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Rethinking the ROUND Hole to Fit the SQUARE Peg

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Working with children with special needs in creating inclusive environments. This presentation will focus on encouraging and promoting inclusive environments across the board for all children – it will shift the focus of how you look at your program and working with each child.

**1. WHY?**

When we have a square peg and a round hole, we often think we have to change the peg, so it can fit in the hole. Instead, we should shift our focus to the HOLE – how can we change the hole to fit the square peg, the oval peg, the star peg, the heart peg.

True inclusion focuses on strategies that support the entire population in ways that will help each and every individual. Inclusive Environments promote equal opportunities and encourage growth in ALL children. The three most important ways we can do this are:

- a. Provide Equal Opportunities;
- b. Focus on Strengths; and
- c. Use Positive and Person First Language,

True inclusion benefits ALL children, both those with special needs and those without.

- a. To the special needs child;
  - i. Academically;
  - ii. Socially;
  - iii. Emotionally;
- b. To all children;
  - i. Promoting inclusion, acceptance (rather than tolerance); AND
  - ii. Promoting kindness and equality;

**2. WHAT?**

What is LRE? LRE is the legal standard acronym for “Least Restrictive Environment.” OR the environment where the child living with special needs is educated and exposed to the general education environment to the MAXIMUM extent possible, and with children who do not have special needs to the MAXIMUM extent possible. This includes academic environments, AND non-academic environments.

**3. HOW?**

Environmental Changes (changes you can make to the program, staff, etc.); Communication between Parents, School, and Programs; Collaboration between Parents, School, and Programs; AND Promoting Acceptance and Equality;



It starts from the ground up – the language you use, the tone of voice you use, the actions you take – all trickle down to how the child learns, communicates and acts.

### *Environmental Changes*

**ACCESS** – Changing the way all children can access the program or environment. Physical access may include ramps, hand rails, alternative seating, alternative tools. Developmental access may include flexibility in how a task is completed, or how much is completed, or breaks during the task.

**LANGUAGE** – Changing the language used by ALL staff should include using positive encouragement, rather than disciplinary or negative reinforcement. Focus on setting realistic expectations and praising the child when they meet that expectation. Utilize language that focuses on the strengths of the child. Praise based on actions and not limitations – meaning praise the hard work and how the journey, rather than the outcome. Example: Praise how hard the child work on completing a task, or studying for a test, rather than the grade on the test, or the finished product.

**EXPECTATIONS** – Changing expectations of the program, task, staff should include creating clear and realistic expectations, ensure they are clearly expressed to all, and are consistent.

**MATERIALS** – Changing the materials being used to ensure multiple modalities are used (i.e. visual, auditory and hands on aids);

### *Communication Between Parents, School and Programs*

Communication between Parents, School, and all Programs, should be:

- c. Consistent – daily, weekly, etc. and the same way each time;
- d. Clear – defined expectations of what is being communicated, using lay language;
- e. Open – to changing as needed, using different variations as different needs arise;
- f. Convenient – for ALL, i.e. email, binder, spiral notebook, etc.

### *Collaboration Between Parents, School and Programs*

Collaboration between Parents, School, and all Programs, should include:

- g. Collecting baseline information for each setting of how the child is performing;
- h. Tracking strategies used in each setting; and
- i. Encouraging consistency across settings.

### *Promoting Acceptance and Equality*

Inclusion should focus on promoting acceptance and equality across the board. Promote:

- j. Acceptance not just tolerance;
- k. Equal Opportunities;
- l. Kindness for All;
- m. Focusing on Strengths;