

# Planning Inclusive Playdates

Thinking about hosting a playdate or event that includes children with and without disabilities but not sure how to plan? This guide will provide basic information to help you feel confident about inviting kids of all abilities to spend time together under your care. Planning an inclusive playdate requires a little extra thought, but will surely result in a richer experience for all involved.

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## Ability Inclusive Mindset

The Ability Inclusive Mindset is a set of beliefs and behaviors that provide a blueprint for how to live an inclusive life. When we adopt these beliefs and behaviors and exercise them in our daily life, our decisions and our actions will contribute to making our environment more inclusive for all people. To learn more about the Ability Inclusive Mindset, watch TNP Executive Director Lauren Schrero's TEDx Talk:

[https://youtu.be/DepM\\_Frf8Vo](https://youtu.be/DepM_Frf8Vo)

**To develop an Ability Inclusive Mindset, you must first adopt three core beliefs:**

- 1. Accessible spaces are better spaces.** When spaces are designed for everyone's needs, they feel more welcoming, accommodating, and comfortable for everyone. Accessibility improves an environment for people with and without disabilities. Take ramps, for instance. Not only do ramps make it possible for wheelchair users to enter a space, they also make it possible for people toting luggage, pushing strollers, or young children who are not yet comfortable with stairs.
- 2. Inclusive activities are richer activities.** While inclusive activities might not always be easier or completely comfortable, they provide a richer experience for all involved. Coming together with people that are different from you challenges your perspective and can introduce you to new ways of thinking and different ways to accomplish things.
- 3. All human lives have equal value.** It's essential that we believe in the inherent value in every human life. This belief allows us to treat people with dignity, to exercise patience in challenging situations, to listen carefully and demonstrate respect to all people.

**Armed with these three beliefs, we must practice three core behaviors:**

- 1. Intentional and creative planning** To ensure that an activity is accessible for everyone involved takes careful planning and thought. You'll need to communicate with people and find out about their access needs. You'll want to have an alternate plan in case things don't go the way you expected. But the end result will be a successful event that makes every participant feel valued and comfortable.

2. **Stepping outside your comfort zone** It is human nature to connect with people that share similar interests and have had similar experiences. It requires risk-taking to invite people into your life and activities that seem at first to be different than you are. When we welcome diversity into our activities, we all benefit.
3. **Demonstrating empathy** Empathy involves feeling with others, perspective taking, and supporting others in the way they need it, when they need it. When we demonstrate empathy to others, we make them feel seen, understood, and accepted. This creates a welcoming environment.

A view of the world that AIMS for ability diversity

# ABILITY INCLUSIVE MINDSET

## BELIEFS

### 1. Accessible spaces are better spaces

If a space is accessible, anyone can use it and everyone feels like they belong.

### 2. Inclusive activities are richer activities

All kids feel less like visitors and more like teammates, because they are working together more often.

### 3. All human lives have equal value

We must treat everyone with dignity and like they matter - because they do.

## BEHAVIORS

### 1. Intentional and creative planning

Kids don't feel forgotten about because we've thought through how each one will access and engage in an activity in advance.

### 2. Stepping outside your comfort zone

The more we practice risk-taking, the more it becomes a reflex. Inclusion can be uncomfortable, so practicing it can make it easier.

### 3. Demonstrating Empathy

When we truly practice empathy, we make people feel understood, safe, and welcome.



## Preparing for your Playdate

- **Educate yourself about disability as a part of human diversity.**

Disability impacts the way 25% of people show up in the world. If you, like most people, didn't receive an education in disability awareness when you were growing up, the prospect of hosting a playdate that includes a child with a disability may seem intimidating. Knowledge is power, and learning some basic information about disability can empower you to do the risk-taking and intentional planning associated with an Ability Inclusive Mindset. We've assembled a resource for parents that includes general information and suggestions for how to introduce disability to your kids. Check out the guide here: <https://bit.ly/tnpdisintro>

- **Communicate with other caregivers in advance**

Your best resource for determining how to put together a playdate that will be accessible and fun for all involved is to reach out to the other kids' caregivers and ask questions! You might be thinking, "*is it rude to draw attention to another child's disability? Will I offend them?*" Disability is not shameful or unfortunate, so asking about a child's accessibility needs demonstrates that you care about creating a positive experience for kids.

Be sure your questions are related to the activity or event and are not intrusive or prying. So, try asking, "Is there anything I should keep in mind to make sure this space/activity/event is accessible to Tameka?" Or, "We're planning on doing \_\_\_\_ activity and I want to make sure it's accessible for Josiah." Some children may experience sensory sensitivities to light, sound, or textures. You can always ask, "Is there anything I can do to help make a space more comfortable for Lucy?"

If you or your child don't know this friend well yet, be sure to ask about their likes and dislikes! Find out what their favorite activities and interests are, and look for commonalities across kids to choose activities that will be fun for everyone. And of course, if you plan to serve food, ask about allergies or other restrictions or sensitivities to keep all kids safe.

- **Prepare your space**

Once you have a plan for your activities, prepare the physical space so that it is accessible based on what you learned from the other child's caregiver. This is especially important if the child has a physical disability that impacts mobility, has a visual impairment, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Think through how a child will enter your home and navigate the floorplan. Consider the space where the kids will play and be sure any surfaces are accessible. If you learned about any sensory sensitivities, think about adjusting the lighting and volume of the space where kids will play.

- **Talk to your child about the plan**

Before any playdate, prepping your child for the social experience can help make it a success. Hosting can be stressful for some children, just as it is for adults, so talking through the plan, options, and how to be a welcoming host will empower your child and help them enjoy the experience. Remind your child that sometimes things don't go according to plan, so talk about what to do if a friend doesn't want to do a planned activity or an activity doesn't take as long as you expected.