School, Community, Inclusion-Friendly Initiative (SCI-FI)

SCI-FI TIPS FOR PARENTS

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Striving for complete integration and equality of people with disabilities
in a society without barriers.

Creating Family Friendly Communities

"Family Friendly Communities" is a phrase that has three words we all know and like. If they were written this way on a ballot, odds are we'd most likely vote in favor. How do we create family friendly communities and where do we start? Let's start with a clear definition. "Family Friendly Communities" are groups of people comprised of families, professionals, leaders, volunteers, and everyday citizens who believe in a community that is culturally and disability friendly, integrated with diversity, and has an all-inclusive design in mind for members of their community, as well as anyone who visits. So, how do we become that kind of community?

First, we begin with community awareness. Do we know who our community is? Do we know our neighbors? Do we meet with them throughout the year to discuss neighborhood safety, cleanliness, or needed improvements? In our neighborhood, what is the climate of our schools? Do the schools have a good reputation for student success and family engagement? Do we patronize the supermarkets, agencies, and other businesses in our neighborhood? Are they friendly? Do we know our elected leaders (Mayor, State Legislators, members of Congress, Senator, etc.)? There are many things that make a community a family friendly one. If you want to create a family friendly community, you should begin by doing the following

Identify your neighboring families

- Single Mom's and Dad's

- Multi-cultural Families

- Families of individuals and children with disabilities

- Self-Advocates

- Senior Citizens

- All members of your community

Identify your neighborhood businesses, agencies, service providers, and organizations:

- Supermarkets, retail stores and shops

- Support groups

- Faith-based organizations

- Hospitals

- Schools

- Recreation centers

- Government offices, agencies, non-profit organizations, etc.

Family friendly communities are comprised of people that are mindful of the needs of their families, residents, and the issues that are in need of attention. Issues that need attention would be:

- **Accessibility** – Do all members of your community have equal access to parks, schools, businesses? Are all the demographics of your community included in all activities? What is your community doing to make sure that all venues, such as parks and recreation facilities, schools, and businesses are easy to access? What about making sure that everyone has access to all programs and equal opportunities to participate in activities?

- **Education** – Do the schools have a relationship with all members of the community? Do they partner with businesses? Are all families well connected with their child's school? Do they make sure to have adequate before and after school child care? Does your community have early childhood learning programs and services for children of all learning abilities?

-       **Transportation & Mobility** – Are there sidewalks and bike lanes? Are there accessible parking and ramps at all locations? Is there a walk-to-school-program available? What about carpooling and accessible transportation programs?

-       **Safety and Development** – Do you have neighborhood "Crime Watch" programs? What about addressing traffic calming measures for neighborhoods with small children, or children and individuals with disabilities (individuals who are hearing or visually impaired)? Has your community thought of lighting guidelines that address or promote safety in your neighborhood?

These tips and ideas are just the first steps to take for creating family friendly communities. There may be issues that require funding and coordinating committees that can meet regularly on addressing the issues. Creating a family friendly community can only have a positive impact in your neighborhoods. Creating a family friendly community helps to reduce crime, unemployment, poverty, dropout rates, and is a win-win situation for all community members!

Person First Language: Respect begins with awareness and sensitivity.

Person First Language is a respectful and appropriate way to talk about people with disabilities. Throughout our history, words have been used to describe people for many reasons including identification, describing ones character, and insult. It's not uncommon for many to identify someone's race, religion, ethnicity, or disability. It is, however, inappropriate to reference someone solely by their race, religion, ethnicity or disability. If we're not aware or conscious of the language we choose to describe another in public, we could potentially offend someone. For example, referring to someone as "disabled" or "crippled," is very hurtful. Have you ever heard someone say, "He is wheelchair bound?" It emphasizes the recognition of a person's inabilities or struggle, instead of the actual person. The word "disabled" doesn't set a positive tone, because it means unable. That is a broad term that could mean someone is unable to work, read, write, speak, or live independently. What if a person is able to do all of those things? Referring to someone as "an individual with a disability" is respectful, acceptable, and appropriate language to use.

In the early 1900's, words like idiot, moron, and imbecile were medical classifications used to describe the intelligence levels of people with intellectual disabilities by professionals in the medical field. This classification system was used until the early 1970's. In time, self-advocates, parents, and professionals helped shift societal thinking by effectively advocating for people with disabilities to be respected by teaching us they have intrinsic value as individual people and are to be treated as equal members of our society.

Person First Language puts the person before their disability. Many people with disabilities don't want to be identified as a label or their disability. They want to be accepted and known for the person they are. A disability is a medical condition, not a personality trait. When we identify a person by their disability or diagnosis, we devalue them as a person. What sounds better? "My brother is a low-functioning Down Syndrome boy," or "My brother has Down Syndrome and has many challenges." The second sentence not only sounds better, but it describes a real person who is not defined by their disability.

In using Person First Language, the first step to take is to understand that respect begins with the words we choose to use. We can all make some changes by improving the way we choose to communicate. For example, people have used the following inappropriate statements: "This is a special ed kid," "My son is non-verbal," and "Use the handicapped parking space." Rephrase these sentences to be appropriate: "This child has a learning disability," "My son uses gestures and points to communicate," or "Use the accessible parking space." Notice the change in the language used to describe people and situations in the disability community. The second set of sentences are respectful and appropriate to use and illustrate disability sensitivity.

