



Best Practice

Guiding decision making for the inclusion team

What do we mean by 'best practice'?

Best practice is informed by research. It describes the thinking, approaches and actions that best support every child to actively and meaningfully participate in all aspects of their early childhood education and care (ECEC) service's program.

It is important for best practice to guide how the inclusion team makes decisions and works together. When best practice happens, children can become confident learners and participate in their community. They develop a deeper understanding of who they are, and this contributes to their sense of belonging.

Best practice is underpinned by the evidence-based principles and practices of:

- ▶ The [National Quality Framework](#), which guides the quality and continuous improvement of ECEC services; and
- ▶ The [National Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention](#)



Best practice for the inclusion team is about:

1. Inclusion and participation;
2. Play-based learning in natural, everyday environments; and
3. Partnerships and teamwork.

Understanding best practice

The following information and resources will help you understand best practice and the underpinning standards and principles.



1. Inclusion and participation

Every child has the right to be included in all aspects of community life, including ECEC services.

Inclusion and participation in an ECEC service focuses on:

- ▶ children being supported to fully participate in all aspects of the ECEC program;
- ▶ children playing and learning with their same-aged peers;
- ▶ adults having high expectations for learning and viewing every child as being capable and competent; and
- ▶ everyone understanding and valuing different ways of thinking and being.

Best practice involves reflecting on and changing attitudes, environments and strategies so that every child can participate. ECEC services have a legal responsibility under the Disability Discrimination Act to include children with disability and to make reasonable adjustments so they can participate in the same way as other children.

Resources on inclusion and participation

- ▶ [Understanding Inclusion](#)
- ▶ [NSW/ACT Inclusion Matters Poster](#)
- ▶ [Benefits of inclusion Vimeo](#)
- ▶ [Disability Discrimination Act ACECQA resources](#)



2. Play-based learning in natural, everyday environments

Children learn through play, relationships and the natural, everyday environments they spend most of their time in. Everyday environments include the home, ECEC services and community settings like the playground and activities like swimming lessons. Children learn through the opportunities that occur in all of these places.

Children spend most of their waking hours with their family, a large amount of time at ECEC services and a small proportion of their time with early childhood intervention professionals. With this in mind, greater outcomes can be achieved when early intervention happens in the everyday environments that children spend the most time in. In ECEC services, these are the learning spaces where children choose to play with and/or alongside their peers.

If children are taken away for one to one therapy in a separate space in an ECEC service, opportunities for children to learn with their peers and benefit from participating in social experiences are limited. When therapy occurs within play-based settings, together with peers, there are many more learning opportunities for the child. This also increases the skills, knowledge and capacity of educators to reinforce learning through the everyday program and routines of the service.

Resources on play-based learning in natural, everyday environments

- ▶ [Early intervention and inclusion for young children with developmental disabilities – a Tim Moore paper](#)
- ▶ [What Therapists need to know](#)



3. Partnerships and teamwork

When families, ECEC services and early childhood intervention professionals work in partnership, it enhances children's inclusion, learning, and well-being. Strong partnerships are built on:

- ▶ supportive and respectful relationships, where communication is transparent and open;
- ▶ a commitment to understand different perspectives; and
- ▶ a genuine openness to the ideas of others.

Together, these build the trust that helps to form a strong team.

When we partner with others and work together as an inclusion team, there is a wider pool of knowledge, skills, experience and ideas to draw on. Working as a team also increases opportunities for success through consistent practices and shared priorities. When the adults in a child's life are on the same page, there are more opportunities for skills to be learned and practised in the different environments that children spend time in. When early childhood intervention happens in an isolated or inconsistent way it can be less effective.

Including children as part of the inclusion team ensures that their voice is not only being considered, but actively responded to. Although a child may not be actively contributing to discussions and meetings, it is important that the team think about how to capture and include their voice when making decisions. *Inclusion Together* uses the phrase 'team *with* the child' rather than 'team *around* the child' to recognise the child as a contributing team member.

