

Thriving in Regular Schools

A guide for parents with a child with intellectual disability

ADVOCACY KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY wa

About DDWA

Developmental Disability WA (DDWA) was established in 1985 and is a trusted source of independent information, advocacy, education and support for people with intellectual and other developmental disability, their families and the people who support them.

We work in three main ways:



Advocacy

To support people with developmental disability and their families to have a strong voice and seek change where needed. To influence government and other decision-makers to achieve positive and lasting change.



Knowledge

To build the expectations and capacity of people with developmental disability and their families. To inform people and families about their rights, choices and options in services and supports.



Community

To support people with developmental disability and their families to live their lives. To partner with others to develop more connected and inclusive communities.

Our Vision

People with developmental disability and their families have the same opportunities as the rest of the community.

Our Purpose

Enhance quality of life for people with developmental disability and their families.

About this resource...

This resource is a collection of the information shared during the Thriving in Regular Schools project in 2019. Running for 12 months, the project delivered a series of Workshops to families to share their experiences, and engage in conversations about choosing Regular Schooling for their child with intellectual disability.

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What is Inclusive Education?

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusion is a term that is often defined in many different ways.

When it comes to inclusion in regular schools, it is more than being physically included, and more than social policy or education rhetoric.

Inclusion is about a HUMAN RIGHTS journey.

Bob Jackson defines Inclusion in Education as:

- ✓ Being physically present in the mainstream classroom for the same amount of time as all other students in the class (physical inclusion); and
- ✓ Socially belonging (social inclusion); and
- ✓ Included in the same curriculum as other students (curricular inclusion).



What does inclusion mean to your family?

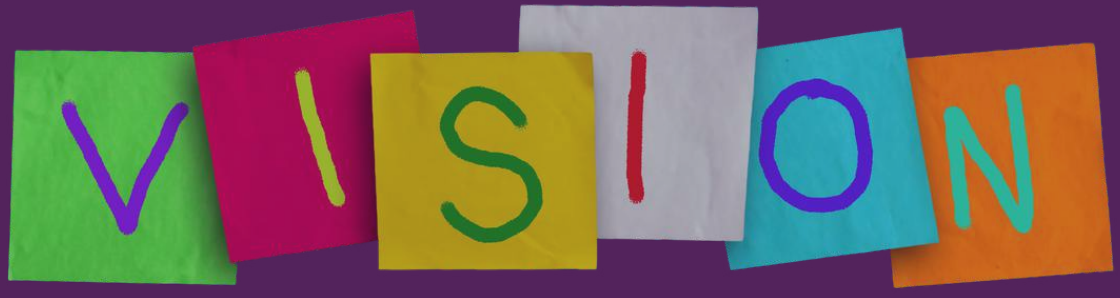
It can be really helpful to think about what inclusion means to you and your family, and to share the vision you have for your child's education with people in your child's life.

- What does Inclusive Education look like for your child?
- What has your child's education journey been like so far?
- What has worked well?
- What challenges have you faced?
- What do you wish you had known early on?
- What are the most important things that the School must get right for your child and their education?

This website from Family Advocacy (NSW) has some great resources about Inclusive Education (and much more)
https://www.family-advocacy.com/ordinary-lives/school-years/

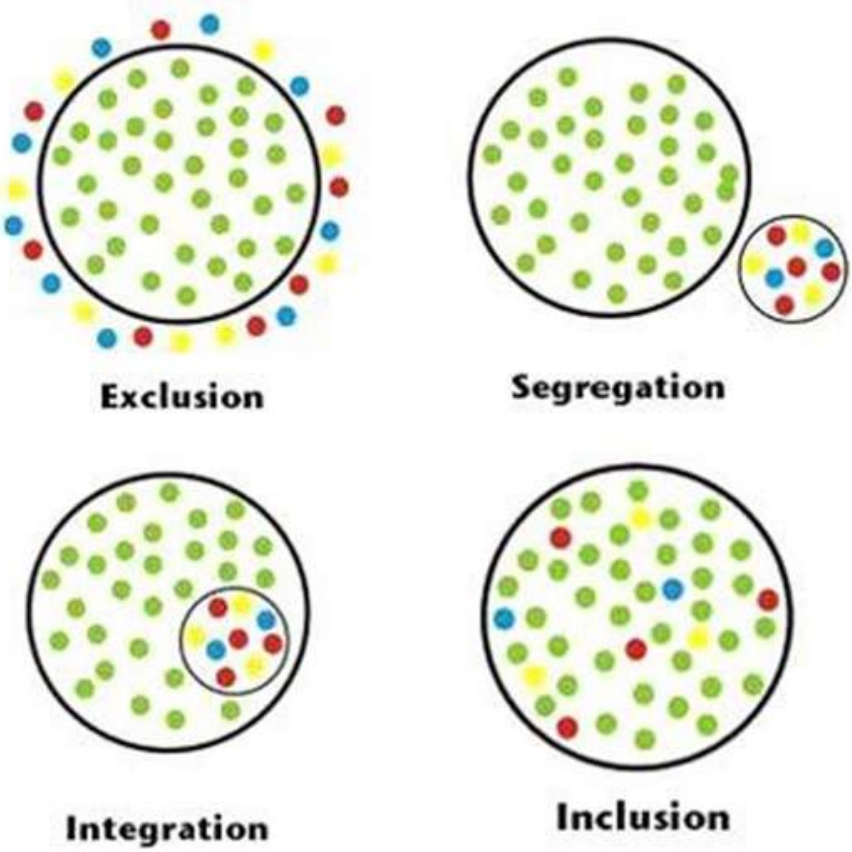
"Inclusive education is an approach that seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion"

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference (UNESCO 1994) where inclusive education was viewed as a human rights issue and as a means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations.



