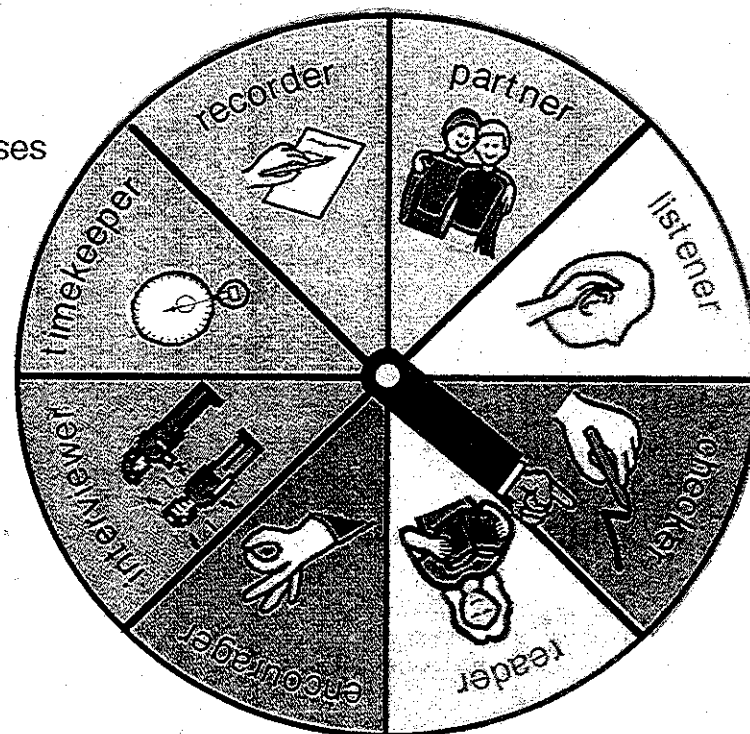


Helping all students learn successfully in general education

Supported Education Team  
luci\_chiotti@mesd.k12.or.us

## Ways Students Can Participate in Any and All Activities

- Friend takes notes
- Friend reads to him/her
- Friend reads his/her part or paper
- Friend tape records 'Joe's' responses
- Timer in group
- Pass out papers
- Note taker with stickies
- Score keeper
- Listener
- Audio visual technician
- Hold up pictures for answer
- Point to next person
- Encourager
- Keeper of materials
- Gatherer of group materials



### Projects can look a variety of ways:

- |                         |                     |                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| book report             | rap                 | model                 |
| video                   | editorial           | oral history          |
| book map                | demonstration       | poem                  |
| artifact collection     | pageant             | diorama               |
| song                    | organizing a trip   | pantomime             |
| individual presentation | storyboard          | article               |
| photo essay             | game                | mural                 |
| dance                   | mobile              | summary of interviews |
| oral report             | choral reading      | hyperstudio stack     |
| slide show              | play                | collage               |
| trifold display         | simulation activity | illustrated booklet   |
| group presentation      |                     |                       |

## Language Arts & Literacy

Story Pyramids are often used to help students demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension. When we add the visual organizer with pictures, all students can join in, contribute and learn. The pyramid can be laminated for multiple practice and copied to hand in. This is a great partner activity.

\_\_\_\_\_

**one word reaction**        
 wow      bad      yeah

\_\_\_\_\_

**two words describing the main character**      What did they look like?      How did they feel?      What did they do?

\_\_\_\_\_

**three words describing your feelings about the story**      liked      disliked      bored      great      funny

\_\_\_\_\_

**four words describing the problem**

\_\_\_\_\_

**five words describing the solution**

\_\_\_\_\_

**six words describing the ending of the story**

\_\_\_\_\_

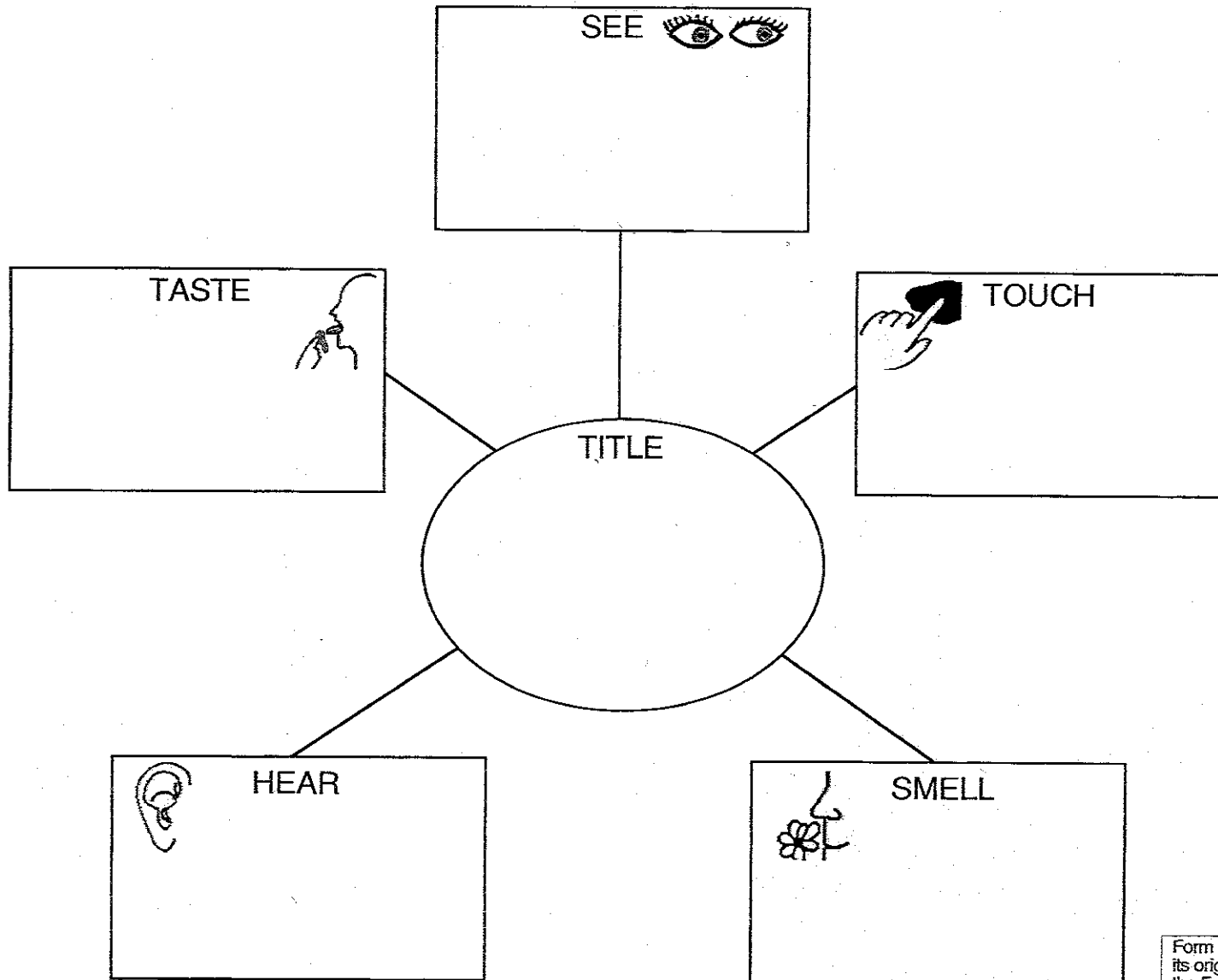
**seven words describing what you learned from the story**

The **Setting Analysis** helps students look more deeply into the details of the story. One teacher uses the setting analysis to get students to stop and increase their awareness of their own setting at particular times during the week.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

**Setting Analysis**



Form is available in its original format in the Forms Section.

