



Inclusive Practice

If we are to include children who have SEN fully in the EYFS, we have to understand that each and every child learns differently and adapt what we do to ensure that they can access the curriculum.

It is up to us to identify any barriers they might face when accessing our curriculum and to plan adaptations flexibly.

▲ ● ■ Children learning differently

Each child is unique, each is special and each will learn in a different way. Getting to know the individual learning styles and assessing the individual needs of the children allows you to personalize their learning experiences so that each and every one can make progress. We all know of children who are primarily lookers, listeners or doers. We also know that most children in their early years are a delightful mixture of all three, busily making connections between their experiences and their senses as they play and learn. If you have reached the point of seeing each child as having a very individual learning style, then you are well placed to see children who have SEN simply as an extension of this. They will have their own individual package of strengths and weaknesses and might need more of your support than others. The guidelines within the SEN Code of Practice suggest a very pragmatic view of SEN – in a nutshell, children have SEN if their needs are additional or different to the majority of the other children. It is up to us to identify any barriers they might face when accessing our curriculum and to plan adaptations flexibly.

▲ ● ■ The evolution of inclusion

The word 'inclusion' has developed and widened its meaning over the past few years. It means far more than including children with SEN and disability and also refers to including people generally regardless of ability, gender, race, religion and age – in fact, as a term it is still developing. We are moving towards better inclusion for children with disabilities and SEN and also recognition that we should ensure equal opportunities for all the children in our care. Members of the Early Childhood Forum have devised this very dynamic definition: *Inclusion is a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down barriers to participation and belonging.*

▲ ● ■ A medical model

In the past, assessing special educational needs involved the identification and remediation of children's deficits and defects. If we focus on a young child's disabilities or deficits, there is a tendency to lose sight of what is most important for learning and development during the early childhood years – that is, opportunities to engage successfully in a variety of playful interactions with people and objects in one's environment. The traditional notion in special education that simply identifying them and 'fixing them' in some way can resolve educational difficulties has not borne fruit and could be seen as personally offensive. This is known as a 'medical model' of disability and SEN.

