

Participation and Inclusion

All children deserve to have a healthy, happy childhood and youth, as well as the chance to be the best they can. The participation of children and youth with disabilities should be an ongoing and flexible process. It is not a question of whether they can participate, but how we ensure that it happens!

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) and the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD) outline the rights of children and young people with disabilities.

Practices for Inclusion provided in this Reference Sheet have been developed drawing on the social model of disability which focuses on building positive attitudes and minimizing or removing barriers that prevent children with disabilities from accessing the same opportunities as other children.

What is participation?

Child participation is a fundamental right recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and 1 of the 4 guiding principles of the Convention. According to this principle, children have the right to express themselves and to be heard. They must have the opportunity to express their opinions regarding decisions that affect them and their opinions must be taken into account. This being said, the child's age, level of maturity, and best interests should always be kept in mind when considering the ideas and opinions of children.

The concept of participation is implicit in Article 4 – Protection of the rights of the child; Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child; Article 13 – Freedom of expression; Article 14 – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion; Article 15 – Freedom of association; Article 16 – Right to privacy; and Article 17 – Access to information and mass media.

What factors influence a child's participation?

Children with disabilities should enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other children and should be fully respected in and outside their Play it Fair! group. Research shows that children with disabilities often have more barriers and less support than those without disabilities. The disabilities of children can affect traditional communication and lead to misunderstanding and teasing.

One of the most effective approaches to developing respect for difference and for combating social exclusion is to involve children themselves in identifying and implementing solutions. The group leader's attitude towards his/her group plays a significant role. It will set the tone of the group and influence how children accept one another's differences. Research shows that children with disabilities, who feel supported by their peers, are more likely to participate.

Tips for encouraging participation

- Don't make assumptions about a child's ability to participate
- Identify potential barriers to participation in an activity and develop solutions cooperatively
- Empower children to make their own decisions
- Give enough time
- Listen carefully
- Make the activity meaningful for everyone
- Make it fun!

Practices for Inclusion

Below are some general inclusive practices.

Blind, low or minimal vision

- If a child is unable to see, enlarge the print on role cards and handouts, or create some of the role cards and handouts in Braille if possible.
- Use high contrast materials –white paper and black markers—when children are engaging in activities which require drawing or writing.
- Provide special lighting such as low vision lights which simulate daylight and increase the contrast, clarity and reduce glare.
- Provide an exemplar with high contrasting colours, dimensional paint or glue to help the child understand the activity.

Deaf or hard of hearing

- Face the children when giving instructions and ensure assistive devices are working.
- Instruct the children to face each other and speak clearly and confidently.
- Speak clearly, loudly or quietly depending on the effectiveness for the children.
- Repeat and reword instructions if needed.
- Write the instructions or steps on the board or on a large piece of paper and post it on the wall.
- Model the activity to clarify the instructions.
- Provide examples where appropriate.

Speech or communication

- Provide assistive speech device such as an alternative communication device as required.
- Do not interrupt or finish a child's sentences.
- Minimize background noise in the room.
- Verify if you are not sure you understood.

Mobility

- Ensure there are no obstacles in the way. If required, move the activity into a large open space such as a gymnasium.

- If a child has difficulty with mobility, work cooperatively as a group to come up with creative solutions for activities that require movement.

Processing information

- When necessary, slow down the pace of the activity.
- Reword, rephrase instructions and information.
- Reduce the number of tasks given at one time.
- Use ability grouping and partnering to support all children.

Behaviour

- Use visual and auditory cues such as gestures, switching the lights on and off or blowing a whistle when transitioning to a new activity.
- Develop consistent routines.
- Refer to Reference Sheet 9 in the Play it Fair! Toolkit for how to establish a code of behaviour for the group.