The Story of Inclusive Education





The past and future of education- a short video by Shelley Moore.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQgXBhPh5Zo&feature=youtu.be





Five Myths about Inclusive Education

1. MYTH 1: Regular education classrooms won't provide the support that students with disability need. REAL DEAL: National and International laws provide for supports in regular schools, and good inclusive practices happen in schools in Australia and elsewhere (e.g. Italy has been educating ALL students together in the same classrooms since the 1970s!).

2. MYTH 2: Students with disability do better when they are educated in separate schools or classrooms. REAL DEAL: Over 40 years of research proves that students with disability learn more and have better post-school outcomes when they are taught with non-disabled students in the same classrooms.

3. MYTH 3: Students with disability in regular classrooms have a negative impact on the learning of other students. REAL DEAL: Research shows non-disabled students do just as well if not better and also have the advantage of developing understanding, empathy and acceptance of diversity when they are taught with and alongside students with disability, in the same classrooms.

4. MYTH 4: A student can't be included unless they can keep up with the pace of the general school curriculum. REAL DEAL: The curriculum is for everybody. There are teaching strategies and practices that are all about making the general school curriculum suitable to ALL learners!

5. MYTH 5: Schools include students with disability as a favour, to help them feel part of society. REAL DEAL: Inclusion is not charity. It is a fundamental right, protected by international and Australian legislation.



Attitudes, Values and Leadership of the school

Bob Jackson talks about Inclusive Schools needing to have "both the will and the heart" to achieve their vision:

'With the will, we can develop the skill through partnerships between parents and the school and outside assistance where required. Without the will, we are dealing with a moral issue that is not solved by resources or added expertise.'

- ✓ Research has shown that strong leadership based in inclusive values, as well as a strong will – are the key indicators to achieving real inclusion for all
- ✓ Every school is different and each will have their own strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Inclusive schools will all be at different stages on the road to achieving their vision

Inclusive cultures celebrate diversity and accommodate everyone's individual needs as much as possible.

Three important questions to ask yourself:

1

What are the attitudes and values that you are looking for in a school? Highlight the ones that are non-negotiable.

2

What qualities and values does a teacher need to make them an ideal teacher for your child? For example: kindness, organisation, creativity, experience, approachable, direct, flexible etc.

3

In your family's experience with school so far, what has been great or not so great? How can this inform your next choice?







What we know from the research

A common belief stated to parents is that children with a disability are "better off" in segregated education, however this claim is unsupported by research.

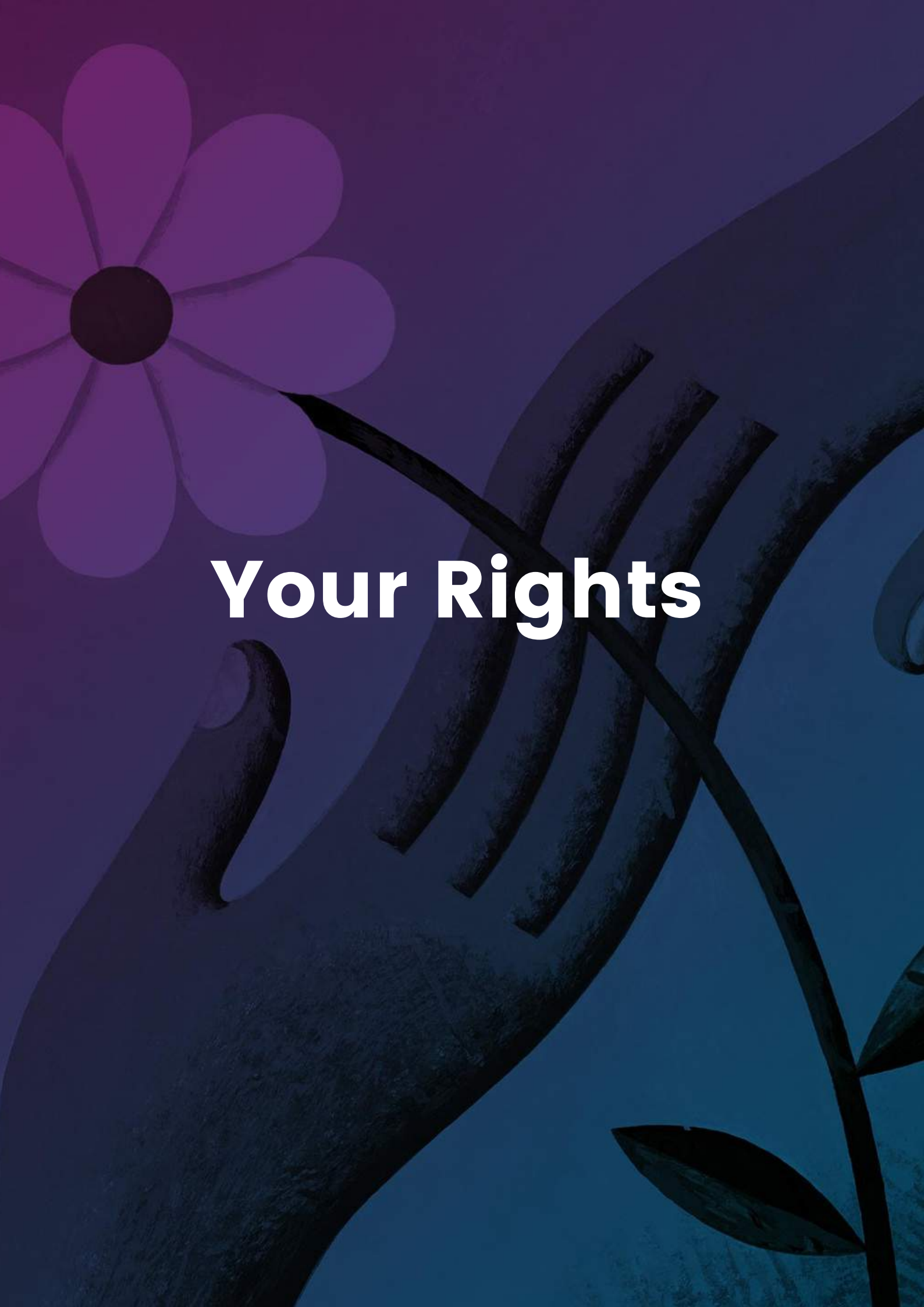
It is important to note that the research does NOT say that children fail to learn in segregated settings, rather that children learn significantly better if they are included, regardless of their disability.

