

A young child with dark hair is peeking over a wooden block. The child's eyes are visible above the top edge of the block. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

# include me

## Guide to Inclusive Child Care

Child care for children and youth with special needs\*

\* **Special needs:** Disabilities, special health care needs, and challenging behaviors (any child or youth, infant to age 18, for whom extra support is needed in order to be included in a child care or out-of-school time program)

# Why is quality, inclusive child care important?

- When I'm in child care, my parents are employed.
- When I'm included, we learn from each other.
- When my community works together, I'm included.

## Getting the information you need

When you care for any child, you will want information about that child's preferences, routines, and medical needs. It is not unusual to have misgivings about caring for children with disabilities. For example, providers often wonder if they have the right skills to meet children's special care needs. The best way to address these concerns is having appropriate information.

The primary sources of information are parents and people who work with the child. They can give individualized recommendations and training. *Include Me* will give you additional ideas about caring for children with special needs. Also included is a list of places where you can find more information and assistance.

There are many resources and support for inclusive child care. For example, local child care resource and referral programs can tell you about training opportunities and additional resources in your community.

## INTRODUCTION

## Who are children with special needs?

Children come with all types of special needs. In this booklet we define “special needs” in this way:  
*Disabilities, special health care needs, and challenging behaviors (any child or youth, infant to age 18, for whom extra support is needed in order to be included in a child care or out-of-school time program).*

No matter what their “special needs” may be, all children are children first. Children are more alike than different. Every child wants to have opportunities to learn, to have fun, to make friends, and to be accepted.



## What is “inclusive child care?”

- Children and youth with and without special needs being together in child care or out-of-school time programs. This promotes growth and development of all children.
- Child care where all children participate in daily routines and activities.
- Child care that is open to all children and families, regardless of abilities, cultures, and backgrounds.
- Child care that focuses on individual strengths of each child.
- Child care that encourages flexibility and creativity in child care professionals.

## Benefits of Inclusion

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When children are cared for together (whether or not they have special needs) they:

- Experience a sense of belonging and feel part of their community
- Have better self esteem
- Develop a wider variety of friendships with other children
- Have positive expectations about things they can do
- Learn from other children
- Share daily experiences
- Learn that people have different kinds of abilities
- Develop sensitivity and understanding towards others
- Learn to value differences in themselves and in others
- Are encouraged to be resourceful, creative, and cooperative

When you care for children with special needs you benefit by:

- Developing an understanding of the special needs of all people
- Learning to value and appreciate individual differences
- Growing in your experiences and skills, which benefits all children in your care
- Learning about community resources
- Enhancing your program through partnerships with people and agencies in the community
- Strengthening your reputation as a child care professional
- Demonstrating your belief in equal opportunities and equal rights for all people

**BENEFITS OF INCLUSION**

## All families benefit from inclusive child care by:

- Having a choice of high quality child care
- Feeling connected to the community
- Seeing their child form friendships with a variety of children
- Observing their child learn new skills
- Having an opportunity to develop friendships with other parents
- Developing an awareness and understanding of people with disabilities
- Having opportunities to teach their own child about diversity and individual differences

## Communities can work together to support inclusive child care:

- Child care providers and other service providers can come together to learn about existing community resources.
- Community members can coordinate and advocate for additional training and access to consultation to assist providers in caring for children with special needs.
- Community members, policymakers, and business leaders can work together to increase funds available to support quality, inclusive child care.



# Tips for Inclusion

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## Getting Started

**Here are the first steps you can take to create an inclusive child care or out-of-school time program:**

- View all children as more alike than different. Children with special needs are children first.
- Recognize children by their abilities, not disabilities.
- Check your policies and procedures to ensure they don't automatically screen out children with disabilities.
- Make simple changes in your activities and environment that allow all children to participate. This can be as simple as rearranging a few pieces of furniture.
- When you receive a call from a parent of a child with a disability or special need, take time to ask about the child's specific needs. Get plenty of information from the parents. Meet the child and parents. Make decisions about your ability to serve each child on a well-informed, individual basis.
- Make a habit of referring to the child first instead of the disability. For example, say, "I would like information about children with Down syndrome," instead of "I would like information about Downs children."
- Find out who is available to provide information and advice (for example, a child's special education teacher).
- Establish good communication with parents. Share expectations and concerns.
- Acknowledge your own discomfort about working with children with disabilities. Talking to support people, such as parents or other child care providers, can help. Other children will be more comfortable when they see you model positive interactions with children who have disabilities. As you gain experience and information, your comfort level will increase.