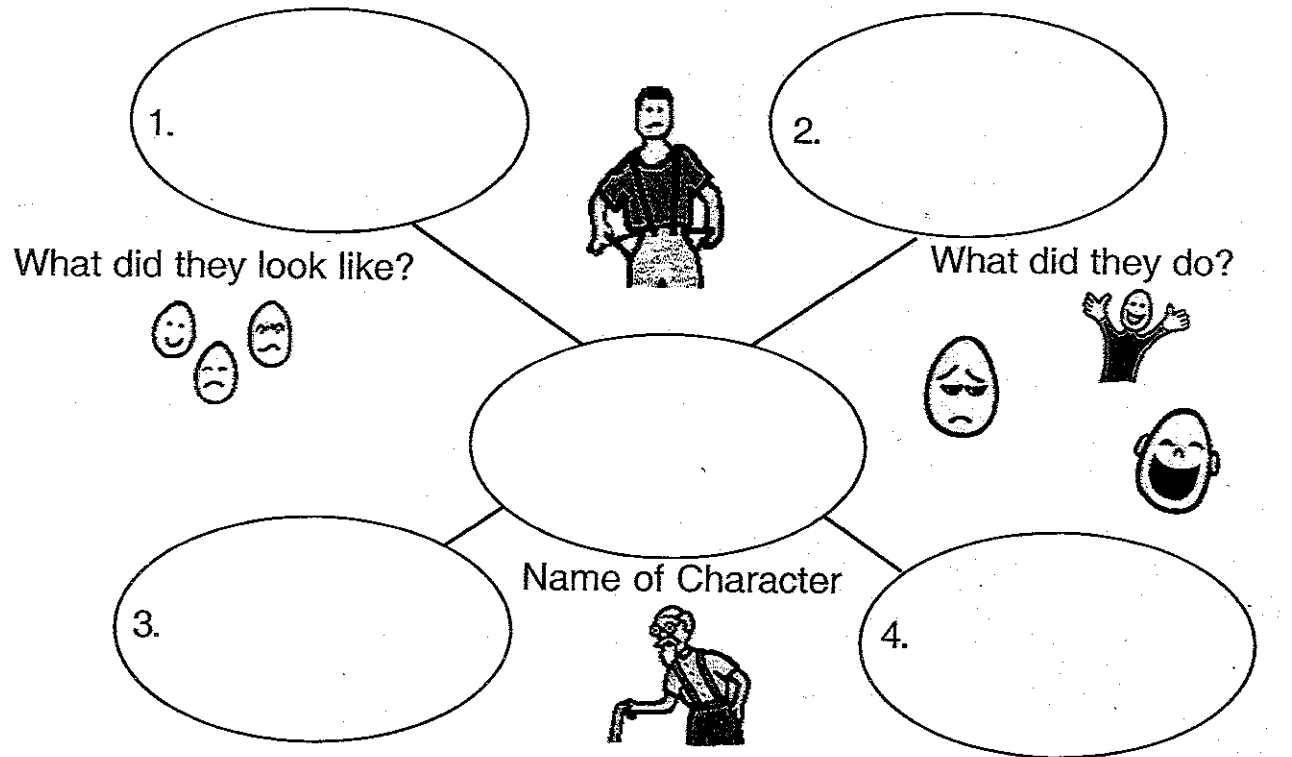


The Character Web helps students think about details and gives non-readers visual cues to help them join in. Each of these tools also provide great visuals for students during discussions to help prompt participation and success.

### Literature Study

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of book: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Author of book: \_\_\_\_\_

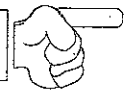


*What did you like/not like about the character?*

*How did the character help the story?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Form is available in its original format in the Forms Section.






The Story Map is just another way to help a student process multiple events within a story.

### Literature Study

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Extension Activity  
*Story Map*


Title & Author: \_\_\_\_\_


Setting	Characters 
Problem 	1st Event
2nd Event	3rd Event
4th Event	Conclusion 





The **Story Frame** assists students in what to look for and how to format their writing.

## Story Frame

The story  takes place \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is a character  in the story who \_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_ is another character  in the story who is \_\_\_\_\_

A problem  occurs when \_\_\_\_\_


After that \_\_\_\_\_

+  
and \_\_\_\_\_

The problem is solved \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_



The story ends \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_



Form is available in  
its original format in  
the Forms Section.



## Carla's Book Report Letter

Each week, the class writes their teacher a letter describing the book they read. Sometimes Carla looks at picture books. Sometimes she writes about a book a friend read to her and sometimes it's a book she and her mom have read at home. Carla's letter provides visual cues and steps to help her share the books she enjoys.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Carla

Dear Mrs. Welch,




The name of my book was: \_\_\_\_\_

The character was:

funny 

sad 

happy 

mad 

Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (Draw a picture).



I liked disliked the book.

I told \_\_\_\_\_ about my book.

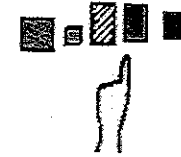


a friend


Sincerely,  
Carla

# When I am Mad...


## When I am mad I have choices:




I can take a break.




I can take a walk.



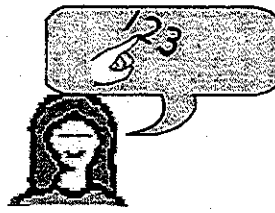
I can read.



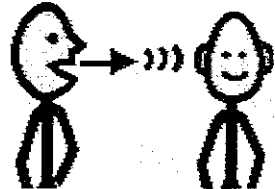
I can find a quiet place to cool down.



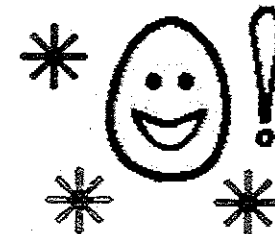
I can count to ten to myself.



I can talk to somebody.



When I make a good choice I will feel great!



Name: \_\_\_\_\_




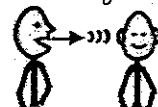

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

It made me mad when: \_\_\_\_\_

I was on the playground and my friends  
 said it wasn't my turn. I wanted to kick  
 someone but I decided to take a break  
 instead.


I took a break and calmed  
 myself by:

Circle one

<p>going to the basket</p> 	<p>visiting Spunky to calm down</p> 	<p>reading</p> 	<p>talking to somebody</p> 	<p>counting to ten to myself.</p> 
--	---	---	--	---

Now I can move on by...

forgetting about it



being happy



and

joining my class





## Making Relationships a Priority

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One of the biggest myths I hear in my work in inclusive education is about friendship. Teachers commonly share that they struggle to facilitate relationships during the middle and high school years because older students simply are not interested in socializing with students with disabilities. As one teacher told me, "When they are little, they are more accepting but as kids get older...they are just more into their own thing. We can't force friendship!"

It is certainly true that no teacher can create friendships between students (nor would we want to), but it is equally true that every educator can create conditions in the classroom that will give students opportunities to strengthen social relationships, learn about and from each other, and get and give support. These opportunities, in many cases, lead to the development of friendships.

Many students with disabilities—including those with significant disabilities—make friends during the secondary school years and sustain those friendships for years. We know this dream is possible. The goal, then, is to create the conditions that will make the dream a reality for a wider range of students. Five ways that schools can encourage interactions, build community, and facilitate relationships are offered here.

### Make It a Priority

It almost seems to simple to be true but when students with disabilities do have a robust network of friends it is often, in part, because they are supported by teachers who value and cultivate student collaboration and interaction. In other words, schools that succeed in bringing students together understand relationships as a priority and engage in practices that are related to that priority. In these schools, for examples, social interactions are prioritized on Individual Education Plans and considered in the development of lesson plans.

### Build a School Community

The development and sustenance of a school community involves strategies and practices that purposefully encourage and teach sharing, learning, interdependence, and respect. For example, teachers might encourage community through cooperative learning experiences, conflict resolution opportunities, play and games, class meetings, service learning, social-justice education, cross-age and same-age tutoring and mentoring, and school and classroom celebrations (Sapon-Shevin, 1999). Teachers can also cultivate community by working for whole-school change. For instance, by lobbying for smaller classes, challenging competitive school structures (e.g., cutting students from sports teams), and developing ways to connect students across classrooms and grade levels (e.g., in-school e-mail pals), teachers can not only strengthen the classroom community but help the school as a whole become more responsive to a wider range of learners.

### Create Spaces for Sharing

Teachers who seek information about students' experiences, dreams, interests, and needs can use this information to better educate their students and to facilitate relationships between learners. Too often (especially in secondary schools), students are educated in the same classrooms day after day without developing personal relationships. When I was observing one middle school classroom, I asked a young man to tell me the name of one of his classmates. "I don't know his name" the student replied. "I've never talked to him". I later found out that these two students had been in the same classroom for over two months.

