

Inclusive Practices: From Classroom to Community Learning *Journeys* – Preparation is key

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Learning journeys provide a valuable opportunity for children to extend their learning beyond the classroom, and to put into practice the skills and knowledge that they have in a meaningful way.



"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember.

Involve me and I learn." - Benjamin Franklin

Whether it is a small adventure within the school compound, or a trip to the supermarket, the library or other places of interest, these trips certainly help children to explore and connect with different settings, understand what to do there, and learn how to behave in a way that is safe and appropriate. However, for the experience to be a pleasant and fulfilling one for all, educators would likely agree that being well-prepared for the trip is key, especially for children with additional needs.

Over the years, Chris, a teacher at an Early Intervention Centre, has realised the importance of having a good understanding of each of his children's unique needs and the kind of support they might require in order to be able to participate in the journey meaningfully.

Supporting Children's Understanding of Expectations

Planning a learning journey requires setting clear objectives of the experience. For Chris's students, these outdoor trips usually provide them with opportunities to be exposed to different settings, to interact with persons in the community, build their confidence in maneuvering the environment and to practice important social skills.

To support these objectives, Chris prepares the children for the learning journey in a variety of ways. He might create a social story to read with the children, which describes the place of interest, the different things that can be done there, and any possible obstacles or discomfort they might face. He might show them a video of what to expect. He might also prepare a visual checklist of the different steps involved in the journey, as a guide for children who would require clear directions, structure or visual reminders. Additionally, he would check in with caregivers if there were any triggers to be aware of in the community e.g. meltdown at the candy aisle, so that he can set expectations early with the child.

Some parents find bringing their child with additional needs on an errand or to a community space stressful. They may feel safer and more confident doing so with a group of others, and with teachers present.

Witnessing the supports put in place by teachers and how well their child responds to them, is an impactful way to raise their confidence and empower them to try the same.

QUICK TIPS FOR LEARNING JOURNEYS:

Set clear objectives

Prepare social stories

Visual checklist that child can tick off

Identifying common triggers and setting expectations early

Collaborate with and involve caregivers



The **Playground**: A Space for All Kids



The playground is usually a source of joy, not only for children but their caregivers too! Caregivers feel pride when they witness their child skillfully manoeuvre different play structures, interact with peers confidently, and overcome obstacles independently.

The playground experience can be starkly different for families of children with additional needs. They may not have adequate motor skills, social skills, or may not yet be able to take the perspectives of others. Caregivers have to be vigilant about their child's movements and actions, to ensure that he does not say or do anything inappropriate to others. They often worry about judgment from other people, and whether or not their child would feel welcome. In this way, bringing their child to the playground can be challenging to them mentally and emotionally. Thus, it is important for children to learn the appropriate skills and be given multiple opportunities to practise them in the natural setting. How can we help support children with additional needs at the playground?

QUICK TIPS FOR THE PLAYGROUND:

Buddy system for the class

Set expectations through stories, videos

Peer modeling

Prepare for "finish time"

Praise good behaviour



Chris said that pairing children together can be helpful, and the whole class can benefit from it. The children can be taught to look out for their friend at the playground; to show kindness, be helpful and to be considerate to their friend. It is also important to let children know about what happens at the playground, and what the expected behaviours are.

This can be done by reading stories, watching videos and peer modeling. If Chris foresees that a child might have difficulty leaving the playground, he ensures that he pre-empts the child adequately e.g. "5 minutes then back to class., 4 minutes... 3 minutes..." etc. and may provide the child with a physical object to help him transition from the playground back to class. It would also help if the next activity in class is also something the child enjoys!

Lastly, Chris sees the benefit of praising children when he catches them doing something well, instead of overly focusing on the negative aspects of their behaviours. When they are explicitly told that they're doing the right thing and are praised or rewarded for it, he sees more of these positive behaviours occurring.



Photo: Chris posing with a few of his students on their EIC graduation day, December 2020