

Inclusion Tools for After School Professionals

Engaging with Families to Develop Partnerships

Accommodating Kids with Disabilities in After School Programs – Where to Begin

How do you respectfully and legally ask parents if their children have disabilities and may need modifications or accommodations to participate in your after school program?

Your registration form can simply ask the question, “Does this participant have special needs (developmental, physical, emotional) that require accommodations?”

No

Yes

If yes, then provide instructions about what will happen next. For example, “Our program coordinator, Lee Garcia, will be giving you a call to talk with you more about your child’s needs” or “Please fill out the enclosed Special Needs Accommodation Form.” The form and/or the interview can give you information about the child and help you assess what you will need to include the child/youth in your program. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires

that you perform an individual assessment of each participant who requests accommodations.

You will want to ensure that your registration process doesn't use the answer to the question about accommodations as a way to screen out applicants. Requirements for eligibility are to be consistently applied to all who wish to enroll in your after school program.

Will you always get parents to volunteer that their child needs extra help? No matter how you ask the question, you probably won't unless your staff attitudes, materials and program information reflect your welcoming/inclusive philosophy so parents will feel comfortable in sharing information with you. One program includes this statement on their registration materials:

“Parks & Recreation welcomes individuals of all abilities to participate in all recreation programs and activities. All programs offered by Parks & Recreation encourage participation by a diverse population, accommodate those with varying abilities, and support diverse learning styles.”

Engaging with Families to Develop Partnerships

It's important to use language that focuses on the child's strengths and skills, rather than on the child's needs. Think about ways you can ask questions that will encourage a relationship where families feel comfortable sharing personal or sensitive information with you. Value and appreciate the information that families share with you - let them know how useful it is for you. Ask parents' permission to share information, e.g.: "Can I ask you about what happens at home?" "Can I contact your child's teacher?"

Invite families to visit the program as part of the intake process. This might give them more information about how their child can best participate. Encourage families to be a part of the program's community. Let them know that you value family participation at your program and welcome them to participate as much as they would like to, e.g.: regular communication, volunteering during program hours, providing extra support people - or other ways that you can suggest.

Discuss families preferred methods of communication:

- *Notes? Phone calls? Emails? Communication book?
- *How often will you communicate? (every day, once a week should be enough, only when needed, as often as necessary)
- *Times you can be reached?
- *Phone numbers, pagers, email addresses etc.

Talking with Families

It is useful to have a set of questions or script to follow when talking with parents to learn more about the child or youth who is applying for your program. A promising practice is to use the script not as a questionnaire to be filled out, but simply a guide to facilitate conversations between parents and program staff to promote sharing information and developing a solid relationship from the very beginning. It is important to remember that it is not always necessary to have information about a child's specific disability or diagnosis, but you will need to have a way to ask if the child needs modifications or adaptations to participate in your program.

1. Describe Your Program. It is important to give families an accurate picture of what your program looks like, so they can make an informed decision about enrolling their child in the program. As you discuss the program, families have the opportunity to recognize components of the program where their child may be successful, or where accommodations or adaptations may be needed.

- What is your program's mission and philosophy
- What is your program application process
- Daily and weekly schedule
- Staff training and experience
- Age range and grade levels of participants
- Staff/participant ratio
- Level and type of supervision of children
- Activities, including field trips
- How children move from one activity to another
- How staff motivate and encourage children
- How staff manage behavior
- Staff goals and expectations for children
- How staff supports children in understanding and meeting those expectations
- How your program determines and provides accommodations for children with disabilities
- How you program communicates with families

2. Learn about the child/youth. It may be helpful for you and your staff to know information about the child's skills in the following areas:

- communication
- self help (including snack and using the restroom)
- learning
- behavior and motivation
- medical needs
- social skills
- mobility
- fine motor skills
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3. Decide on Next Steps

- Generate a plan for following up, with a clear list of actions steps.
- Allocate who is responsible for what, and when it will be done by
- Confirm the best ways and frequency of communication, i.e. email, notes, communication book, etc.
- Schedule a time to develop the inclusion plan

Interview Questions to Help You Get to Know a Child

Here are some questions you might use; depending upon the child's age and ability levels, some questions will be more appropriate than others.