Students' voices must be central to work in the classroom and time must be carved out for communication and idea sharing. Teachers interested in incorporating students voices might begin by increasing forums for student participation and leadership. For instance, students might be asked to lead weekly class meetings or to mentor one another. In Kim Rombach's classroom, students have ample time and space for sharing; they are even in charge of managing conflicts. Rombach facilitates this process by providing two "talking chairs" that are available to any two students who engaged in a disagreement. Students in this classroom don't go to the teacher to have their recess scuffle assessed, instead they secure permission from the teacher to use the "talking chairs". In the chairs they discuss their issues and try to find a solution or explain their feelings (Sapon-Shevin, 1999).

### Look to Peers to Teach and Support

<http://www.paulakluth.com/articles/relationships.html>

11/13/2008

Peer support is an essential part of inclusive schooling for students with and without disabilities. In some cases, students succeed when teachers cannot. Often times, peers will learn quite naturally how to support a friend with disabilities. They will know how to calm, how to teach, and how to encourage a classmate without any direction or interference from adults. In addition, peers are valuable resources because they tend to understand each other in ways authority figures or adults do not. Even the best teachers lack the same degree of intimacy with students that students share with each other. Students know each other's secrets and their fears. They often recognize each other's needs and gifts in ways that adults do not always recognize. This type of help and mutual support is great preparation for adult life for all participating.

In any peer support model, however, it is critical that teachers seek opportunities to give all students opportunities to both give and receive help and support. Relationships where some individuals are always helped while others are always helping are neither natural nor particularly useful in building a classroom community. It is a teacher's job, therefore, to cultivate a classroom culture that allows all students to give assistance and receive assistance.

### Provide Opportunities for Social Connection Beyond Classroom

In order to support the development of relationships in the classroom, teachers may need to help students find social opportunities outside of the classroom. Extracurricular activities with all of the related fun, camaraderie, and socializing can offer some of the richest opportunities for relationship building students are likely to have during their school years.

While some schools offer activities to meet the needs of all students, other schools need to develop a wider array of activities so that every student can find an extra-curricular home. Some schools, for instance, are moving beyond the traditional sports-based and arts-based extra-curricular options and offering clubs and activities related to academic content (e.g., chess club), political issues (e.g., conservation groups, Students Against Drunk Driving [SADD]), and social support (e.g., anti-drug groups).

All schools must be conscientious about offering options that will interest and engage a range of students in the school (Sapon-Shevin & Kluth, 2003). This means questioning whether or not all students can afford certain clubs or activities; whether meeting times are convenient for students who may have after-school responsibilities; and whether students can get the appropriate supports they need to participate in after-school activities. If a student with a disability, for instance, needs personal support to participate in activities, teachers must brainstorm ways to provide this. Schools may try and provide natural supports by structuring the activities in creative ways or they may ask paraprofessionals or teachers to provide this support or look to student or adult volunteers.

### References

Sapon-Shevin, M. (1999). *Because we can change the world: A practical guide to building cooperative, inclusive classroom communities*. Boston : MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Sapon-Shevin, M. & Kluth, P. (2003). In the pool, on the stage, and at the concert. In P. Kluth,

D. Straut, & D. Biklen (Eds.). *Access to academics for all students: Critical approaches to inclusive curriculum, instruction, and policy*. Erlbaum Publishing.

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## Is This Inclusion? Questioning Removal, Rejection and Exclusion

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Adapted from: P. Kluth (2003). "You're going to love this kid": Teaching students with autism in the inclusive classroom. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing

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I was visiting an elementary school when I passed a little boy sitting on the floor in the hallway crying and sucking on his wrist. When I asked another teacher about the child she told me, "Oh that's Peter. He's out there more than he's in the classroom. He can't handle it."

I fear there are a lot of Peters out there waiting for opportunities to re-enter the inclusive classroom. Many students who are included in general education environments are only allowed in for a portion of the school day. Others are allowed in on a contingency plan; they can stay as long as they can behave.

Too often, students with disabilities are asked to leave the classroom or are escorted out of educational environments without their permission. Faber and Mazlish (1995), ask us to put ourselves in the place of a student who is isolated. "As an adult you can imagine how resentful and humiliated you would feel if someone forced you into isolation for something you said or did" (p. 115). For a young person, however, this type of rejection can be even more serious, since he or she may come to believe "that there is something so wrong with her that she has to be removed from society" (p. 115-116). Vivian Paley (1992) reminds us that teachers send powerful messages of exclusion and rejection when they isolate learners; these messages impact students and the classroom:

Thinking about unkindness always reminds me of the time-out chair. It made children sad and lonely to be removed from the group, which in turn made me feel inadequate and mean and -- I became convinced -- made everyone feel tentative and unsafe. These emotions show up in a variety of unwholesome ways depending on whether one is a teacher or child. (p. 95)

This tendency to send the student away from the group is incredibly problematic. When at all possible, it is best to support and address challenging situations in the environments where they occur. Removing students from places where they should feel belonging is detrimental to the building of community and, often, to the processes of teaching and learning.

### What's the harm?

One of the primary reasons students should not be removed is related to the definition of inclusion; students should feel without question that they are members of their classroom community and they should not have this membership constantly threatened. Asking or forcing students to leave an educational environment may even cause new problems both for them and for teachers; students removed from the classroom may feel rejected, hurt, or confused and, in response, may struggle academically, socially, or emotionally. Students who are removed from the classroom also lose valuable content when they are away from the curriculum and instruction of the general education classroom. Students miss instruction, they lose work time, and they have fewer opportunities to interact and learn from peers.

Further, students need to learn to negotiate behaviors in the most natural ways possible. Students cannot learn social skills without opportunities to make friends, they cannot learn communication skills without interacting and working with classmates, and they cannot learn competencies related to behavior if they are not allowed to solve problems and work through difficulties with others in authentic environments.

Finally, removing students from the inclusive classroom frames the behavior as the student's problem and prevents students and teachers from understanding behaviors as complex and socially-situated. If a student is removed from the classroom the teachers and the students are unable to see how the classroom community, the environment, the behaviors of others, and the curriculum and instruction might be impacting a student's actions, feelings, movements, and moods.

Of course any student may need to leave the classroom for a variety of reasons throughout the day, and it is important for students to have this option when they feel upset or angry. Further, students may need to leave the classroom at times so that their dignity can be preserved and protected; if a student needs privacy or wants a break it should be provided. There is absolutely nothing wrong with having a safe, comfortable place where any student can go to relax, calm down, or to have a few minutes alone. In fact, all students should be given this option, and when a situation escalates, the child can be calmly reminded that he can use this space. In one classroom, the teacher checked in with a student with autism at regular intervals. When he seemed anxious or when he began to "melt down" a bit, she would calmly ask him in a whispered voice if he needed a break. She would show him the sign language gesture for "break" and ask him to imitate the sign. She would

then guide him gently to the classroom hall pass and direct him out of the room, teaching him in a very direct and supportive way, how to get the time and space he needed.

Clearly, students with unique learning, behavior, and communication needs can be supported sensitively in the inclusive classroom. Why then is behavior so often cited as a reason why students with disabilities must be removed from the general education classroom? Perhaps it is because teachers are taught to examine “problem behaviors” in students instead of thinking of student struggles as difficulties that must be interpreted, seen in context, and understood in relation to curriculum, instruction, and the school environment.

### A success story

Consider the story of Todd, a young man with very unique learning and behavior characteristics. On Todd's first day of third grade, he ran through the building, crawled under tables, banged his head against the cement floor of the locker room, and screamed every time he heard the fire alarm. Teachers in the building were apprehensive. Todd, who was educated in segregated, special education schools for several years, seemed scared and confused in his new inclusive school.

I was certainly nervous about working with Todd; I desperately wanted him to be successful and was unsure of where to begin in supporting him but I was fairly certain that our school was the best community for him. When my colleagues challenged Todd's placement, suggesting that he needed a more restrictive environment, our administrators pointed out that it was most likely the more restrictive environments that had facilitated the development of so many of Todd's behaviors.