All children can thrive in Regular schools

- Academic outcomes are better; AND so are social outcomes for all children if inclusion is done appropriately. This includes children with profound or multiple disabilities.
- Universal design helps all students, not just those with disability.
- Inclusion helps ALL students learn how to live and work together, for post school life.
- Inclusion grows compassion, helping and social awareness - for all students and teachers.

For more information see http://allmeansall.org.au/research/

The question is not 'why we should include?'
It is 'how do we include in the most effective way possible?'



Your Rights

Your child's right to an inclusive education

You are protected by:

✓ The Disability Discrimination Act (1992)

✓ The UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities

www.humanrights.gov.au

✓ All students have the same Rights to:

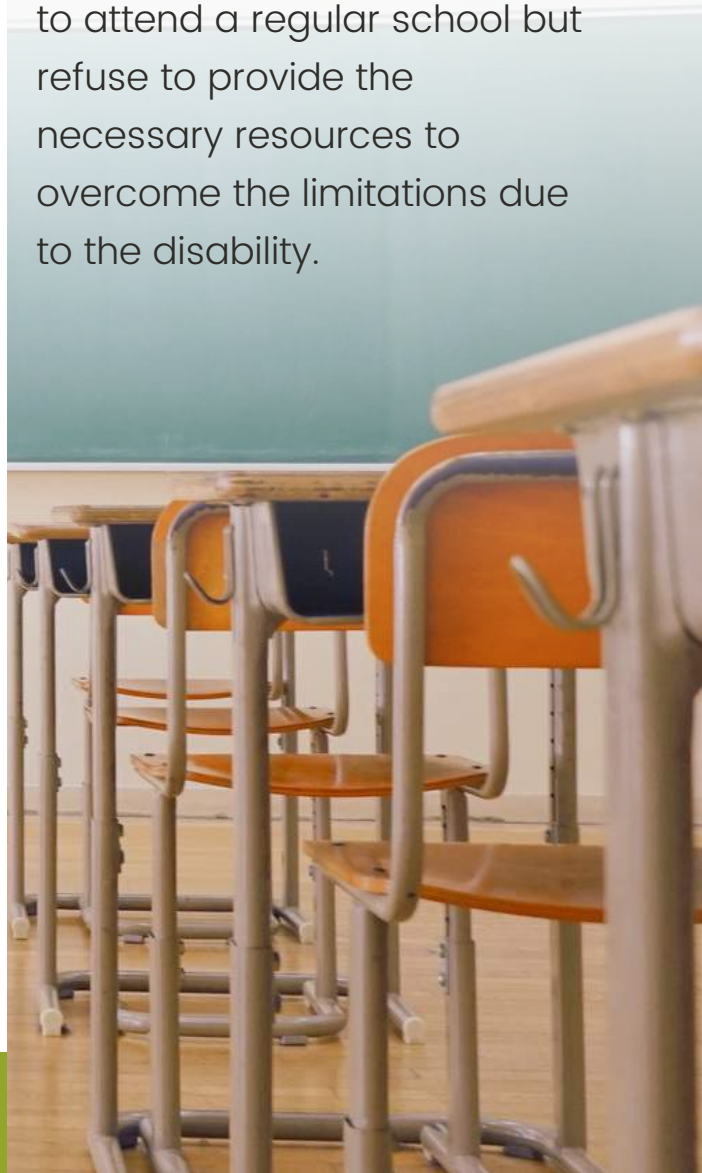
- An education
- Being valued for who they are
- Connection and positive relationships – (with peers, not just teachers)
- Have their needs attended to
- Have their choices listened to

✗ Under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992):

It is an offence to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their disability.

