

IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE TO CHOOSE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION.

Some families are clear from the beginning that they want their child with disability to attend school with their peers or siblings. Other families have made the move from a special to a regular setting.

Either way, many encounter messages, myths and barriers which can steer them off the inclusive path.

See **Fact Sheet 8**. These messages can come from professionals, school personnel or extended family and it is helpful to have the correct information and some counter arguments ready.

Historically, the special education path has been the default. This means it is helpful for families to plan and be prepared to advocate for school inclusion – rather than thinking it will “just happen”.

FAMILIES HAVE FOUND THE FOLLOWING SIX STEPS HELPFUL:

1. SPEND TIME CLARIFYING YOUR VISION

What do you hope and dream for your child? Think about how the school years will support your long-term vision. Even if these dreams feel quite obvious and ordinary (e.g. for your child to be surrounded by people who love and care for them, to one day have a job and home of their own) it is helpful to write them down. Maintaining a strong vision forms the basis of your advocacy and planning. See “Clarifying Your Vision for School Inclusion Question Sheet” at www.cru.org.au/factsheets

2. PRACTISE BEING ABLE TO ARTICULATE YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS AND GIFTS

When a child has a diagnosis, a lot of focus gets put on what they can't do. Throughout your child's school life, including at enrolment, be a good ambassador for your child, talk convincingly about their beauty, gifts and contributions. Help others see the wonderful child you know! Awareness of your child's gifts and interests may also create pathways for participation and friendship.

3. LEARN ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND HOW IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

There are a lot of myths about inclusion (see **Fact Sheet 8**) and things get called inclusive that aren't! It is important that you are well informed and ready to counter unhelpful suggestions such as a unit or dual placement providing “the best of both worlds” or that a special school is “inclusive”.



“In the beginning, I thought my son needed withdrawal for one-on-one or lots of aide time but now I see how those things took him away from his peers. While there is still sometimes extra adult support in the class, there are many other ways to foster my son's participation, learning and belonging, so he is a full and valued class member”.

- Mother of John (age 7)

4. GAIN KNOWLEDGE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Schools are obliged to provide reasonable adjustments so that students with disability can participate in learning on the same basis as their peers. Refer to **Fact Sheet 1** for the *Disability Standards for Education* and **Fact Sheet 8** for legislative resources

5. EXPECT AND PREPARE FOR SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS TO INCLUSION

Hopefully you will receive a warm welcome at your chosen school. You are more likely to get a good outcome if you come prepared with a clear vision, ask for what is legally required, meet other enrolment criteria, and can calmly and confidently approach these conversations. Don't be apologetic about seeking inclusion.



“I persevered, determined to learn more to see how inclusion was possible, because my conscience wouldn't allow me not to!! When Cate's siblings asked why Cate went to a different school – every answer I gave felt weak and untruthful – I was compromising the right of all my children to experience their schooling years together. Now when all three walk through the same school gates together in the same uniform – it is a powerful feeling of completeness.”

– mother of Cate (age 11)

TIPS FOR PROFESSIONALS:

Help families to develop their vision, identify their child's strengths and connect with other families who are pursuing an inclusive path.

Help break the myths that inclusion is only for some or that children miss out in a regular school. Rethink “school ready”. Identify how to support families to prepare their child and how the school can be ready.



6. KNOW THAT IT IS NEVER TOO LATE

Many families with children in special settings have made the move to a regular setting. In addition to the information above it may be helpful to:

- not wait to convince everyone before enrolling in the regular school. Prepare for possible resistance – from teachers and other families in the special setting, or even from family and friends. Keep revisiting your vision and look to the opportunities for your child.
- take control of information. Assumptions may be made about your child based on what was provided in the special school. As the expert on your child, provide relevant information which is positive and solution focused.