Indeed, Todd had been educated with several non-verbal students for years and was, therefore, unaccustomed to typical classroom communication behaviors. He was educated with two students who banged their heads and he, therefore, adopted head-banging behavior. He was never given instructional materials to handle on his own, so he was unaware of his new teacher's expectations. He had been educated all day in one room so changing environments during the day and “traveling” through such a big school was quite confusing at first.

Changes came slowly but consistently for Todd. Teachers, however, were cautiously optimistic, hopeful, and open-minded. They watched and waited for success and it came. After spending a lot of time observing other students and engaging in typical school routines, Todd was able to use some speech and sign language to request a drink of water or a trip to the bathroom. Students learned his communication system and began socializing with him. Very slowly, his head-banging disappeared.

Todd also learned where to put his belongings and materials in the classroom and began using a picture schedule to learn about daily activities. After a few weeks, he learned where he was supposed to be at different points in the day and stopped running around the building. His teacher then acquired a few small rocking chairs and some floor pillows and Todd stopped crawling under desks, opting instead to sit in his desk, on the chairs, or propped up against the pillows.

Teachers and students helped Todd prepare for the annoying fire drill sounds. Two students flanked Todd the moment the alarm sounded and they modeled how he could put his hands on his ears as he walked out of the building. While he never grew accustomed to the noise, Todd's screaming ceased and he was able to tolerate the sporadic drills.

It took several months for Todd to acclimate, but after only a few weeks the staff marveled at how different this young man looked and acted. He continued to make impressive gains and by his fifth grade year, Todd was participating in all aspects of classroom life, accessing the general education curriculum, and working collaboratively with peers. He became a member of the track team and sang in a school musical. While he once had a paraprofessional sitting next to him at all times, Todd could now work in his classroom with only occasional “spot-checks” by a paraprofessional or special education teacher.

Todd's success can be directly attributed to the inclusive philosophy his teachers held and practiced. If Todd had been seen as “the problem” then teachers would not have created adaptations for him; they would not have given him time to learn about his surroundings; and they would not have adjusted their own expectations or practices. Todd's teacher did not see him as “the problem”, though. Instead, they viewed *the situation* as challenging and collaborated with Todd to make the school a familiar and welcoming place to learn.

Too many students are excluded because they are thought to “own” their behaviors and because these behaviors are assumed to be unchangeable. While behavior can certainly pose a challenge to certain students, their peers, and their educators, it should not serve as a barrier to inclusive schooling. In fact, inclusive schooling may be exactly what students

like Todd need most. Todd teaches that ultimately, we need to face challenges with ideology and develop ways of supporting students that resonate with the beliefs and values we want to promote in our inclusive classrooms and schools.

### References

Faber, A. & Mazlish, E. (1995). How to talk so kids can learn. New York: Avon Books.

Paley, V. (1992). You can't say you can't play. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

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# COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

1. Tell a child what to do instead of what not to do.
2. Show the child by modeling or using a picture of the action.
3. Clearly and simply state what you expect the child to do.
4. Remember young children use inappropriate behavior because they may not understand the social rules yet.
5. Talk to young children using language they understand. Young children may not understand words like "don't" because it is a short word for "do not" and he/she may not know what the "negation" of a word means.
6. Encourage the child in a way that lets him/her know that he/she is exhibiting the desired behavior
7. Be enthusiastic and generous with encouragement. Children can never get enough!

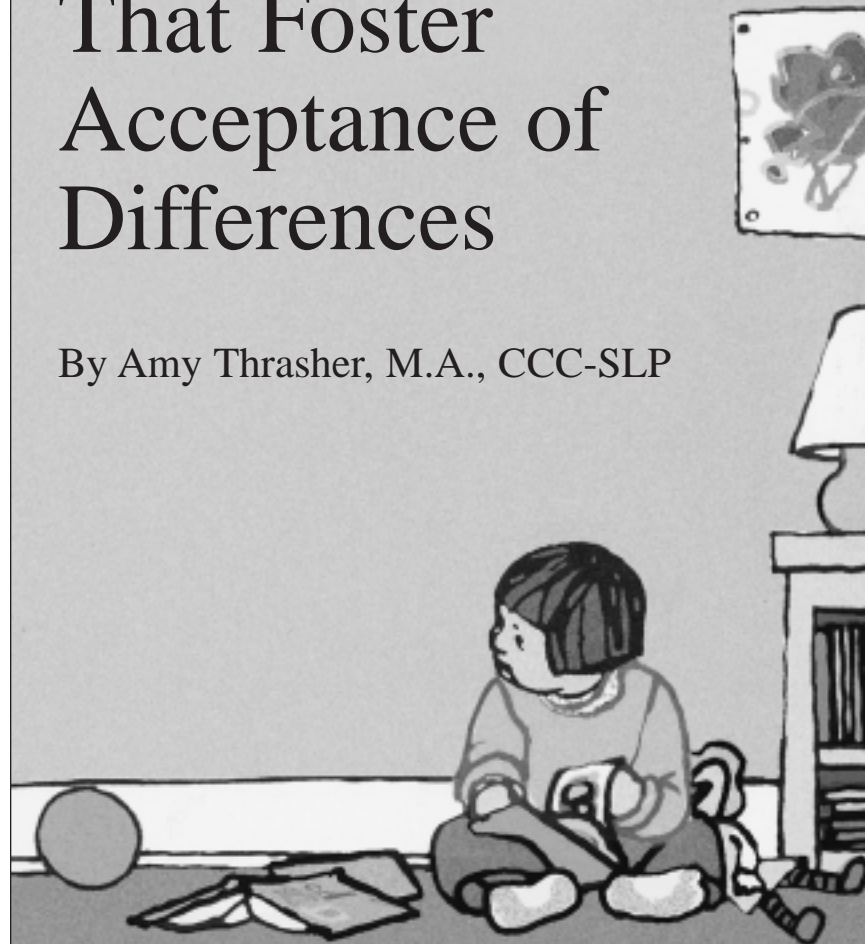
## Examples:

Avoid	Say/Model	Remember
Don't run!	Walk; Use walking feet; Stay with me; Hold my hand	Way to go! I like how you're walking. Thanks for walking!
Stop climbing!	Keep your feet on the floor	Wow! You have both feet on the floor!
Don't touch!	Keep your hands down; Look with your eyes	You are such a good listener; you are looking with hands down!
No yelling!	Use a calm voice; Use an inside voice	[In a low voice] Now I can listen, you are using a calm (inside) voice.
Stop whining!	Use a calm voice; Talk so that I can understand you; Talk like a big boy/girl	Now I can hear you; that is so much better. Tell me with your words what's wrong.
Don't stand on the chair!	Sit on the on the chair	I like the way you are sitting! Wow you're sitting up big and tall!
Don't hit!	Hands down; Hands are for playing, eating, and hugging; Use your words (Give child appropriate words to use to express emotion)	You are using your words! Good for you!
No coloring on the wall!	Color on the paper	Look at what you've colored! Pretty picture!
Don't throw your toys!	Play with the toys on the floor	You're playing nicely. I really like to watch you play!
Stop playing with your food!	Food goes on the spoon and then in your mouth; Say "all done" when finished eating	Great! You're using your spoon! What nice manners, you said "all done;" you can go play now.
Don't play in the water/sink!	Wash your hands	Thanks for washing you're hands! I can tell they are really clean!
No biting!	We only bite food; Use your words if you're upset (Give child appropriate words to use to express emotion)	You're upset, thanks for telling me!
Don't spit!	Spit goes in toilet/tissue/grass; Use your words (Give child appropriate words to use to express emotion)	I like the way you used your words! Thanks for using your words!
Don't run!	Walk; Use walking feet; Stay with me; Hold my hand	Way to go! I like how you're walking Thanks for walking!

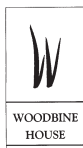
**A TEACHER'S GUIDE**  
*to My Friend Isabelle*

Classroom Activities  
That Foster  
Acceptance of  
Differences

By Amy Thrasher, M.A., CCC-SLP



The companion guide to  
*My Friend Isabelle* by Eliza Woloson



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## INTRODUCTION

# Supporting Acceptance of Differences



Charlie's mother says in *My Friend Isabelle*, "...differences are what make the world so great." Teachers in inclusive classrooms have a wonderful opportunity to make the world a more tolerant place by encouraging children to appreciate our many differences. This Teacher's Guide to *My Friend Isabelle*, with preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students in mind, provides ideas and activities designed to support you in creating a classroom environment in which differences are discussed openly, all children are valued, and learning takes place through friendships.