## Creating an Inclusive Environment

- Treat all children with respect. Ask each child and family for permission and input before sharing personal information with others.
- Use activities and materials that are well organized and accessible to all children in your care. Adapt activities so all children can participate.
- Make sure there is enough space for children to move around (including children using wheelchairs or other assistive devices). Whenever possible, use furniture and bathroom fixtures that are child-sized and durable.
- Encourage each child to join his or her peers. Give children support and assistance in this when needed.

- Create a language-rich environment. Talk with children. Describe what they are doing. Ask open-ended questions.
- When talking with a child, allow adequate time for him or her to respond to requests. Keep in mind some children with special needs may need extra time to respond.
- Affirm strengths of all children and emphasize similarities among children.
- Answer children's questions in a straightforward manner. A good way to do this is to relate questions to the child's own experiences. For example, if a child asks, "Why doesn't Susie talk?" say, "Susie doesn't talk because she doesn't hear things the same as you do. She is learning to use her hands to talk."
- Be as consistent as possible in routines and interactions. Be clear about rules and expectations. Consider developing a picture board to show your daily schedule. Provide logical and natural consequences that relate directly to a child's specific actions.
- Try using different kinds of cues to communicate. For example, some children are more visual. When reading to the group, show a photo of children sitting together with their hands to themselves for story time. Or show a child an outdoor picture to communicate the group is going outside.
- Give positive attention to children:
  - When they play well with others;
  - When they try new things;
  - When they are creative;
  - When they make progress;
  - Or just because . . .

## Partner with Parents

**Parents are the experts for their child. Here are some ways to build a partnership:**

- Ask all parents to help you develop a care book for their child that contains information on these items and other things you think may be helpful:
  - Emergency contacts, procedures and phone numbers
  - Medications, allergies, special health care needs
  - The type of environment in which their child does best
  - The types of activities their child enjoys
  - Behavior management plans
  - Any specific accommodations that are needed
  - Special education, early intervention, or other services their child is receiving, along with specialists who can share information.
- Make time for conversations with parents to discuss their child's development and experiences in child care. Be sure to share positive things as well as concerns.
- Find different ways to communicate with parents. For example, you could make a notebook for each child. The book would go home each day with brief notes. This gives parents a chance to respond by writing back. Other ideas include quick notes on 3x5 index cards or attendance sheets.
- Support and respect, in a non-judgmental manner, connections between children and their families.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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I have never cared for a child with special needs. Shouldn't I leave inclusion to the bigger, better-equipped centers?

Child care is needed in every neighborhood in all types of settings, including family child care. Your talents and experiences are valuable. No child should be excluded from benefiting from your skills and your program simply because he or she has special needs.

Will I need special training to care for a child with disabilities?

It depends on the child. For most children, good basic child care skills are enough. If caring for a child does require added skills, parents can often give you the training and information you need. Specialists can also share tips and advice.

Will I need to make major changes in my child care program to include children with special needs?

The answer will depend on each individual child. Find out about a child's particular needs. Then see which—if any—changes would have to be made in order to include the child. Parents and specialists who work closely with the child can help you make this decision. Here are some examples of typical changes:

- Changes in equipment, such as lowering or raising an activity table to include a child using a wheelchair;
- Modifying rules of a game or activity so all children can participate;
- Diapering a child who is older than most children who use diapers; and
- Taking time to communicate with the child's team.

Does the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to child care providers?