It is also an offence to require a person with a disability to meet conditions that, while appropriate for other people, are not able to be reasonably met by people with a disability (or their families).

This means that it is illegal to force a child to go to a Segregated School, Centre, Unit or Class against the wishes of the person (or parents in the case of a child). It is also illegal to allow a child to attend a regular school but refuse to provide the necessary resources to overcome the limitations due to the disability.



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 24 – Education

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

a. The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
b. The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
c. Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.

2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:

a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

Article 24 – continued

3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

a) Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;

b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;

c) Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.

4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education.

Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

Resources about your child's rights



Accessible Resources explaining the United Nations Convention

For a child-friendly version of the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, see this link:
www.unicef.org/reports/its-about-ability
For an Easy to Understand version of the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, see this link:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/345108/easy-read-un-convention.pdf

Fact Sheets to help students, parents, and schools to understand the standards, and ensure that students with disability can access and participate in school education on the same basis as other students can be found at the links below:

Australian Government Department of Education website
www.dese.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005

Disability Standards for Education: A practical guide for individuals, families and communities
www.nccd.edu.au/wider-support-materials/disability-standards-education-practical-guide-individuals-families-and

Adjustments to the Curriculum

The Disability Standards for Education (2005)

Developed under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, it became a legal right for all people with disability to have access to, and participate in education on the same basis as people without disability.

It also became a legal requirement for education providers to make reasonable adjustments to enable participation, and to ensure students with disability are not victimised or harassed.

Reasonable adjustments include:

- ✓ Adjustments must allow similar choices for the student with a disability as for other students.
- ✓ Students with a disability must be able to participate on the same basis as other students.
- ✓ Students must be able to participate in the same curriculum as other students.
- ✓ Associates (e.g. parents) must not be discriminated against.



Documented Plans



Also known as an Individual Education Plan (IEP)or Individual Learning Support Plan (ILP), Documented Plans are created for students with disability or diverse learning needs.

Schools are required by law to make reasonable adjustments to learning to provide students with access to teaching, learning and the schooling experience generally.

Every school and teacher is different and so plans will vary, as will each school's progress towards inclusive practices such as adopting more universal design for learning approaches.

Where to start?

A good individualised learning plan starts with a vision for your child that is shared with your child's support team. The plan should be seen as a process and as a living document.

✓ **Is the plan aligned with the vision for your child's life?**

Having a clear vision of what is important to, and important for your child, and sharing this with the school as early as possible, is a great way to make sure that each goal is formulated and reviewed against that vision so that the plan is meaningful.

✓ **Is it on the path to, or consistent with achieving the vision for your child?**

What is the collectively held vision for your child?
Does it need re-imagining?

It is a common experience of parents that a school will focus on their child's physical and academic inclusion, and overlook their need for social and emotional inclusion - important for their child's sense of well-being and their enjoyment of school. Sometimes this can lead to the parent withdrawing their child from regular schooling into home schooling, because they feel their child is not emotionally safe at school. It is important that the documented plan takes a 'whole of child' approach to inclusion.

Documented Plans Some questions to ask

Here are some questions to start a conversation about creating a plan that will work well for your child:

What is the school's philosophy & policy about Documented Plans?
Do they value them?
How do they use them?
How are teachers supported to write and implement them?
How do they make sure it is a meaningful document?
How can you work together to make sure there is a shared vision for your child ?
Will it include social goals as well as academic goals?

Once the plan is written:

Is the teacher invested in the plan - do they seek your input and involvement? Are plans transparent and easily accessible to you?
Is the plan easy to understand and follow?
Does it include adjustments to learning materials such as alternate formats, adjusted worksheets, or a choice of tasks?
Does it include adjustments to teaching style and the environment such as modelling of communication device or specific seating?
Is it written in positive language - not framed in deficit language?
Is the plan the same for the whole year?
How often is it reviewed or changed?

Who might contribute to the plan?

Does the plan address the assessed needs of your child from wider professionals such as specialist medical practitioners, allied health professionals and therapists including but not limited to your child's paediatrician, psychologist, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, audiologist or school counsellor?

Three things to look for:



- ☐ The school is proactive in seeking open consultation with you to develop the educational plan and formulate any appropriate adjustments.
- ☐ Individual educational planning (IEP) meetings or “case conferences” are valued and used to set the formal goals or objectives that your child’s school team will be pursuing for the next school period, usually 3 to 6 months.
- ☐ Planning meetings are held at least twice a year. It is common for an IEP to be developed at a meeting a month or two after the beginning of the school year, and for the IEP to be reviewed and updated at a meeting a month or two after the middle of the school year. However, you can ask for an IEP meeting at any time if you feel it is needed to address concerns or issues about your child’s schooling. The first point of contact to arrange a meeting is usually your child’s teacher.