When children grow up in an atmosphere of diversity, they are much less likely to develop biases toward others who seem different from them. This does not mean that children in inclusive classrooms do not notice differences. These children develop a sophisticated understanding of self, of others, and of difference. If their natural curiosity and attempts to understand their world are met with respect, encouragement, honesty, and with words that make sense to them, children will learn to view differences with acceptance.

The teacher is the most effective tool in creating a classroom community in which diversity is discussed and welcomed. By demonstrating genuine appreciation for the special interests and strengths of *every* child, the teacher creates an atmosphere in which individuality is viewed positively. Teachers can encourage acceptance of difference everyday in the classroom by...

- Creating opportunities for *all* children to engage in activities, communicate with each other, and notice each other's strengths;
- Drawing on information provided by a child's family. In talking with families, go behind labels like "Down syndrome" to get deeper impressions of their child's personality. Use the words the family chooses to describe their child.
- Focusing attention on what children do—on their unique abilities—not on how they look or what they wear. For example, "You love to paint, Vanessa," rather than "What pretty braids you have today.";
- Being specific with comments to children when they cooperate, play with a variety of friends, help each other, or jointly solve problems. For example, "You and Jonah are building a very tall tower together," rather than "Good job, boys."

## Addressing Comments and Answering Questions

As children begin to understand the concepts of "same" and "different," they use their developing language skills to test their theories of how things work in the world. Their attempts to understand differences are natural learning opportunities. How you respond to questions and comments about differences will help reinforce acceptance of diversity in your classroom. *Here are some hints:*

- Prepare for possible comments and questions. Look at your classroom through the eyes of a child. What might a young child notice as "different"?

- Closely observe interactions among children so you will understand the context or reason for a comment or question.
- Address comments and questions in the moment. Postponing a discussion can cause uncertainty or discomfort.

Not all "questions" sound like questions. Children often comment on what they see as a way to confirm their impressions and theories. *Treat comments like questions.* For example:

In a classroom of 3-year-olds, Ahmed crawls to get around. After watching him for a few moments, Ella states, "Ahmed is a baby." You may not be sure what prompted Ella's comment. *Ask her a sincere, non-judgmental question to find out why she thinks this.* Sometimes, just rephrasing a comment will cause a child to elaborate. "You think Ahmed is a baby." Then, by pausing and looking expectantly yet patiently at Ella for her thoughts, you encourage her to say more about her reasoning. From there, you can continue the open discussion.

*You may need to supply information or perspective.* Ella's comment reveals that she is working to understand the concept of age. She naturally associates behavior (Ahmed's crawling) with age (babies crawl). If Ahmed crawls to get around the classroom because of mobility issues, while his classmates walk and run, Ella might test her theory that "3-year-olds walk, babies crawl; therefore Ahmed is a baby." One way to respond would be to say, "You and Ahmed are both 3 years old. Ahmed likes to play with other 3-year-olds, but it is hard for him to move sometimes. He crawls to meet his friends."

# Reading *My Friend Isabelle* to Your Class

Reading *My Friend Isabelle* to a group of children naturally provokes discussions about differences. Read each page, show the illustration, then pause. Your children will notice the exquisite drawings that supplement the text's meaning. The following activities support children's questions and comments and suggest ways to explore the concepts in the story. Responses to the story from children in my own classroom and strategies that I have used are sprinkled throughout.

## Experiences That Correspond with the Story



*“Even though we are the same age, we are different.”*

When you read this page, many children will naturally hold out their feet for inspection. Try imitating this action, providing a model for the children who do not immediately join in. Draw children into the conversation, who are unlikely to participate verbally in a large group, by pointing out shoe similarities and differences. “Oh, look! Deneeka has flowers on her shoes like you, Tara. Deneeka’s are purple and yours are white.” By connecting two children in the same remark, children begin to see each other in relation to one another. Try incorporating movement, since

some children may not have enough language to participate verbally. When reading this page to my class, I commented, “Thomas has new light-up shoes!” and stomped my foot. Thomas, who doesn’t yet have words to talk about his shoes, imitated me and stomped his foot. I made sure to stress that even though Thomas’ feet are smaller than Tara’s, Thomas and Tara are the same age, like Isabelle and Charlie in the story.

## **Idea #1: Shoe Store**

Create a mini shoe store in your classroom. Collect and set out shoes of all sizes, from baby shoes to Daddy-sized shoes. Include specialized shoes, braces, casts, or orthotics that children can explore. Assist the children in measuring and comparing their foot sizes. You can use a foot measuring device from a shoe store, trace the children’s feet on construction paper, or use a measuring tape or ruler. Outfit your classroom’s dolls with a variety of shoes and ambulatory accessories as well! Have materials such as ace band-a-ges, toilet paper rolls, velcro, and foam packing material available to make ambulatory accessories.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

Encourage your students to act out various shoe store scenarios, for example looking for a particular size or style of shoe. Teachers can assist by prompting children with appropriate words or gestures. Pair children and allow those who are adept at pretend play to model for children who have less experience.

### ***Resources:***

You can buy or borrow shoe boxes, shoe horns, foot measuring devices, etc. from local shoe stores. Collect old shoes, boots, ski boots, braces, orthotics, shoe boxes, and more from your students’ families. Check with occupational and physical therapists for items they are no longer using. Tap local orthopedists, clinics, medical supply stores, or hospitals for resources. Check the Lakeshore Learning Materials™ catalog for materials for dolls with differing abilities.

## **Idea #2: Foot Painting**

Cover your classroom floor with sheets of paper from a large roll. Allow the children to stand on the paper, holding an adult's hand so they don't slip, and paint the bottom of one of their feet. To personalize their prints, give them a choice of paint color. Then they can stomp their footprints! When the paint dries, encourage the children to write their names next to their footprints and discuss any differences in size, shape, and paint color.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

If they will tolerate it, allow pairs of children to paint each other's feet. After they have had their foot painting fun, the children can wash their feet in buckets of warm, sudsy water and dry them with towels. While cleaning up, the children, who might not otherwise pair up, will be encouraged to share their excitement over the project.

### ***Special Considerations:***

If a child in your class has something different about their feet, this is a natural opportunity to discuss it. All children can participate in these activities, even those with mobility issues, so be creative and seek out opportunities for these differences to be discussed openly. "Lucy has a differently formed foot. She is learning to strap on the braces that help her walk. Maybe you can help her with the velcro straps, Terrence." While some families welcome the opportunity for peers to explore their child's assistive accessories, others might find this discomfoting. Always ask the family and the child for their preferences.



***"I am tall. Isabelle is short."***

It will take just a moment, but the children will notice that in this illustration, Isabelle is standing on a stool. (All children can relate to feeling small in a grown-up sized world.) Likely, discussions about their own heights will begin. It is important that the teacher sets a tone of acceptance. Indicate that people come in all shapes and sizes, and that all shapes and sizes are valued. Take care not to reinforce societal stereotypes, such as that short or small is somehow inferior.

## **Idea #1: Body Tracing**

To explore height and body shapes, have the children lay down on big paper and trace them with a marker. For added interest, children can be traced striking poses or holding hands with another child. Children love to individualize these images of themselves with markers, collage materials, or their own personal items such as barrettes, shoe laces, and even band-aids!

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

The tracings can be cut out and placed on a wall in different groupings of friends on different days. This suggests to the children that they can be friends with *all* members of the class. "Carrie and Alma are buddies on the wall today!" Reinforce the connection by having the pair share classroom responsibilities, such as passing out lunches or watering the plants.

## **Idea #2: “Look How I’ve Grown!”**

A common object in early childhood classrooms, the height chart, takes on more meaning as children explore concepts of size and measurement within the context of this story. **You may have a child in your class who uses a wheelchair or cannot stand up** to be measured. You and the child’s friends can hold a piece of string against the child’s body from head to toe, cut it, then tape the string to the height chart. If you use this string method for one child, use the same method for *all* children.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

Have the children measure one another. Make sure the children know to tell the child being measured that they will be touching them with the string, as unexpected light touches can be unpleasant for many children.