Yes. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law. The ADA says people with disabilities are entitled to equal rights in employment, public services, and access to public accommodations. "Public accommodations" include preschools, child care centers, and family child care homes. If you provide child care to the public, you cannot refuse to serve a child simply because he or she has a disability.

The ADA says you must make "reasonable accommodation" to serve children with disabilities. In the language of the law "reasonable accommodation" means adaptations that are not "unduly burdensome" or that do not cause you to make "fundamental alteration" in your program. For example, you are not expected to make changes that bring an unreasonable amount of additional expense.

The resource section at the end of this guide tells how to get more information about the ADA and child care.

Will serving children with special needs mean extra costs for me?

For some children more costly changes might be needed, for example:

- Changes in the environment, such as building a ramp or widening a doorway.
- Adding a staff person at certain times (such as mealtime) for a child who needs close supervision.

If you think caring for a child would bring extra expenses, first look closely at the child's individual needs. Ask about types of supports and resources that are available. When you have this information, you can make the best decision about your ability to serve the child within your current rates.

If a parent using a Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) child care subsidy enrolls a child with a special need in your program, the child may be eligible for a special needs rate. Children who require a higher level of care than other children their age may be eligible. This includes children with developmental delays or disabilities and children with mental health or behavioral issues.

## Can I get a tax break for making ADA-required accommodations?

You may be eligible for federal tax breaks to small businesses that make special accommodations for persons with disabilities. Call 1-800-829-3676 for IRS Publication #907, that provides information on these provisions.

## If I care for a child with special needs, will other children in my program have to stop doing certain games or activities?

Children with special needs can participate in all kinds of activities, both indoors and outdoors. Try to find practical and creative solutions that allow all children to participate in all activities in your program. Making an activity inclusive is much better than removing the activity from the program.

## What if other children's parents are concerned that a child with special needs will take time away from their child?

It is not unusual for parents to fear that a child with special needs will take time and attention away from their child. Talk openly with parents about concerns. Remind parents there is always an adjustment period with any new child. Remember to respect privacy of all families in your program. Do not share any personal information without getting permission from the child's parents.

## How do I answer questions from other children about a child's disability?

Children are curious by nature. They ask questions about differences in people. When children ask questions, give honest answers. Always use the child's name in your answer. For example: "Joey gets food through that tube, just like you use a spoon." Ask parents of children with special needs for ideas about answering other children's questions.

## If a child uses specialized equipment, should I allow other children to play with the equipment?

Because children are naturally curious, they are likely to be interested in a child's equipment and how it works. Encourage them to ask questions, and answer in a straightforward manner. With the parent's permission, allow children to touch or try the equipment. This gives children opportunities for shared experiences and will help promote understanding and acceptance.

## What kind of words do I use to talk about a child with special needs?

Language is important because it often reflects positively or negatively on the people about whom you are talking.

Remember to always put the person first. It is important to remember the child is a child, not a disability. "People First" language is important whether you are talking to children or other adults. Here are some examples:

### People First Language:

A child with a disability  
Keisha has a visual impairment  
Marshall has Attention Deficit Disorder

### Disability First Language:

A disabled child  
Blind Keisha  
Marshall is ADD



# Common Misconceptions

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## Misconception

All children with special needs require complicated care.

## In Fact

No two children are alike, whether or not they have disabilities. Some children who have disabilities will need special care. Others will need little or no additional care. Like all children, children with special needs have unique personalities, strengths, interests and abilities.

There are many types of disabilities. Just because a child has one type of disability, does not mean he or she has others.

## Misconception

Children with special needs should associate only with other children with special needs.

## In Fact

All children benefit from associating with others with a wide range of abilities. All children, including children with special needs, gain valuable learning experiences by being together.