This is your chance to influence the goals that are set and how the school will endeavour to achieve them. As a parent, you know your child best, and your input will be valuable to the team's consideration of what academic, social and independence goals should be pursued, when they should be pursued and how best to achieve them.



Example of a documented plan



Individual Learning and Support Plan - Example

Student: Bobbie Smith. **Teacher**: Robin Reeves

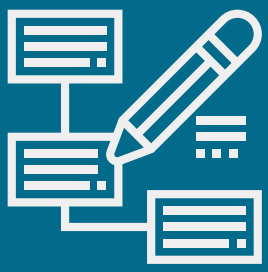
General support needs - Bobbie:

- is a bright year 4 student with lots of personality, energy and a wonderful sense of humour
- loves animals, especially reptiles, and is fascinated and engaged in anything to do with science
- loves social situations and engaging with others
- experiences difficulties in planning the steps to completing a task and finds it difficult to remember and anticipate what will happen in the future
- has reasonable expressive language however finds comprehension of instructions, detailed information and complex questions difficult
- often appears to understand information but may have gaps in ability to process or retain information.
- may misinterpret social cues in unfamiliar situations
- is learning to recognise internal cues of changes in regulation, confusion, stress and emotions.
- needs help to identify and label own emotions and internal experiences

In English, the class are working on Literacy with a focus on story writing on topics which incorporate students' interests.

Australian Curriculum	Strengths & capabilities	Next focus areas in learning
Creating Texts - plan, draft and publish an imaginative text containing key informationand supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features.	Bobbie can write: • short narratives (3-4 sentences) • longer narratives (up to a page) if dictated to a scribe	• writing more complex ideas and stories to produce texts which can be published for a wider audience
Interacting with others - use interaction skills such as acknowledging another's point of view and linking students' response to the topic, using familiar and new vocabulary and a range of vocal effects and volume to speak clearly and coherently.	Bobbie is an animated story-teller and in particular: • loves to tell the class stories especially about pet snake Luther • uses humour and animated facial and physical expressions to engage the audience	• understanding and recognising the different points of view class mates have on snakes • interview skills • inviting others to contribute to the conversation

Example of a documented plan continued:



Learning Area: English

Support Strategies:

- consistency of routines, schedules and structure
- advance notice and processing time for any routine transitions during the day - eg let Bobbie know 5 minutes before its time to pack away
- advance warning using visual supports of any changes in expected routines or staff, and support to process these changes (the day before if possible)
- visual and auditory cues throughout the day - use of diaries, planners, and visual notes are important
- tasks to be broken down into individual steps with visuals to support them where possible
- tailored learning and tasks around Bobbie's interests to support engagement
- lots of opportunities for physical movement during the day
- a sense of achievement and value - eg genuine feedback at least once each day about what Bobbie has done well
- allow Bobbie to go to calming area when requests a break
- model use of self-regulation using visual cues across the day

Strategies to support learning	Strategies to monitor progress
• create narrative around interests provide visual scaffold of text components • use Cowriter app on the iPad to use predictive text and get auditory feedback on words written • have a purpose for the text – with B's consent publish for sharing with a wider audience	• Bobbie progress in independently finding texts about subjects of interest at the library • Bobbie's story is shared with others in the school and family, and feedback given
• plan and conduct interviews with classmates about how they feel about snakes, which adjectives they would use to describe snakes, and which of their interests they will base their story on • timely feedback about things Bobbie does well in interviews of classmates • use of visual supports for activities eg visual of interview process, breakdown of class activities into visual steps	• feedback from peers • ability to complete an interview with 5 peers • verbal report on snakes provided to the class on findings

Example of a documented plan continued:

Australian Curriculum	Strengths & capabilities	Next focus areas in learning
Creating Texts - re-read and edit for meaning by adding, deleting or moving words or word groups to improve content and structure.	Bobbie can: • identify ways words can be changed in a text to achieve greater clarity if the text is read aloud • listen for grammatical correctness if the text is read aloud	• increasing Bobbie's use of descriptive words
Creating texts - reading the students' own work aloud to listen for grammatical correctness: checking use of capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks.	Bobbie can write: • sentences which present information • with greater ease and independence using technology rather than handwriting	• use of capital letters • use of full stops



Example of a documented plan continued:

Strategies to support learning	Strategies to monitor progress
• interaction with class members to identify shared use of descriptive words on a topic of interest • use the adjectives log to support Bobbie to choose descriptive words to add to the story	• creation of an adjective logbook relative totopics of interest • extent of expanded and creative use of adjectives in published narrative
• after shared reading, EA will type out favourite passages from texts found at the library about snakes, without punctuation • with a peer, read aloud and notice whereit sounds like the sentence breaks go • practice marking where capital letters and full stops should go • compare with original text	• each week EA will note level of accuracy in identifying where capital letters and full stops go in familiar texts • if accuracy level improves, have a go with unfamiliar texts, being mindful of Bobbie's need to achieve success at this stage



What about Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology is 'any device or system that allows individuals to perform tasks they would otherwise be unable to do, or increases the ease and safety with which tasks can be performed' (World Health Organisation, 2004).