### **Other ideas to try:**

Height, size, and shape differences are easily related to other physical differences. To explore other physical differences, try these ideas:

- Provide a variety of mirrors in the dramatic play section of your classroom and elsewhere.
- Create life-size self-portraits using a variety of skin-toned papers, paints, markers, and collage materials that truly reflect the children’s skin color, eye color, hair color and texture.
- Create a “family pictures” wall. Give each child the opportunity to show and tell their friends about their family in the photos on the wall. In some families, relatives look similar, in others, each person looks unique. A child may point out, “Chen doesn’t look like her mommy. She has black hair but her mom has yellow hair.” Use this opportunity to talk about family differences, and be sure to use the families’ words for these differences.
- Cut out pictures of people of a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and ages from magazines for the children to use in collages.



***“I run fast. Isabelle takes her time.”***

This page of the story addresses not only ways of moving, but ways of being, which, for children can often seem like the same thing. Many children will excitedly say, “I run fast, too!” One boy in my class, who has very few words, stood up and ran a few steps into our circle, expressing very clearly and proudly that he understood and identified with Charlie. Another child, who has a quiet, observant demeanor, went home and told her mother that we were reading *My Friend Isabelle*. After a moment, she exclaimed, “Isabelle takes her time!” as if to say that she had found a positive image of herself in the character of Isabelle.

## **Idea #1: “Chase Me!”**

“Chase” is one of the earliest interactive games that children of all abilities enjoy, in one form or another. If we focus on what movement *feels* like, rather than racing and competing with each other, we *all* win. Actually being caught is not really the point, but the thrill of movement, pursuit, and interaction can create shared moments of joy between peers who may not otherwise play together. Through the joy of chase, I have seen friendships begin among children who seem to be at very different levels in the classroom. By communicating through movement, children begin to see children of differing abilities as potential play partners.

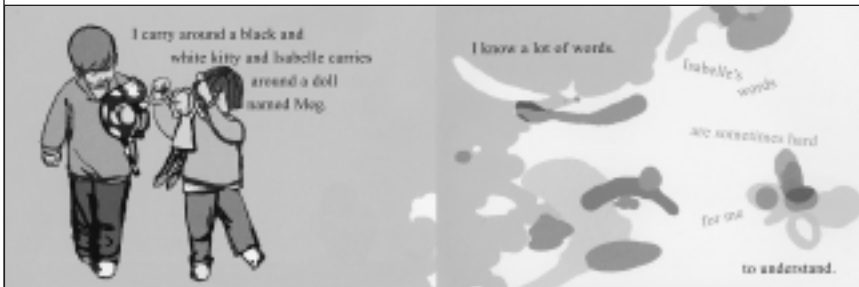
### ***Supporting child interactions:***

It often takes a teacher’s suggestive remark about the actions of a child to encourage others to join that child in play. “Look at how fast Conrad runs! Julia, I bet Conrad would like it if you chased

him!” “That’s a slippery slide, Francesca! Watch out, here comes Michael, chasing you down!”

## **Idea #2: “Move Like Me!”**

By holding up visuals and calling out ways to move, you can encourage children to move together in similar ways. Hold up a stop sign, a green light, a checkered flag that says “*fast!*” or a yellow sign that says “*slow!*” Have the children take turns assisting you in calling out the ways of moving. Add silly ways to move, like crab-walking or running while “bicycling” arms. **If a child in your class has limited range of movement**, make the ways that this child moves some of the choices. This will not only give the child a chance to move along with his friends, but will also provide an opportunity for his friends to take his perspective for a moment.



*“I know a lot of words. Isabelle’s words are sometimes hard for me to understand.”*

The story begins to shift here from addressing physical differences to more abstract differences among people. Young children are just beginning to understand the concepts of words, and the power of communicating through them. This simple text and the illustration help children begin to understand that we are all learning to communicate in our own way. Even though sometimes our friends may be hard to understand, they are trying to tell us something. It may just take a little time and “detective work” to figure it out!

## **Idea #1: Word Detectives**

Fortunately, in our diversifying society, children are being exposed to languages other than their own home language. Children know that “Rosa speaks Spanish and is learning English”; “Anton speaks English *and* German.” Encourage children to be “word detectives,” to keep an ear out for new words heard in their own or other languages, and to seek out clues to their meanings. Keep a list of these words and their definitions posted in your classroom. This ongoing activity will do wonders for your students’ vocabulary and understanding of cultural and linguistic differences and similarities.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

**If you have children in your classroom whose “words are sometimes hard to understand,”** encourage your students to be “word detectives” and uncover clues as to what their classmates mean. Is their friend pointing at something? Does it sound something *like* a word they know? In this way, the responsibility for communication is on both communicative partners: the speaker and the listener. You’ll find that children become better listeners and more cooperative as they try to understand one another. You’ll be amazed at the empathy that will develop among children. “Leila sounds like she’s going to cry a little. I think she’s hungry. Do you want some crackers, Leila?”

## **Idea #2: Signed Stories**

American Sign Language (ASL) is its own true language, with its own syntax and morphology. If a family member of a child in your classroom is fluent in sign language, or if you know anyone in the Deaf community, it is an eye-opening and engaging experience for the children to see a story told in ASL. Children become absorbed in the movements and expressions that bring the story alive.

Try showing the pictures from *My Friend Isabelle* while it is being signed (voice off). The children might recognize some signs because of their iconicity—they “look like” what they refer to. Then read the book aloud while it is being signed (voice on). Ask the children to describe the different ways in which they experienced the story with and without spoken words.

Hand signs and gestures are frequently used by children whose “words are sometimes hard to understand” or who have trouble understanding spoken words. Have the children pick out a few words from the story and learn the corresponding signs. Hand signs and gestures are frequently used as stepping stones to spoken words!

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

Become familiar with the signs that a child in your class uses, and begin to use them with *all* the children during daily routines. Some common signs used with children to augment their speech development are “more,” “all done,” “yes,” “no,” “stop,” and words for activities, such as “eat,” “drink,” “potty,” etc. Ask the child’s family if there is a particular sign language dictionary they use, or if they have pictures that demonstrate the signs. (Some signs are different across regions of the country, and some families may use their own versions of signs/gestures.) You can post these sign pictures along with the written labels in your classroom. Children love learning signs, and if you remind them, “Victor is using his signs and now you know what he is saying,” you’ll find them interacting with Victor more often as they look forward to figuring out what his signs mean.

### **Idea #3: Sign Names**

Create sign names for each child in your class. Sign names are signs that usually incorporate the first letter of a person’s name, plus some unique characteristic of that person. For instance, Audrey has a twinkle in her eyes, so we sign her name “A” by the eye. Typically, sign names are given by people who are Deaf. If

you are unable to have a person from the Deaf community join your class on this day, let the children decide what makes for the most appropriate sign names for each other. Start by pointing out unique qualities that each of the children have. Encourage everyone to contribute to the list. This is a great opportunity to open up a discussion about differences in a natural and positive way. Raul has curly hair, he wears glasses to help him see, he always tells the funniest jokes, and he loves cars. Maybe the person from the Deaf Community or the children will decide to use the “R” hand shape when signing “car” for Raul’s name. The easiest way for children to learn everyone’s name signs and begin to interact using them will be through your “hello song” that recognizes each child.

### ***Resources:***

There are a number of attractive sign language books for children out there, including *The Handmade Alphabet* by Laura Rankin. Look for more at your local library.



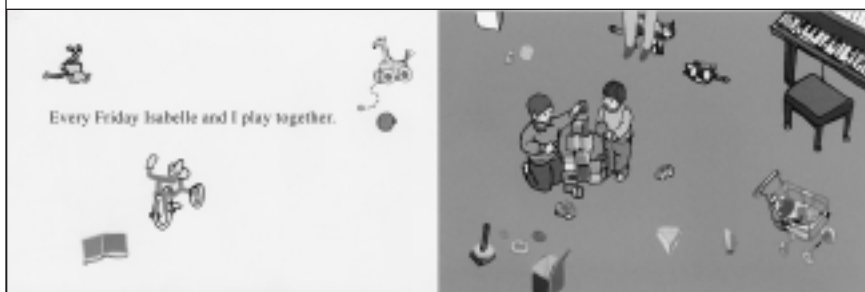
***“Mommy says that differences are what make the world so great.”***

This is the essential message of the book. Inspire a discussion of differences by posing this thought-provoking question to the children: “What would it be like if we were all the same?”