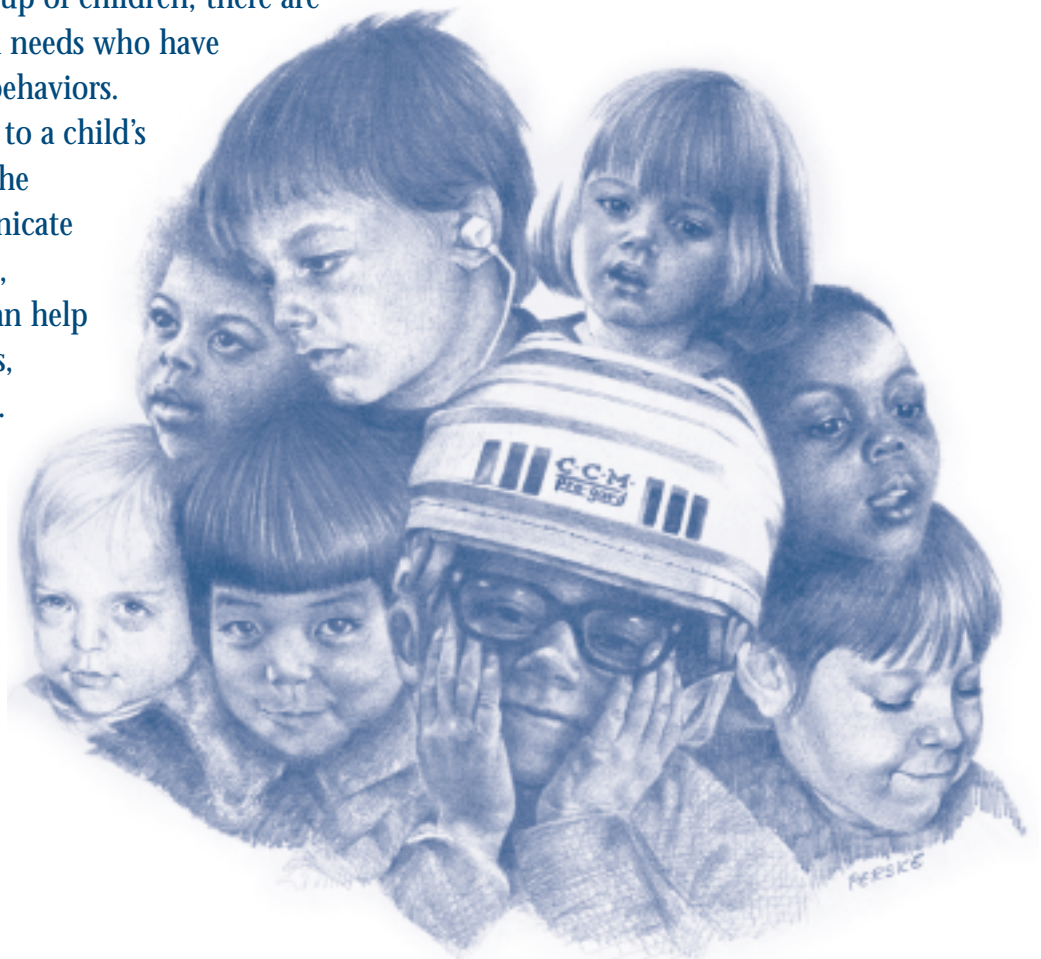
## Misconception

All children with cognitive disabilities have challenging behaviors.

## In Fact

Just because a person has a cognitive disability, it does not mean that he or she has behavior problems. As with any group of children, there are some children with special needs who have challenging or aggressive behaviors.

Often this behavior is due to a child's frustration because he or she cannot effectively communicate his or her needs. A patient, understanding caregiver can help by learning the child's cues, routines, likes and dislikes.



## Misconception

Children with severe special needs cannot learn.

## In Fact

All children are capable of learning. How much and how fast they learn varies a great deal. Children with special needs sometimes learn at a slower pace than their typically developing peers. For these children learning may require extra patience and repeated exposure to activities and concepts. Some children with special needs may also need additional assistance, special activities or adaptive equipment in order to learn to their fullest potential.



## Misconception

All disabilities are visible.