There are lots of examples, here are just a few:

1. Literacy software or built-in settings that allow text to be read aloud to a student.
2. Software or settings that adjust the screen display to suit a students needs e.g. tools that allow a student to magnify content on a screen.
3. Speech-to-text tools that allow a student to dictate their writing and predictive text to increase efficiency.
4. Alternative and augmentative communication systems (AAC) such as a non-electronic Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) Communication Book, or a robust AAC app for iPad such as TD Snap, TouchChat, LAMP or Proloquo2go.





Choosing a School

Which school to choose?

Many parents struggle with the decision of which school to enrol their child in.

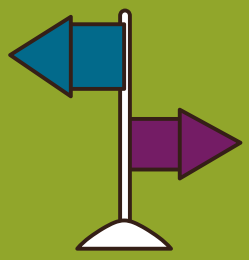
You may have received lots of conflicting advice or even been told that 'segregated' or 'special' education is best for your child. Perhaps your child is already enrolled in a segregated setting and you want to explore other options.

It is every child's right to be enrolled in their local school. However, before making a final decision you might like to do some research about the school and other options available.

Your child is a child first, with a unique personality and a range of strengths and interests, and with the same needs as all children including a need to feel safe, secure and that they belong. In addition, your child may need specific supports that should be discussed at or before enrolment. There will need to be a strong partnership between you and the school.



Is this school a good choice for my child?



Before deciding which school to enrol your child in, it can be helpful to first imagine the conversation you might have with the school, and think about the responses you are looking for:

"I would like to apply to enrol my child at this school. My child will need some adjustments to support them in their learning, so I am calling to discuss this and see what information you need from us to prepare for enrolment".



What would be some ideal responses that tell you that the school is open and inclusive?

What would be some responses that would tell you that the school may not yet have the culture and capacity to best support your child?

Some questions you could ask

- What are the school's beliefs and values around children with a disability in regular classrooms?
- What is the 'general' school culture regarding inclusion?
- What resources and experience does the school have? What evidence is there? Do they walk their talk?
- Are you a respected and valued partner in your child's education?
- Does the school have a 'welcoming vibe'? Can you talk directly to the principal and key staff?
- How do you feel when you enter the school grounds, talk to administration staff or enter the classroom?
- Is the school proactive in planning for inclusion and eager to understand your child's disability and additional needs?
- Are they willing to do what is needed?
- Is the school flexible and collaborative regarding working together with therapists and other external supports?
- How much travel would be involved for your child to attend the school?
- What do other parents and children say about the school?



Introducing your child

To help introduce your child before they start at their new school, some families share information with the school through a story or video. For example:

A one page Personal Portrait can be a useful way to share essential information. Templates can be found here: https://themighty.com/2019/08/iep-template-student-profile-one-page/

An "About Me" book to share information and photos of your child. It's best to include your child in the writing process, so they have a say in what information is shared about them, especially if you write it in the first person.

You might include information about:

- People in your child's family
- Your child's culture, home language, where they live.
- Important events in your child's life
- Your child's interests, their likes and dislikes,
- Your child's strengths and achievements
- Challenges that need support
- What works well
- What to avoid

A Film or Slide Presentation

This might include pictures of your child growing up, playing with siblings and doing things they like. You could use your phone to make some short videos or to turn some photos into a short video.



Starting High School



Here are some things you could ask when your child is starting High School

- Can a homeroom teacher be pre-assigned so planning can happen before your child starts?
- Will an Educational Aide be available, how many hours, what is their role ?
- Have the teachers had access to in-service training on appropriate use of an aide if one is involved (that is, to assist not replace the teacher, focussed on social belonging and independence as well as academic support)?
- Will therapy be involved? If so, how will inclusive will it be?
- Which classrooms will be used? Are all classrooms and learning spaces accessible for your child?
- Can you set up several visits in the months preceding high school entry to ensure your child is comfortable with the environment and knows how to navigate it?
- What process is in place to introduce your child to teachers?
- Is there a buddy system in place to introduce your child to classmates, help to navigate and find amenities, get to each lesson and have company at lunchtime?
- Is any planning in place regarding making adjustments to the curriculum?
- What supports are available to teachers?
- How will the school communicate with the family and primary school so information and ideas can be shared before enrolment?
- Is the school aware of and using the support structures available within the education department?
- After enrolment, what ongoing communication system will be put in place between you and the school?