### **Idea #1: “I Spy”**

Encourage the children to find people in this illustration doing different activities, using different modes of transportation, or

with various physical distinctions. “I spy with my little eye a person riding a unicycle.” Give each child a turn “spying” something. Then ask the children why these differences make the world so great. Record their answers on a poster that they can add to throughout the day, the week, or however long you spend with the book.



***“Every Friday Isabelle and I play together.”***

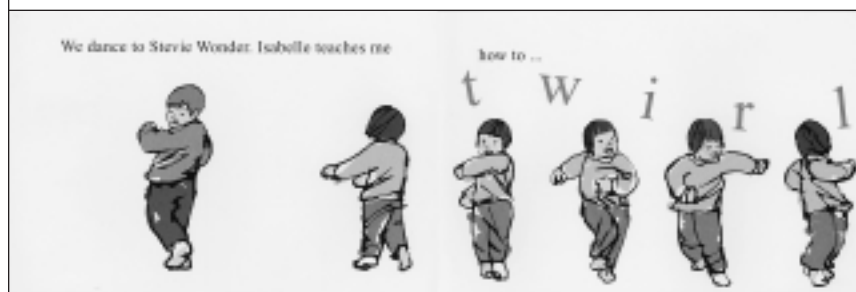
During their early childhood years, children use their developing social-emotional skills to build friendships. Through friendship, children learn from each other and construct meaning together. Reading this page provides an excellent opportunity to talk about friendships. We have all kinds of friendships and special people in our lives. Do the children in your class have a special day with Grandma? Do they have their cousins or neighbors over to play? Do they have playdates with friends? By engaging the children in a conversation about family and friends with whom they play already, you can then begin to talk about playdates among the children in your class. The children will see themselves as potential friends outside of school. “Sandy, if Lena came to your house, what would you like to play with her?”

***Supporting child interactions:***

Teachers play a vital role in encouraging and supporting parents in arranging playdates for their children. Encourage families of children with disabilities to be proactive in seeking out playdates for their children. Bring up the topic of playdates at drop-off or

pick-up times, at conferences, or home-visits. Discuss how the children interact with each other during class and which children might enjoy a playdate together. Be specific with your suggestions: “I’ve seen Noelle and Carter playing at the sensory table together a lot lately. They might enjoy a playdate that centers around a sandbox.”

Playdates where both families are present, such as at the park, help families understand that their children *do* have things in common, and go a long way to assuage any concerns about differences or behaviors. As an early childhood teacher, you know how much learning takes place within the context of friendships. Spread this important gem of knowledge to the families with whom you work. Create your own playdate tipsheet to post on your family bulletin board, send home, or include in your newsletter.



***“We dance to Stevie Wonder. Isabelle teaches me how to twirl.”***

Young children love to dance and twirl, and to be recognized for a special movement! When we come to this page during story-book circle, we all take a twirl. It can be very difficult for young children to sit quietly while being read to, so this opportunity for movement, which connects meaningfully to the story, is helpful to me as a teacher! Movement is often very organizing for children; it helps them quiet their bodies so they can focus their attention on the task at hand.

## **Using Music To Encourage Communication and Interaction**

Music in the classroom can be used to enhance understanding, stimulate communication, calm or alert children, ease transitions, and support child interactions. When used just as background noise, music only creates more stimuli for a child to filter through their auditory system. This can cause some children to “tune out”; others may become over-stimulated. But when a child is *engaged* with music, it can help her organize her body and thoughts. Children who have few or no words are often very attuned to music.

The repetitive nature of children’s songs and simple lyrics connected to hand movements provide children with opportunities to associate meaning with words. Melody and rhythm also help children attend to lyrics, and later help them recall and reproduce those words when they begin joining in with songs. One technique that encourages word production is to leave off the last word in a familiar refrain, such as leaving off “boat” when singing the second refrain of “Row, Row, Row Your (Boat.)”

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

Children can relate to one another through songs that incorporate hand holding, such as “Ring Around the Rosie” or “London Bridges,” or other physical connection. Other songs can be adapted to increase the amount of child interaction. For instance, children can face each other sitting down and holding hands while rowing and singing, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

### **Idea #1: Music Jam!**

Invite families to send in music that they listen to at home with their children. Dance around the room as each child leads the movement to their own “special” music. Often you will find there are musicians among your students’ families who may be willing to come in and play for the children.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

Record a mixed tape or CD of all the different styles of music that the families share. Lend it out to families or make copies for each family so the children can listen to the music at home and associate each song with a friend from class.

### **Idea #2: Special Songs**

Most children like to be recognized in song and to be imitated by their friends. Songs and activities, like those listed below, give children the opportunity to shine as individuals and show respect to their classmates.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

**“Simon Says”**—In this game, I always say “Simon says...” and skip the trickery part, which children in this age group don’t usually grasp anyway. Let the children take turns being “Simon.” When it is Theo’s turn, he leads the group for three movements, each time saying, “Theo says...” For children who don’t initially grasp the concept of leading “Simon Says,” I might notice the child’s position or movement and say, “Oh look, Karen says, ‘Put your hands on your knees!’”

**“Everybody Do This”**—This is a simple song or chant to do in a circle. Ask a child what movement he or she would like the group to do, or, if the child cannot answer that type of question, “catch” the child doing a movement. Then sing and imitate the child’s movement, “Everybody do this, do this, do this. Everybody do this, just like Jackson.”

**“Something Special Song”**—This song or chant highlights what a child views as special to her. Ask a child what he or she would like to sing about, such as her nail polish, baseball hat, or the kitty on her shirt. Look for the slightest movement from physically challenged children or those with limited language as an indication of what they would like to sing about. “Bella has blue shoes, blue shoes, blue shoes. Bella has blue shoes on today.”

We pretend to go shopping for grapes at the store.  
We cry when one of us forgets to share.



***“We pretend to go shopping for grapes at the store.  
We cry when one of us forgets to share.”***

Children readily identify with this page on many levels. Grocery shopping is a familiar family activity and they love to re-enact it, with themselves in the “grown-up” role of the shopper, rather than as the passive participant in the shopping cart! In “pretend,” they get to choose what they would like to bring home from the store. But the children also relate to the feelings of frustration that can accompany pretend play, when conflicts over toys or roles occur.

### **Idea #1: Grocery Store**

Because it is such a familiar routine in our society, the dramatic play theme of “Grocery Store” draws children together regardless of gender, experience, or ability. You can increase feelings of belonging among all of the children in your class by including foods that are eaten in their homes. Ask children and families what their family favorites are, write “grocery lists” with the children, and ask families to send in cans or empty boxes to bring authentic cultural and literacy experiences into your dramatic play area. As an added benefit, these realistic props help some children relate to the more abstract ideas involved in pretend play. Real paper bags with familiar logos from the children’s local grocery store can help children make connections between this in-class symbolic representation and their own family shopping experiences.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

All children learn through repetition, and some children need more than others. Set up various play scenarios focused on grocery shopping so children can practice their social skills. By providing a familiar play script, such as “shopping to make a recipe,” you can allow for novelty, since elements like the recipe can change, while the basic play script remains the same for children who need more practice. If at first Michelle needs a lot of assistance in the “grocery store” to pay her friend Marquel, the cashier, for the orange, you can support her and then fade back your assistance day by day as you see her becoming more adept and confident.

### **Idea #2: Feeling Faces**

Children need to identify their own feelings before they can begin to understand the feelings of others. Picture cards of faces depicting various emotions can help some children identify how they are feeling when they don’t have or can’t find the words to express it. While reading *My Friend Isabelle*, pairs of children can take turns pointing to or holding up the “feeling face” card that corresponds to the emotions of Charlie and Isabelle in the book. When you reach the page about crying, you can reflect what the children demonstrate with the picture cards, “Aisha thinks that Isabelle is mad. Conor thinks that Charlie is sad.” Talking about the differences and similarities among these kinds of emotions, and how different people might feel a different emotion in the same situation, helps children begin to understand and accept differences among their friends.

