Least Restrictive Environment: Family Resource Guide

How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support families of children with disabilities navigate the early childhood education system to ensure their child is included in the **least restrictive environment (LRE)**. Each resource is accompanied by links and guidance to help you understand and use them effectively. Whether you're just beginning your journey or looking for specific support, this toolkit will empower you to champion **inclusion** for your child.

- Definitions of **bolded words** can be found towards the end of the document under “Glossary”
- All links embedded throughout the document can be found as QR codes at the end of the document

Evidence of Benefits of Inclusion

Inclusion in early childhood settings benefits not only children with disabilities but all children. This section highlights key research showing how meaningful **inclusion** leads to better social, cognitive, and developmental outcomes. Understanding these benefits can strengthen your advocacy for your child's participation in inclusive settings.

Inclusion Brochure

This brochure provides a concise overview of what **inclusion** is. It highlights the broad benefits of inclusive education and explains how it supports the development of all children. Families can use this to learn more about the foundations of inclusion and its positive impacts.

Understanding Inclusion – On-Demand Learning Modules from Early CHOICES

This on-demand series includes six lessons, each focused on a different aspect of **inclusion**. Topics range from the legal foundations of **inclusion** to the benefits for all children. These modules provide families with essential knowledge to navigate the system and advocate for their child’s **inclusion**.

Inclusive Schooling Strategies & Checklist

This article provides five key strategies for working with your school district to advocate for inclusive educational opportunities for your child. Families can also utilize this checklist to prepare for an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** meeting or use during the meeting to help guide the conversation on placement and support options.

Federal Guidance for Inclusion

Did you know that the federal government has guidance on how to include children with disabilities in early childhood programs? This guidance, called the Federal Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, is a powerful tool for families advocating for their child’s right to an inclusive early childhood education. This section equips families with knowledge about their child’s rights under federal law, empowering them to ensure their child’s needs are met in the **least restrictive environment (LRE)**.

Summary of Federal Guidance

This one-page summary outlines the federal government's policy on including children with disabilities in early childhood programs. It offers updated recommendations and resources to help families ensure their child transitions smoothly into elementary school and is supported by the latest research. Families can use this document to better understand their child’s rights and advocate for their child.

Rights & Protections Overview

This detailed document outlines federal laws and protections that ensure children with disabilities can receive their education and services in various settings, such as Head Start or child care programs. It provides guiding questions for families to consider during **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** meetings, emphasizing that families should never have to choose between inclusion and their preferred early learning program.

Video Resources

Explore some excellent video resources to help families better understand **inclusion** and the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**. These videos break down key concepts like advocating for your child, navigating special education services, and understanding the benefits of inclusive practices. By watching these, you can gain a deeper insight into how to support your child's inclusion journey in early childhood settings.

Videos on Inclusion: A Playlist for Families

This video playlist offers a collection of videos designed to support families in understanding **inclusion** and the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**. The playlist covers key topics like advocacy, inclusive practices, and strategies for working with early childhood educators. These videos are perfect for families looking for quick, accessible guidance on fostering their child's success in inclusive settings.

Know Your Rights: Early Intervention (EI) Video Series

This video series was designed to support families' and early interventionists' understanding of their safeguards or rights in participating in the EI system. This video from the series explains what **natural environments** are and how they are essential to your child's right under the law to inclusive EI services in the **least restrictive environment**.

Glossary

- **Inclusion** means that children with disabilities learn and play alongside children without disabilities in the same classroom, instead of being taught in separate classrooms. It's about making sure all children, no matter their abilities, have the chance to participate in the same activities, form friendships, and learn together.
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a customized plan developed for a child with a disability. It outlines specific educational goals, services, and supports that the child will receive to meet their unique needs.
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** means that children with disabilities should be educated alongside their peers without disabilities in the regular general education classroom, as opposed to separate classrooms.
- **Natural Environments** are settings that include the same activities and routines in which children of similar ages without disabilities take part. This can be a family's home, child care setting, or community setting.

Inclusion Brochure
bit.ly/inclusionbrochure

Understanding Inclusion On-Demand Module
bit.ly/understanding-inclusion

Inclusive Schooling Placement Strategies
bit.ly/placementstrategies

Inclusive Schooling Supports Checklist
bit.ly/supportchecklist

Summary of Federal Guidance
bit.ly/fedguidancesummary

Start Early - Rights & Protections Overview
bit.ly/rightsprotections

Early CHOICES YouTube Playlist
bit.ly/ecfamplaylist

Know Your Rights: Early Intervention (EI) Videos
bit.ly/eifamrights