A checklist of inclusive practice

Indicators of Inclusive Schooling *a resource for families and educators		No	Some-times	Yes
School Community Membership				
1	Uses the same facilities – room, toilet block, resources and equipment as other students.			
2	Appears in photos in class photos, school year book etc.			
3	Has a locker, coat hook and storage space like other students.			
4	Is eligible for and shares same school jobs and responsibilities with other students.			
5	Receives a report card, 'best of ability rewards', academic awards like other children.			
6	Is assigned to groups like other students e.g. sporting factions, grades, form room.			
7	Is present at special events – graduation, school sports, school plays, dances.			
Participation in Regular Classes				
8	Participates alongside typical peers in regular class lessons.			
9	Is called on in class.			
10	Has appropriate technical support to facilitate participation, - computers, switches, adaptive devices, wheelchairs, and teacher assistance.			
11	Participates in extra-curricular activities such as sport, field trips, musical/drama productions, camps.			
Sense of Belonging and Friendship				
12	Is invited and spends time with others in the school (play)grounds.			
13	Plays/engages with other students, at school lunch and recess times.			
14	Eats lunch with peers.			
15	Has friends, not just peer tutors or buddies.			
16	Is chosen by others for team membership.			
17	Spends time with typical students after school and on weekends.			
18	Is named by others as friends.			
19	Gets telephone calls from school friends at home, and spends time with other students outside school hours – parties, holidays etc.			

Adapted from: Nisbet, J. (Ed.). (1992). Natural supports in school, at work, and in the community for people with severe disabilities. Baltimore: Paul Brookes

Families share their thoughts...

"The administration staff often reflect the school culture. If their initial response to your inquiry seems stressed, or they act as if they are at full capacity, it may be an indicator of the school's willingness around inclusion."

"We were initially told that the ethos of the school is not to cater for children with special needs - we decided not to accept this and to challenge the school from a legal and ethical perspective...after lots of conversations, the school changed their policy and put in extra supports. We also set up a support group for other families who are facing the same issues- it has really changed the school for the better."

"Learning about the culture of the school is really important to inform how you might best work with them."

"Labelling a child as 'special needs' can make them stand out. All children have the same needs, some just need more support to meet their needs."

"It's important that the school doesn't just focus on academic supports- you can be physically present in the classroom, but still feel unwelcome."





Working Together

Working together



Inclusive schools know the benefits of working together and have communication systems in place to ensure every child has the support they need to thrive in the school environment.

What does an Effective Partnership look like?

- It is based on mutual commitment, trust and respect; and a shared responsibility for the education of your child.
- It includes a multi-disciplinary team of family, school and health professionals such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, paediatricians, and psychologists.
- All members of the team bring a unique set of knowledge, skills and experience that help make learning successful.
- Everyone has a role in making the partnership work.

YOU
are the single most important element in your child's life. Teachers, professionals and supporters will come and go. You will always be there. You are the expert on your child- no one knows more than you- this means that you are always the SENIOR PARTNER in decisions regarding your child.

Great communication: what to look for

- [ ] Does the school go out of their way so you feel welcome and valued?
- [ ] Do they acknowledge and celebrate your input?
- [ ] Is communication a two-way exchange?
- [ ] Is communication active, personal, frequent and culturally appropriate?
- [ ] Does communication involve not only an exchange of information, but also an opportunity to learn about each other?
- [ ] Is it made clear that families are genuine partners and can help solve big problems?
- [ ] Is the school open to your individual family's' needs and attitudes?
- [ ] Does communication happen in different ways - formal and informal and in different places (both in the school and other sites if applicable such as community centres) and in different methods (verbal, written, face-to-face, phone, email, etc)?



Communication and dealing with difficult situations



Being a parent can mean that you are faced with some challenging situations especially when negotiating with services, schools and community groups to support your child in their life.

Going to meetings, writing applications, dealing with questions and attending medical appointments can all be part of daily life and it can sometimes be difficult when going it alone.

Good communication and relationships allow things to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

However, for bigger decisions, or where there is a more serious concern from the school or family, it is likely to be dealt with by a meeting.



Take a few moments to reflect on your own communication style, and what makes it easier and more effective for you when you are advocating for your child to have their needs met.

Think about the times you have been involved in a meeting: How did it go? How did you feel ? What worked well ? What didn't work well?

Thriving in meetings

Meetings are a way that schools bring people together to deal with important issues, including the development of your child's Documented Plan.

Meetings bring many elements together and may come with high stakes, a power imbalance, a lack of information or understanding, a fear of surprises, being outnumbered and a potential for conflict.

It is important to develop practical and protective ways to help you manage these meetings and achieve the outcome you need.



Standing up for someone you love



Standing up for our self can be hard enough. Standing up for someone you love can have the added worry about doing this in the very best way possible and as an expression of our love and commitment. However, being an effective advocate is a skill that anyone can learn with practice. It can sometimes be challenging, but you don't have to go it alone.

There will always be a role for professional advocates to support families to deal with difficult negotiations, particularly when a situation becomes stuck or an impasse is reached, however, a professional advocate is not usually needed for the routine negotiations and meetings around services, school and community settings .

Take someone with you to metings

What we know, is that the presence of an independent support person in these meetings - be it a friend, family member or a parent with similar experience - can dramatically change the way it feels.

A supportive third party can help reduce the stress of a meeting and provide a wide range of other unexpected benefits.

A good meeting is marked by a feeling of being well heard and respectfully treated. The practical outcome may not be that resources or actions are granted, but simply that the issues are aired and the grievance addressed.

Support in meetings

Don't go it alone!

School meetings almost always involve a number of people in different roles including the Principal or Deputy, past year teacher, current teacher, aides, psychologist and specialist teachers.