## In Fact

There are many types of disabilities. Some are easily recognized, such as physical impairments or cerebral palsy. Other disabilities may not be apparent. These include visual impairments, hearing impairments, autism, emotional or behavioral disorders, and learning disabilities. Whether a disability is apparent or not, children must not be judged by a diagnosis or label. It's important that caregivers take the time to get to know each child as an individual.



# Being on the Child's Team

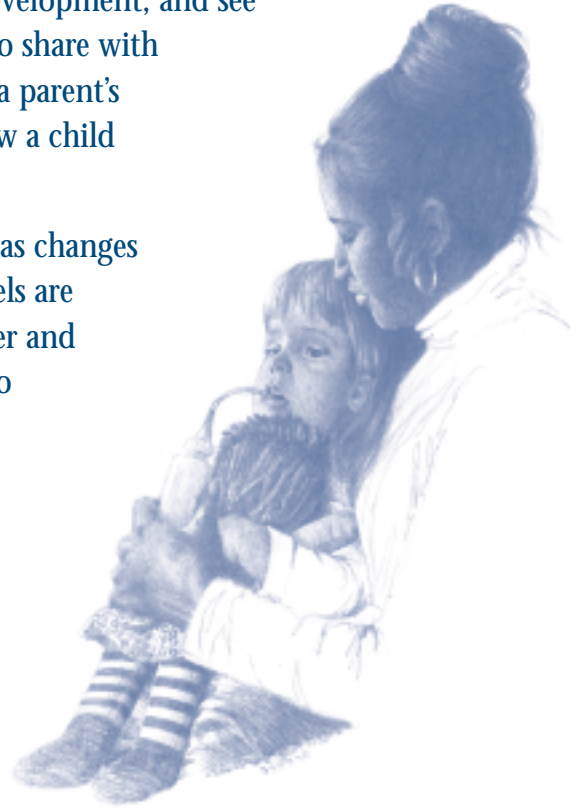
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Many children with special needs receive services from a team of people. The team includes the child's parents and may include a speech therapist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, early intervention specialist, special education teacher, nurse or mental health therapist. As a child care provider, you can be an important part of this team!

## What can you offer to the team?

As a child care professional, you are with the child in a natural environment. You see the child interact with other children, see changes in growth and development, and see signs of illness or distress. This is important information to share with parents and others who are working with the child. With a parent's permission, this information can help team members know a child better and help set appropriate goals for the child.

Specialists may ask for specific types of information, such as changes in a child's behaviors or times when the child's energy levels are very low. Writing down brief notes will help you remember and share this information. You can also help team members to remember the positives! Therapists must often focus on problems, so you can play an important role by pointing out gains the child has made.



## How can others on the child's team help you?

“Teaming” with parents and specialists can be an extra benefit of caring for a child with special needs.

### **With the parent's permission, specialists can:**

- Help you learn how to respond to certain behaviors;
- Help you know which things a child can or cannot do;
- Help you understand special health care needs;
- Let you know when to be especially careful with a child; and
- Tell you about other helpful services and resources.

A specialist may even be able to provide services in your child care setting. For example, a therapist might come to help a child with physical therapy exercises, which gives you a chance to learn, too.

## How do I become part of a child's team?

Parents can tell you about types of specialists who are working with their child and how to contact them. Ask if it's okay to talk with specialists and if there are any particular things that parents would like you to share with them. Encourage parents to give your phone number to specialists so they can call you with questions. Be sure to have the parent's written permission before you talk to a specialist. Agencies usually require a signed “release of information” form prior to discussing a child with you.

## Participating in the child's plan

Each child who is receiving early intervention or special education services has an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In addition to these plans, children may have behavior plans or medication schedules. Parents and the child's team develop these plans which include goals and resources to meet the child's special needs. You can ask the parent for a copy of the IFSP or IEP. With the parent's written permission, request a copy of the plan from the special education or early intervention provider. Knowing what the plan says will help you better understand a child's special needs. It may be possible to implement parts of the plan in your child care program.

Parents may ask you to be involved in developing a child's IFSP or IEP. If you can't go to meetings, find out what information you can send with parents or call in to other team members. Ask the parent to keep you updated, especially about any decisions that impact your child care program.

