

# GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION

## What does a successful inclusive program look like and what does it take?

You have been hired by NWSRA to provide assistance to the park district with including individuals with disabilities in community recreation programs. You may be responsible for some planning and leading of activities if it does not jeopardize the safety of the included participant. Depending on the situation, you may be assisting the program with the inclusion of one or more than one participant.

You are under the supervision of the park district staff while you are at the program. You need to follow the policies and procedures of the park district at which you are placed. Your role is that of an ambassador on behalf of the NWSRA. Please remember to act with the best interests of the participant as well as those of the park district. Communicate any concerns within the park district to the park district supervisor and also to the inclusion coordinator. Our goal is to include children and adults with disabilities so they may function at their highest level of ability. We must all work together to allow for successful inclusion into park district activities. Here are five qualities that you will need to keep in mind as an inclusion aide.

### **PATIENCE**

There is no doubt about it, working with people of all ability levels can be challenging. That is why it is important to have patience when working with individuals who have disabilities. First think why the individual acts that way he or she does. Keep in mind that negative actions either verbal or physical towards staff should not be taken personally and try not to let them frustrate you. Realize that you represent authority and over time you will win their trust over and they will begin to have respect for you. When discussing issues with an individual, allow more time for processing of what is being discussed and try to keep it simple and to the point without using too many words.

**Example:** You notice that Sarah came in with a pouty face and was expressing attitude towards you. You then ask Sarah what's wrong since she usually has a positive attitude. She explains to you that she got a bad grade on a test she studied hard for. She wants nothing to do with you or anybody else and wants to stay to herself. You should respect her decision but check in with her periodically and understand her negative attitude is not towards you but the grade.

### **PROFESSIONALISM**

As a professional inclusion aide, you need to assist the entire program looking for ways to help promote active inclusion into planned activities. An aide should approach problems with a positive attitude and show respect for everyone including staff. Being professional includes arriving to work on time and being dressed for the day's activities. When you're at site, you need to be physically and mentally prepared for the day. If you feel yourself being frustrated with another staff or participant then you need to show self-control and step away from the situation or ask for help.

**Example:** You are on your way to your aftercare site, when you notice that there is a car accident ahead of you causing congestion. This will make you late to your site since you were still 15 minutes away. You should then pull over and call your site supervisor and let them know you will be late due to traffic.

### **CONSISTENCY**

It is very important to be consistent by creating a predictable environment. As an aide, you should arrive on time for your assignment and understand that you are committed to the length of the program. If the program you are assigned to seems to have a lot of free time or down time, you need to know how to structure the unstructured environment. Having structure in a program helps individuals know what to expect and to know what is expected of them. Consistency is vital with all aspects of a program including structure, expectations, rules, and consequences.

**Example:** After discussion with your inclusion coordinator, you both decide that Aaron who receives inclusion assistance would benefit from a specific schedule for the program. When Aaron arrives to after care, you both sit down to plan the schedule of the day. You give Aaron two acceptable choices for each activity such as snack or active games. In each of those activities you review the rules and expectations of each task scheduled. By showing up on time every day to your site and developing a schedule this provides the consistency and stability that will help Aaron succeed.

## CARING

Think about the last time someone addressed you by your name. For example “I hope you have a great day, Brenda”. Some individuals who might have negative behaviors might not always hear a lot of positive statements throughout the day. Showing care and concern can change someone’s day in an instant. There are many ways you can show interest in an individual such as:

- Show interest in the things they like such as their hobbies
- Giving praises and high fives
- Creating a comfortable place to go if feeling overwhelmed or over stimulated
- Giving choices or getting opinion so that they feel they have some power
- Give recognition in front of peers

Talking on a positive note will help change negative thoughts and behaviors. When individuals are talking to you, get down to their level and make eye contact. Show the individual you understood by repeating back what you think they said and not jumping to conclusions.

**Example:** On Friday, Gina tells you all about the gymnastics meet she is competing in on Sunday. On Monday, when Gina arrives to morning care you greet her with a big smile and ask “How did the gymnastics meet go!?” Then you listen to her explain all of her events to you. By showing interest in Gina’s outside activities she can see that you care about her.

## SENSE OF HUMOR

One of the greatest gifts we have is the ability to laugh at ourselves. Having a good sense of humor can teach individuals to laugh at situations that happen in life instead of taking everything so seriously. Being silly and making activities fun and not competitive will also help with individuals who might not always participate or those individuals who struggle with losing. By being enthusiastic and upbeat, others will follow your lead and enjoy the program.