The feeling of being out-numbered can itself create a pressure as you try to process the information coming from different individuals in the room.

You can change the dynamic by adding a support person to act as an independent third party so that you are now two sets of ears and eyes.

Your support person is there to support you at the meeting and can also help you to prepare beforehand and talk it over with you afterwards. Together, you can analyse the meeting, go over what happened and have a good laugh or cry - both of which can be very therapeutic!

A support person (independent third party) can be anyone in your life:

- Good Friend
- Understanding relative
- Parent from a peer support group
- An adult sibling, or partner
- Elder relative or friend
- Support Worker
- Therapy provider





Resources and Links

Resources & Links

Family Advocacy (NSW)

This website has some great resources about Inclusive Education (and much more):
https://www.family-advocacy.com/ordinary-lives/school-years/

Article: All kids together in the regular classroom: What does it mean to be included?

https://www.family-advocacy.com/ordinary-lives/school-years/

Family Advocacy - A child's journey

Yolande Cailly is a parent, passionate about equity in education, disability rights and inclusive education. Drawing on successful yet challenging personal experiences with her own child Yolande is committed to advocating for an inclusive education for all students:
https://access.family-advocacy.com/watch/australian-experience/a-childs-journey/

The Right to Choose? Catia Malaquias, lawyer, board director and advocate:

https://access.family-advocacy.com/read/why-include/article-4/

allmeansall.org.au

Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education, Inclusion Toolkit for Parents:
http://allmeansall.org.au/for-parents/

For more information about Inclusion Research, a detailed literature review can be downloaded from:

http://allmeansall.org.au/research/
www.include.com.au/resources/
http://www.include.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Inclusion_Seg.pdf

swiftschools.org

Literature review of the comparisons of inclusive versus segregated education for children with an intellectual impairment. Written for Queensland Parents for People with a Disability:
http://www.swiftschools.org/sites/default/files/Research%20Support%20for%20SWIFT%202017.pdf

alana.org.br

Report that documents evidence on the effectiveness of inclusive education and provide insights into how educators and policy makers might improve the availability of inclusive options for children with disabilities and their families.
http://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

Resources & Links

Human Rights Commission Website

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is an independent third party which investigates complaints about discrimination and human rights breaches. Human rights recognisethe inherent value of each person, regardless of background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe.

www.humanrights.gov.au

https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/legal/legislation#dda

If you believe you have been unlawfully discriminated against because of a disability you may be able to make a complaint.

For more information

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/dse-fact-sheet-5-complaints-processes_2.pdf

United Nations, Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, Article 24- Education

https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html

United Nations Enable: Easy Read

International agreement on the rights of disabled people

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/345108/easy-read-un-convention.pdf

The Mighty - One Page Profile and Vision Statement templates

Mum, Ellen Stumbo explains why she created a one page overview to share with her child's new teachers each year in this blog post and shares downloadable, editable templates for you to make your own.

https://themighty.com/2019/08/iep-template-student-profile-one-page/

Family Advocacy - What Inclusion Is video

VIDEO: It's not a program or place. Inclusion is; how a school operates, a sense of belonging and success for each and every student. Dr Carol Quirk challenges the definition of what inclusion in schools is, and more importantly, what it is not and what is required for a school to deliver authentic inclusive education.

https://access.family-advocacy.com/watch/what-inclusion-is/theory-and-practice/

cru.org.au

CRU exists to create and promote positive change so that people with disabilities can belong to and participate in community life.

https://cru.org.au/resources-and-publications/films/

Resources & Links

imaginemore.org.au

Imagine More believes in a strong connected community where individuals with a disability hold socially valued roles, have strong relationships and are constantly exploring what is possible. Imagine More embraces the opportunity to inspire, resource and motivate individuals with a disability and their families to discover better life chances for individuals so that they can live an ordinary life. We are families that want an ordinary life for our children.
https://imaginemore.org.au/portfolio-type/inclusive-education/

Helen Sanderson Associates One Page Profile Templates

This webpage shares more templates for creating a one page profile of your child to share with their teachers.
http://helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/one-page-profiles/one-page-profile-templates/

Understood.org Get to know me Handout

Another template for sharing essential information about your child's support needs, to be completed with your child.
https:https://assets.ctfassets.net/p0qf7j048i0q/MYNUlQqv7lexirEu2wETH/c1bc50c9531358f504029c865bc231d9/3__3_Card_to_Help_Teachers_Get_to_Know_Your_Child_Understood.pdf

Positive Partnerships

Working together with parents, carers and educators of school-aged children on the autism spectrum to provide current, relevant and evidence informed information through workshops and online resources.
https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au

Student Wellbeing Hub

Resources to build safe, inclusive and connected school communities
https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au

Raising children - the Australian parenting website

Children with disability: school, play & work
https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/school-play-work

Australian Government - Department of Education, Skills & Employment

Supporting Family-School-Community Partnerships for learning.
www.dese.gov.au/supporting-family-school-community-partnerships-learning

fact Sheet- Building Partnerships
www.dese.gov.au/supporting-family-school-community-partnerships-learning/resources/factsheet-building-partnerships



ADVOCACY KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY wa

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