IFSP and IEP meetings usually take place once during the school year. If you are able to attend, take notes during the meeting so you can refer to them when needed. If there are certain terms you don't understand, ask for clarification or an explanation. Keep asking until you have the information you need. You can also bring notes about things you've observed in your child care setting. This will help share the child's accomplishments. Parents can request meetings take place at times and locations convenient to you.

## How do I stay in touch with the team?

Talk about ways to keep lines of communication open with parents and other team members. Find out how to contact them when you need additional guidance or have information to share. Ask about good times to call, or arrange a regular check-in schedule.

## The importance of confidentiality

Always remember that all information about a child or family is confidential. Never share anything you see or learn about a child or family with anyone unless you have specific permission. It's best to ask parents for written permission to speak to a specialist. Most agencies have a "release of information" form that parents can sign.



## Inclusive Child Care Resources

### ■ Washington Contacts for Information on Disabilities

#### **Arc of Washington**

1703 State Avenue NE • Olympia, WA 98506 • (888) 754-8798 • [www.arcwa.org](http://www.arcwa.org)

#### **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill – Washington (NAMI)**

4305 Lacey Blvd, Suite 8 • Lacey, WA 98503 • (800) 877-2649 • [www.geocities.com/namiwa](http://www.geocities.com/namiwa)

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### ■ Child Care Provider Support and Educational Organizations in Washington

#### **Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network**

917 Pacific Avenue #301 • Tacoma, WA 98402 • (800) 446-1114 • [www.childcarenet.org](http://www.childcarenet.org)

#### **Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC)**

841 N Central Avenue #206 • Kent, WA 98032 • (800) 727-3107 • [www.waeyc.org](http://www.waeyc.org)

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### ■ Organizations with Information on Care of School Age Children & Youth

#### **School's Out Consortium**

801 23rd Avenue S • Seattle, WA 98144 • (888) 419-9300 • [www.ci.seattle.wa.us/most/soc](http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/most/soc)

#### **National Association of School Age Care**

1137 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02124 • (617) 298-5012 • [www.nsaca.org](http://www.nsaca.org)

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### ■ National Organizations for Information on Disabilities

#### **National Information Center on Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)**

P.O. Box 1492 • Washington, DC 20013 • (800) 695-0285 • [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

#### **The Arc of the United States**

500 East Border Street, Suite 300 • Arlington, TX 76010 • (800) 433-5255 • [www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org)

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### ■ National Organizations with Information on Inclusive Child Care

#### **National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC)**

243 Church Street NW, 2nd Floor • Vienna, VA 22180 • (800) 616-2242 • [www.nccic.org](http://www.nccic.org)

#### **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**

1509 16th Street N.W. • Washington, DC 2003 • (800) 424-2460 • [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

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## Internet Resources

### ■ Inclusion Links

#### **Child Care plus+** – Resources for inclusion of young children with disabilities

[www.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/childcareplus](http://www.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/childcareplus)

#### **Circle of Inclusion** – For early childhood service providers and families of young children

[www.circleofinclusion.org](http://www.circleofinclusion.org)

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### ■ Disability Links

#### **Child Care and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** – US Department of Justice

[www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/)

#### **Family Village** – A global community of disability-related resources

[www.familyvillage.wisc.edu](http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu)

#### **Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP)** – Includes links to many related sites

[www.wa.gov/dshs/iteip/iteip.html](http://www.wa.gov/dshs/iteip/iteip.html)

#### **Internet Resources for Special Children** – Global disability links

[www.irsc.org](http://www.irsc.org)

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### ■ Advocacy Links

#### **Children's Defense Fund** – Children's advocacy information

[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

#### **Children's Alliance** – A voice for Washington's children, youth and families

[www.childrensalliance.org](http://www.childrensalliance.org)

#### **Connect for Kids** – Building community for kids and families

[www.connectforkids.org](http://www.connectforkids.org)

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## Thank You

Thank you to everyone who helped make this booklet possible

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- Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council

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