### ***Supporting child interactions:***

You can use these feeling faces along with words throughout the day to acknowledge how children are feeling about various situations. Later, the children may begin to use the feeling faces or words to identify each other’s feelings. The children’s awareness of their friends’ feelings will increase, a critical step in the development of empathy. It is appropriate to choose a moment when

things are calm to ask children how they feel when a friend won't share or to ask them about other emotions. Writing down what they say and later reading it back to them is very powerful. In order to include everyone in these discussions, be sure to ask the families of children who are unable to communicate at this level how their children experience and express emotion.



*"We drink apple juice and eat Cheerios at the little red table and chairs. We bring our sippy cups together and say 'CHEERS!' Kitty and Meg say 'CHEERS!' too."*

Children love the picture of Charlie and Isabelle making their stuffed animal friends, Kitty and Meg, say "Cheers!" They relate to this page because they too eat Cheerios, drink apple juice, and believe that their own special toy or stuffed animal is real.

### **Idea #1: Fun with Cheerios!**

Cheerios are one of the first and favorite finger foods given to young children. They provide tiny hands with lots of practice refining their pincer grasp, necessary for later grasp of utensils, zippers, and pencils. Try out these fun recipes and activities.

**Cheerio trail mix**—Making this is a great way to explore differences in preference. Out of all the many tasty treats we offered to make trail mix, one four-year-old only wanted the Cheerios and chocolate chips! Other children liked a wider variety in their mix. Charting children's favorite ingredients provides a visual means to understand different preferences. Children love to make food in

the classroom, and when each child has the opportunity to do a step in a recipe, they feel they belong and contribute to the group.

**Cheerio necklaces**—If you use yarn to string Cheerios, apply tape around one end to make it easier for all children to poke through the holes. Pipecleaners and lanyard string also work well.

**Cheerio books**—There are counting books available illustrated with Cheerios. Children can match real Cheerios to the picture, count, and eat!

### **Idea #2: Teddy Bears' Picnic**

Children will love to bring their favorite toy or stuffed animal to school for a special toys' tea party or a teddy bears' picnic! Have them write and decorate invitations to their "special friend." Ask families to RSVP by sending in a note or short story including the special object's name, the history of how it came to be the child's favorite, and possibly an adventure that the "carry-around" went on with the child. With these personalized stories, you can help *all* children "show and tell" about their special toys.

#### ***Supporting child interactions:***

During the tea party or picnic, encourage children to have their special toys converse. Say "Cheers," and pretend to eat like Isabelle and Charlie do. Some children feel safer relating to others through objects first, before relating personally.

#### ***Special Considerations:***

**If you have a child in your class that has a special diet**, you can talk frankly about this with the whole class and all the families. The more the children and their families know about their friend's dietary needs, the safer that friend will be. "Peanuts make Jessie feel very, very sick. He likes cream cheese and jelly sandwiches instead of peanutbutter and jelly!"

If a child has a dietary need that is more complicated to explain, such as a gluten-free diet, you can say, “Some breads and foods make Mona feel sick. The grown-ups will check the ingredients and make sure that our snacks are good for her stomach.” Discussing food restrictions and diets during snack time is yet another opportunity to explore our differences in a natural way.

**If you have a child in your class who is unable to eat orally,** it is likely that the child will have a g-tube (gastrostomy tube) or another feeding apparatus. These can seem intimidating to young children at first because of the simple fear of the unknown combined with fears about bodily mastery during this developmental stage. Be open and honest in explaining what their uses are. “Carmen uses a feeding tube because it is hard for her to swallow. The food goes right to her tummy from the tube through this button.” Children may become confused, and think that the opening created for the g-tube is similar to their bellybutton. Prepare yourself for many questions by asking the child’s family what words they use to explain g-tube feeding. Include anyone who joins your class to assist in g-tube feeding, such as a nurse or assistant, in these discussions with children so that you are consistently explaining it in a simple, positive way.

***Supporting child interactions:***

Much socialization occurs during snack and meal times, and it is important that children with feeding issues have the opportunity to be with their peers at the table (unless it is otherwise counter-indicated). By giving the child with feeding issues special jobs to do, you can make that child an integral part of socializing at meal times. “Lisa, will you pass out the cups to your friends, please?”



***“We go down the big slide at the park...  
We both like to do it ourselves.”***

Open up the discussion by asking about the children’s favorite outdoor activities. Mention that all children like to do things “by themselves,” but sometimes need help. This is an important discussion to have, because although we want to encourage children to help each other, sometimes children take on the role of caregiver to children they perceive as less able. This kind of interaction can interfere with children viewing others as true friends. It is important to emphasize that helping is good, but letting our friends learn how to do things by themselves is another way to help.



***“Mommy is right. Life is more fun with friends like Isabelle.”***

After reading *My Friend Isabelle* several times and exploring differences and friendships through activities such as those suggested here, involve the whole class in a project that affirms “Life is more fun with all of my many friends!” Make a collage of the children’s drawn pictures, their photos, or their handprints using the skin tones of each child. Create a book about the members of the class, recording what the children say they like about each child. Ask the children what special activity they would like to do with all of their friends. Display these projects proudly in your classroom for families and children to enjoy. Revisit these whole-class projects throughout the year, adding to them and reaffirming the children’s acceptance of differences.

*About the author:* Amy Thrasher is the Speech Language Therapy Supervisor and an Early Childhood Teacher at the Child Learning Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She earned her master's degree in Speech Language Pathology at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

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# MY TEACHER WANTS TO KNOW

CHILD'S NAME:

DATE:

How well do I:	Not so well	Very well
do in the morning?	1	3 5
do in the afternoon?	1	3 5
do in the evening?	1	3 5
sleep?	1	3 5
nap?	1	3 5
eat lunch?	1	3 5
eat dinner?	1	3 5
play with adults?	1	3 5
play by myself?	1	3 5
play with another child?	1	3 5
play in a small group?	1	3 5
play in a large group?	1	3 5
play inside?	1	3 5
play outside?	1	3 5
play with younger children?	1	3 5
play with older children?	1	3 5
do when children sit near me?	1	3 5
do when children sit further away?	1	3 5

How do I let people know:
I am angry or upset (example: crying, screaming, etc.)?
I am happy (example: laughing, hopping, etc.)?
I want something (example: reaching, talking, etc.)?
I don't want something (example: push away, say NO, etc.)?
I like something (example: smiling, talking, laughing, etc.)?
I don't like something (example: crying, throwing, talking, etc.)?
What helps me when I am: sad? angry? scared?
What makes me angry/upset?
What makes me happy/excited?



**What do I "get" or "get out of" when I use challenging behavior?**

What happens just before the behavior?	<b>BEHAVIOR</b> Describe exactly what the behavior looks like.	What do adults/siblings do when problem behavior occurs?	Why might he/she be doing this?
<p><b>EXAMPLE:</b></p> <p><i>He is told to go to the bathroom to take a bath.</i></p>	<p><i>He screams, runs to the other end of the house and drops to the ground kicking.</i></p>	<p><i>Mom/Dad chase after him. When he drops and kicks we back off and wait him out.</i></p>	<p><b>To get:</b></p> <p><b>To get out of:</b> <i>taking a bath until he is ready (delays going to take a bath)</i></p>
			<p><b>To get:</b></p> <p><b>To get out of:</b></p>
			<p><b>To get:</b></p> <p><b>To get out of:</b></p>
			<p><b>To get:</b></p> <p><b>To get out of:</b></p>
			<p><b>To get:</b></p> <p><b>To get out of:</b></p>

# My Preferences:



1. My teacher wants to know about toys/activities:

My Favorite

My Least

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2. My teacher wants to know about foods:

My Favorite

My Least

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4. My teacher wants to know about people in my life with whom I:

Behave Well

Have Behavior Problems

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3. My teacher wants to know what activities I like:

- |                |              |                 |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| blocks/legos   | dress up     | pretend cooking |
| computer       | coloring     | paints          |
| sand table     | water table  | books           |
| cutting        | pasting      | play doh        |
| baby dolls     | cars/trains  | outside play    |
| action figures | real cooking |                 |
| other:         | _____        |                 |

