

POSSIBLE RESPONSES BY PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

In responding to parents who have chosen a segregated path for their children with disabilities, it is vital that we are always respectful, but we must keep the focus on inclusion.

Suggested responses from various sources including:

- Parents of children successfully included
- TASH Newsletter Vol 20 No 5
- The Inclusion Charter, Centre for Students on Inclusive Education, 2002

COMMENT	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
<p>It's alright for your child, but not for mine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm not sure. I don't know your child. I do know that there are successful stories about children with high support needs that have been included at the local school. • That's what they said about my child until I got some more information. • I've heard other parents say that but they haven't been given enough information. They didn't know that there was another option. It is only when you have all the facts that you can make the best decision.
<p>He/she is not on the same behavioural or academic level as the other kids.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What modifications, including reasonable modifications to the curriculum, or the addition of a teacher's aide, would be necessary in those classes for [insert name] to be successful?
<p>It takes too much money.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you know? • Do you know what it costs in a segregated setting? . • People don't complain about the costs of programs for the gifted and talented. • You can't count the value of a child. • Lots of ways that children can be supported cost nothing - it just takes planning.
<p>My child's disability is too significant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many children with high support needs that have been included with appropriate support.

COMMENT	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
Modifications would be too expensive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could the modifications that children need be used by other students? • Doesn't the teacher's aide assist the teacher - not just work one on one with one child?
Modifications would be too extensive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could goals and objectives be put into [insert name]'s plan that will bring his/her goals to a level so that less extensive modifications of activities would be sufficient for him/her to participate with kids his/her own age?
I've made my decision. Who are you to tell me I'm wrong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We all want the best for our children so we need to put aside our personal differences and consider what will help all children to have a fulfilling life. • We all make decisions based on the information we have at the time. I have some additional information that you may not have read/heard before. • Have you considered approaching the issues from the perspective of considering your child's whole life? • I know it's challenging, it was for me too, but it was information given to me by other parents that made me think differently. • It is a matter for you and your family what you choose to do, but I hope that you support my decision to have my child included at the local school.
I've tried it and it didn't work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are all kinds of knowledge & expertise to help to make it work. • Children can be set up to fail in inclusive settings where they don't have enough support. With extra information, we can ensure that all possible supports are put in place. • Sometimes success depends on the attitude of everyone involved - including staff.

COMMENT	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
<p>Other kids are too mean and unkind.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That's not our experience . • Good leadership and understanding can help kids to understand and be accepting of differences. • That's not borne out in some of the articles that I've read . • Inclusion requires preparation of the whole school community. • I feel that segregated education is one cause of society's prejudice against adults experiencing learning difficulties. Efforts for kids with disabilities to increase their participation in the community when they are adults may be jeopardized unless they are included from the beginning. Inclusive education is one step to help change discriminatory attitudes.
<p>He/she can't learn the same way other students do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All kids learn differently and at a different pace - [insert name] is no different . • Co-operative learning techniques promote students learning in different ways in the same environment. • The system needs to change and that won't happen until our children are in the schools. • Inclusion means accommodation by the system to the child, not just by the child to the system. It's about [insert name] having his/her needs considered and catered for. All kids have different needs.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES MADE BY PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITHOUT DISABILITIES

COMMENTS	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
Your children will take up too much of the teacher's time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That's not our experience . • There are extra resources and supports from the Department available when a student with a disability is included. When things are planned properly, all students can benefit. • All students share equal value and status so I feel that to exclude children from the mainstream because they have a disability is devaluing and discriminatory.
It's not worth the money.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe that children learn best if they are included - and I'm not just talking about the curriculum -kids also learn from the other kids. • If your child had a disability you'd be trying to get the best support and resources to provide him/her with the best education. • Resources also go into education in a segregated setting. It's just that most people don't see that or question that as much. • People don't question the resources going to the gifted and talented program.
Your child will be a bad influence on my child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Insert name] is a great kid - you just need to get to know him/her. • That's not our experience. • Children with disabilities can also be poorly influenced by children without disabilities . • I've heard that children without disabilities who are included at school with children with disabilities often become more tolerant and learn better where subjects are approached in a range of ways - and it makes sense.

Your child can't really learn.

- All children can learn.
- Every person has the right to receive an education to enable him/her to reach his/her full potential.
- [Insert name] learns a lot. I see changes in him/her all the time. It will make a great difference to his/her life.

POSSIBLE COMMENTS MADE BY EDUCATION BUREAUCRATS

COMMENTS	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
The policy says "....."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We don't think that the policy is right. The policy actively restricts the opportunity of students with disabilities to be educated in neighbourhood schools.
I believe in inclusion but the government doesn't give us enough money.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's a question of priorities as to how the money and expertise are used. We need to redirect expertise and resources from the segregated system into the regular system. Children can be supported in lots of ways that costs the school nothing - they just require planning and accessing regional resources.
Some children are just too disabled. Inclusion is not in their best interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That's not our experience Public policy needs to be developed around the majority. We then look at the individual to see what is required to assist that child to be included. Apart from anything else, I see pursuing inclusive education as a human rights issue which belongs within equal opportunity policies.
Your child needs to learn living skills, communication, have behavior modification etc. before he/she is ready for inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The best place for any child to learn the skills they need for life is within the mainstream of community living. My child will most effectively learn what he/she needs in the local class in our local school

But there is Funding Support, so what's the problem?

- It's not enough
- The Department decides on whether they will support an application for Funding Support or not, sometimes irrespective of the parent's wishes.
- Funding can be reduced or taken away.
- It's not education as a right. It's treated as a privilege.