1. What does (name) like to do?
2. What is (name) good at?
3. What motivates (name)?
4. How does (name) tell you what he wants?
5. How does (name) let you know he
 - ...doesn't like something?
 - ... needs to use the restroom?
 - ... is hungry or thirsty?
 - ... is tired?
 - ... is upset?
6. What do you do at these times?
7. How can we help (name) at these times?
8. How does your child interact with other children.....
 - ... at home?
 - ... at school?
 - ... in the neighborhood?
9. Are there any allergies or medical needs we should be aware of?
10. Can you suggest any supports that you use at home, or are used at school that it would be good for us to use too? (e.g.: visuals, schedules, behavior plans etc)
11. How do you help (name) to learn new skills?
12. How do you let (name) know he is doing a good job?
13. What are your goals/expectations for (name) while they are attending this program?
14. What do you hope (name) achieves by attending this program?
15. Is there information you would like our staff to know before (name) attends this program?
16. Do you have any concerns about (name) attending this program?
17. Are there modifications or accommodations that you can suggest which may encourage (name's) participation in the program?

Sample Child Profile 1

Hi!

My name is Michael. I am 6 years old.

I communicate using phrases, and can understand phrases with multiple steps

<p>Here are some things I like.....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving around • Hooting • Being outside, camping • Climbing • Playing with water and sand • Meeting new people • Blueberries, green apples and raspberries • Balls, I've been trying to hit a baseball off a tee recently • Stacking and crashing dominoes & blocks • Marble runs • Bubbles • Bouncing on a yoga ball • Being barefoot • The wind blowing through the trees • Magnadoodle
<p>You can help me by.....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompting me to wash my hands in the bathroom • Offering me chewing gum if I am seeking some sensory feedback in my mouth (there should be some in my backpack) • Watching me carefully – I might wander over to things that are interesting • Prompting me to stay engaged in play, particularly pretend play • Directed me to use the bathroom if I ask “pee in trees?” • Using visuals to help me understand what’s happening • Provide me with ‘count downs’ (e.g.: 10 more minutes, 9 more minutes) and use “first....., then.....” to help me transition
<p>I might get upset if.....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't want to stop doing something • Don't want to do something
<p>When I'm upset I might....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yell ... “no.... for me!”
<p>You can help me by....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing me with a countdown when something is going to end – I can usually accept it then
<p>While I'm at camp, its going to be great for me to practice.....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacting with other kids – I might need some adult prompts and encouragement • Moving my body around & getting some exercise

Sample Child Profile 2

All About Me



Hi,

My name is Jason. I am 7 years old. This is a photo of me and my younger brother Henry. We really like to play soccer and wrestle with each other. I also love to play with toy cars. I have a pet cat named Felix.

This year I went to West Main School. It was a lot of fun. My teacher was Miss Maria.

Important things to know

I love being outside and I have a lot of energy.

I can be a great help for you classroom and love doing jobs.

I am really good at soccer.

Sometimes I find it hard to concentrate if there's lots of distractions

**** I am allergic to peanuts****

Please see my allergy chart

This year I have been practicing

Adding and subtracting numbers bigger than 10. I've gotten really good at this!

Waiting for my turn when playing games on the playground.

Letting Miss Maria know when I'm tired and need a break

Sitting at circle time for 10 minutes before I need a break.

You can help me by

Giving me jobs to do in the classroom so I can stand up and walk around regularly.

Letting me use one of my "fidget toys" when I'm sitting on the rug or at my desk. This helps me concentrate.

Giving me some extra time to practice new math skills when I'm learning them.

Having "wait" cards available during recess to help remind me to wait my turn during games.

Sitting me at the front of the group during circle.

For more information about including children and youth with disabilities check out The Inclusion Tool Kit under Tips and Tools at www.snipsf.org The Tool Kit also contains “Questions and Answers about the ADA for OST Programs” which is an excellent description of OST providers’ obligations to serve children and youth with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act.