

Finding Quality Child Care for a Child with Special Needs

When children attend high quality child care programs that are **inclusive**, both children with and without special needs understand and appreciate each other and their differences.

Inclusive programs prepare children to be part of an accepting, universal community.

What Are the Benefits of an Inclusive Program?

- ❖ Your child will grow and learn physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially alongside his or her peers.
- ❖ Your child will be better prepared to enter elementary school and may develop skills to be more independent.
- ❖ Your child will make friends and learn from a diverse group of children in a natural environment.

How do I Identify a High Quality Child Care Program?

The first step to finding the right program for your child is to go for a visit. Ask questions and closely observe the program (see “Ask, Look and Listen” below). If you like the program after visiting, ask if you can stop by again to observe at a different time, potentially during a transition period (for example, during lunch, after time outside, or at drop-off).

It may also be helpful to talk with families whose children attend the program. If you don’t know any families, ask the program staff for names and then follow up with parents at a time when they can be honest about their thoughts and opinions about the program.

Ask, Look & Listen

Below are questions to help decide if a child care program is high quality and inclusive.¹

Overall Program Environment

- Is the atmosphere bright, cheerful and child-focused, without being overwhelming?
- Is the facility safe, secure and physically accessible, including the playground and bathrooms?
- Is there a daily balance of active and quiet activities? Is there ample time and prompts for transitions between activities for children who need extra time?
- Do materials, books and pictures reflect diversity, including children with special needs?

1. See UCP of Greater Dane County’s “Guide to Finding an Inclusive Child Care Program”

Partnering with Families and Therapists

- Is communication open between child care providers and families?
- Are child care providers willing to work with you and develop goals for your child and plans to achieve them?
- Do providers seek family input and are there opportunities for families to meet each other and attend events and celebrations?
- Are therapists or other outside providers welcome to visit and give input?

Training and Materials

- Are child care providers trained and experienced in CPR, first-aid, early-childhood education and special needs?
- Are there enough learning materials and toys? Are they safe, clean and within reach of all children?

Funding for Supplemental Supports and Staffing

Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) & Children's Community Options Program Funds

Families whose children are enrolled in the CLTS Waiver Programs may use these funds to support and benefit their children while in a childcare setting. Families should work with their service coordinator to make the service or supply part of the child's Individual Service Plan (ISP).

***Be aware that CLTS funds can't be used to pay the tuition for a child care program if a child is under age 12.*

Examples of CLTS funded supports: Supplemental staffing and supervision to meet a child's exceptional needs (*see Waiver manual*); buying special toys, art supplies, communication devices, safety equipment or other materials that support a child's goals and exceptional needs.

Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy - *Special Needs Inclusion Rate*

If a family receives Wisconsin Shares, a parent can apply for a Wisconsin Shares special needs inclusion rate increase. These funds can go directly to a child care program to pay for staff, modifications, equipment or other resources. The special needs rate request form can be downloaded from the Family Voices Child Care Inclusion webpage at:

familyvoicesofwisconsin.com/resources/childcare-inclusion/

Think Creatively!

Remember that modifications don't have to be expensive. Examples include moving furniture around to make a room more accessible, turning lights down at certain times during the day to decrease stimulation, or adding picture cards for labeling toy boxes or shelves.

If you have additional questions or need help finding services contact the following organizations:

- [Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/index.htm)
dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/index.htm
- [Wisconsin First Step](http://www.wisconsin.gov/firststep) , a 24-hour hotline and resource database, at 1-800-642-7837.