**Example:** Every day when the site director goes over rules, Johnny tends to wander the room and not pay attention. When you ask him to sit down and listen, he tells you that the rules are boring. You suggest to the site director different ways of presenting the rules. She tells you that it’s a great idea and she will have each of the staff pick a day to explain rules. On Monday, it’s your day to present the rules so you put on a funny hat and talk in southern accent. You then asked the kids to name a rule and you give them a star sticker.

### How to avoid burnout?

As time goes on in any profession, staff may start to not enjoy going to work and feel frustrated and stuck. Here are four things that can help you from burning out too quickly and will help you stay excited about your job: maintaining professionalism, showing empathy instead of sympathy, separating work and home life, and letting go of being in control.

## 1. MAINTAINING PROFESSIONALISM

Staff can lose professionalism when they start taking verbal or physical actions personally. If the individual gets a response from you like one of their peers then they feel that they now have the control and you have lost your authority. The anger is directed at the authority you represent and not necessarily at you personally. Realize that at times you might hit your breaking point and it is important to understand your limits. It is ok to have someone else step in when you feel you cannot respond appropriately. If you feel yourself getting in a power struggle with a child, a part of being professional is asking for help or having someone step in to assist you. Also, if you are having issues with another staff at your program, you should wait until all the participants at the program have left and discuss the issue with that staff. Don’t let it show or be known by the participants that there is any animosity between staff.

**Example:** At your site, you are trying to calm down Trevor who is upset he is not going swimming today due to the weather. After 15 minutes, Trevor calms down after you explain that he will still get to participate in the other activities he enjoys. Trevor joins the rest of the kids for craft time. During craft time, another staff comes up to you and says “I can’t believe it took you 15 minutes to calm him down. I would have done it a different way.” You should then ignore the comment at the time and after everyone has left for the day, you may then talk to the staff how that comment upset you in a professional matter.

## **2. SHOWING EMPATHY INSTEAD OF SYMPHATHY**

Knowing where to draw the line on caring too much is a hard thing to do in this field. Try not to get personally involved in an individual's life outside of program. Remember to stay focused on the goals of your job of helping to include them into the program. Worrying about things you cannot control like the family life of an individual can put unnecessary stress on you. Everyone wants the best for the individual and for them to meet their goals, but it is necessary to understand that sometimes the outcomes of a program might not always be met during a certain session. Keep focusing on the positive experiences and emphasize what they can do in the program.

**Example:** You are assisting Rebecca at a park district day camp. Each morning, you ask her how her night was. Every day you get the same answer that she didn't do anything but watch TV. She says she wishes she could take dance classes but her two older brothers play sports and her parents have to take them to all their practices and games. Instead of feeling bad for Rebecca, you could incorporate dance and other activities she enjoys into camp.

## **3. SEPERATING WORK AND HOME LIFE**

There may be times that you have things going on in your home life that could affect you at work. As a professional, you need to do your best to leave it at the door before walking into your program. If something frustrating happened to you at program or the child you are helping to include had a rough day, you need to leave the situation at the site. If it still bothers you, talk to your site director or inclusion coordinator. If you are having issues at home or at work, remember that you are making a difference even when times get tough.

**Example:** Your boyfriend/girlfriend of five years broke up with you an hour before you were supposed to go to your soccer program. You are extremely upset but know that you have to go to the program because it's last minute. When you get to the program, you should clear your head and focus on your job responsibilities.

## **4. LETTING GO OF BEING IN CONTROL**

There are many factors that you can't control. It isn't your fault if the child you are helping to support is having a bad day. For the same reasons, it wasn't only because of your efforts that child you are helping to support has a great day. The goal is to work as a team to help everyone have a fun and safe experience – that includes both children and staff. This may mean having another staff step in to help with any struggles you may be having.

**Example:** You are working with Nicholas at a preschool program. It is now time to line up and go to the gym. Nicholas decides to go to the toy bin and get the trucks out. You walk over to Nicholas and tell him to put the toys away and line up for the gym. He begins to get upset and says "No I want to stay here and play with the trucks." You keep telling him to put them away and line up but he begins to get more agitated. Noticing this, you could call over another staff at the program to ask to help with the situation. While the other staff is handling the situation, you step back and assist the other children in the program. This way a fresh face could change Nicholas behavior and replenish your patience.