Resources on partnerships and teamwork

- ▶ [Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention](#)
- ▶ [Guide to the National Quality Framework](#)

- ▶ [Belonging, Being, Becoming: The Early years Learning Framework for Australia V2.0, 2022](#)
- ▶ [My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia V2.0, 2022](#)



Best practice in action

It is important for the inclusion team to think about best practice approaches and actions when they are deciding on shared priorities and planning their next steps forward.

Use the following questions to guide your decision making:

Best Practice Quick Check

- Does the activity support the child's learning and participation in the ECEC program?
- Have the child's interests, preferences and choices informed your decision making?
- Can the planned activities happen in the natural, everyday environment of the ECEC service with same-aged peers?
- Is the role of the child's same-aged peers planned for?
- Are planned activities play-based and fun?
- Do the agreed actions represent the shared priorities of the team?

Best Practice in Action Examples

- ▶ To increase opportunities for social connection with a child's peers, a visiting early childhood intervention (ECI) professional involves other children who are playing in the space the child is engaged in. This makes the most of the social environment of the ECEC service.
- ▶ A child attending an ECEC service uses Key Word Sign to communicate. All educators learn Key Word Sign so that they can support the child's communication and the further development of that skill. Educators also teach Key Word Sign to other children so that the child can communicate in this way with peers as well as adults.
- ▶ When an ECI professional visits an ECEC service, they provide therapy where the child is already engaged and utilise the play-based materials that are already there, rather than bringing in different or special resources. This ensures that the child's play choices are considered, and that learning can be supported and practised using the service's own resources and materials.
- ▶ A service Director has received complaints from families about the behaviour of a particular child attending the service. Some families are asking for the child to be excluded. The Director explains that every child has the right to be included and participate in the service and that risk management and safety plans have been put in place. She also explains that they are supporting every child to learn and practice social and emotional regulation skills.
- ▶ A Speech Pathologist suggests that a child needs to practice labelling different objects to increase their expressive language skills. An educator at the service can think of many times where this could happen throughout the day. She also knows that the child particularly enjoys story time, so suggests this as a good time for this to be practised. She shares this with other educators in the team so that this can guide their choice of books.

- ▶ A parent wants to incorporate the goals of bike riding into their child’s plan. The family regularly ride their bikes in the park on the weekends and they would like their child, who has motor difficulties, to be able to participate in the family activity more independently. The service doesn’t have a bike track or safe place available for bike riding. The service Director suggests some alternative play-based activities that will help to build muscle tone and balance skills that will contribute to reaching this goal.
- ▶ During an inclusion team meeting, a parent shares that their child loves bathtime. He says that even when his child is stressed or upset, bathtime always helps his child to feel calm and settled. The ECEC educator thinks that this could be adapted to help the child to feel calm, particularly after transitions. They trial having ‘warm’ water play available both indoors and outdoors. Educators report that this has made transitions easier for a number of children in the group.
- ▶ A child is experiencing significant anxiety when they separate from their carer when arriving at their ECEC service. The therapist has suggested using a visual routine of the day to help this child to know what is happening and what is coming next throughout the day. As part of creating the visual routine, educators decided to take and use actual photos of the different parts of the day so that the visuals were easily understood. Many children have benefited from using this visual routine throughout each day.
- ▶ A family would like telehealth occupational therapy sessions to happen at the ECEC service as the therapist is based a long way away and the parents work full time. The inclusion team met online to discuss how this could work. They considered child safety requirements, consents that may be required and the importance of building the skills of parents and educators to support learning. As a result, some telehealth sessions occur at home with parents participating and some sessions occur in the ECEC service with peers and educators participating. The inclusion team meet regularly to review progress and plan together.

Click [here](#) to find out more about *Inclusion Together* or go to <https://inclusionagency NSWACT.org.au/about/inclusion-together>