

## **Imagining a Future for Your Preschooler with Special Support Needs**

All preschool children show us their gifts and talents, as well as the places where they may need our extra support. It is typically during their preschool years that children begin to notice similarities and differences between people, such as who is a boy and who is a girl, or who can run quickly and who is a great builder. A great way to help children actualize talents and strengths is by fostering their confidence. We emphasize and demonstrate that being distinctive is positive and valuable.

In good preschool programs, early childhood educators know that creating child sensitive learning environments lets children make their own choices, follow their own interests and discover some new ones, all in a safe and supportive way. The chance for your preschooler to attend a quality, inclusive early learning setting (full time child care or part day program) will help your child to develop comfort with social relationships, which will be a big part of success in school later on. But early years programs can offer great support to you and your family by partnering with you, and supporting your child's growth in these important preschool foundation years.

When we notice children's individual interests and skills, we can build onto the things they enjoy doing and feel proud of, gently extending the activity, introducing some new feature, reading another book that shares more information, etc. We also need to help children understand that everyone makes mistakes, and that it's ok, and that we can try again. Your praise and support helps children feel positive about trying hard, another important life skill.

Even when we are busy, we need to find a way to slow down the pace to that of a preschooler's. Children may complete their 'work' at different times and in different ways. Try to offer transition warnings so your child has lots of time to get ready for the idea that its soon time to clean up, leave, go to bed, etc. This shows our children that we value what they are doing too, and this helps them feel good about what they do.

If your child can communicate her feelings, try to create chances to let her share her opinion or make a choice. For example, each time you let your child choose whether she wants to go on a walk to the park or to the library, you show her that she can have some power in the world, too—something all preschoolers crave-- and which helps your child grow into an adult who can make decisions too.

When parents and early childhood educators help to celebrate children's unique qualities we help all children to think in more fair and open minded ways and to learn to apply this kind of thinking in new situations, too. Children who play together as preschoolers go on valuing one another in the elementary years and beyond, something all parents want for their children.