We also have to be mindful of the metaphors we use socially. For example, jokingly stating that you're "blind as a bat," may seem harmless to you, but a person who is visually impaired may not find it funny.

Here is a short reference chart for what is respectful and acceptable language.

Inappropriate and hurtful language	Respectful and appropriate language
He is autistic, or she is a mongoloid, or Down Syndrome kid. Epileptic.	He has autism. She has Down Syndrome. Person with epilepsy.
She is disabled or handicapped.	She has a disability. A person with a disability.
He is a crazy, psychotic, maniac.	He is a person with a mental health disability.
Is someone using the handicapped stall?	Is someone using the accessible stall?
This man is mentally retarted, slow, or a special person.	This man has an intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disability.
My son is non-verbal.	My son communicates using pictures.
Ask the wheel-chair bound woman where it is.	Ask the woman using the wheel chair where it is.
I am a normal or healthy person.	I am a person without a disability.
She is disabled or handicapped.	She has a disability. A person with a disability.
This is an ESE kid.	This is a student with a learning disability.

It may take some practice, but making some minor changes in the way we communicate about, and with people with disabilities could strengthen and assist in the development of an inclusive society that accepts all people regardless of their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and abilities.

Bullying Prevention

We've all thought to ourselves: "Kids will be kids and they should learn to solve their own problems." For many situations, this may be the case. However, bullying has become a serious problem across our nation. Did you know that one out of four children is bullied every day? Today in schools, over 77% of students are bullied psychologically, physically, and verbally. The growing use of technology has made it easier for children to fall victim to "cyber bullying." How do you know if what you're witnessing between children is playful teasing or bullying? The answer: it doesn't matter. Any time a child is made to feel ridiculed, humiliated, and less than others, it's unacceptable. When should you get involved? Anytime you witness cruel, unfair, and unwanted aggressive behavior from one person to another, you should get involved. Bullying is not just taking place among children.

Adults can be bullies to other adults and children, as well. If you witness any type of bullying, you should notify someone at the administrative level of your school. You should become familiar with your child's school's policy on bullying prevention, and take the necessary steps to report the behavior and follow up on any action taken. It's important that action be taken to prevent bullying. Children with disabilities are at higher risk of being bullied and are sometimes easy targets for bullies. Kids that are bullied are more likely to do poorly in school. They are also at higher risk for fighting, substance abuse, and dropping out of high school. Studies have shown that kids that bully excessively are more likely to carry these traits into adulthood. Many chronic bullies have been shown to have had at least one criminal conviction by age 24, and 40% had three or more arrests by age 30, according to the ***National Youth Violence Prevention Center.***

Bullying Prevention (cont.)

Bullying prevention works if everyone is on the same page. Students feel safer if they know their teachers, parents, and peers are willing to work together to eliminate bullying behavior. These tips offer strategies that can help prevent bullying from happening in our schools and communities:

School Climate: It's important to know what you're dealing with in terms of the frequency and severity of bullying. Schools can survey their students on where and when bullying happens. Do they feel safe about reporting incidents to adults? What about their feelings towards other students who report this information? What do they consider to be acceptable and unacceptable behavior? Do they feel safe in their school environment? How do they feel about other students of different ethnicities, sexual orientation, or socio-economic and cultural backgrounds? Parents and educators should also be surveyed on their views and thoughts on these topics as well. This will help to identify any possible triggers to bullying.

Three Tiered Partnerships: Develop a "Family Friendly School" committee comprised of students, parents, and educators. Begin by creating a Bullying Prevention Compact. This agreement is signed by students, parents, and educators. It says they are in agreement that bullying is prohibited and they will not engage in or allow any form of bullying behavior. It also states that they agree to report incidents of bullying they witness. They all agree to comply with and support the school's policies on bullying prevention.

Enforce school rules and policies on bullying: No one will take bullying prevention seriously if the policies are treated like just another checkmark on a to do list and are not enforced or mentioned again. Make sure that children, parents, and school faculty understand that bullying prevention is as important as attendance, and it will be monitored regularly.

Training and curriculum: Identify agency resources available to schools and families, such as your Parent Training and Information Centers, or other agencies that will provide training to faculty, parents, and students on bullying prevention. Make sure these trainings take place annually.

How to bully-proof your child:
You're not with your children all day long, but you can make sure your child knows what to do if they are bullied, or what to do if they have the potential to become a bully:

1. Talk about bullying early – children have reported remembering being bullied as early as four years old. Explain what bullying is and ask if they've experienced being bullied or if they've bullied others.

2. Learn about your child and their friends – it's important to encourage your child to have friends. Sometimes children don't always make the best choices in friends. As parents you should know who their friends are and what activities they prefer to engage in. It's no secret that children behave differently in different settings. Pay attention to your child's behavior and actions around other children. Is he or she aggressive, controlling, or timid and submissive?

3. Get involved at school – children who have parents who are active at the school level are less likely to become victims of bullying (especially if their parents are head of the parent phone call tree). Learn about the school's policy and join the school's PTA and/or parent committees to discuss, review, and update bullying prevention policies.

4. Teach assertiveness – you can help increase your child's self-esteem by teaching them how to walk away from a situation with confidence. You can do this by reading stories or researching topics about bullying together. The more informed your child is, the more they will understand the situation. You can also try role playing different scenarios at home on how to handle a bully.

5. Monitor internet and phone Use – children have more access to technology today than ever before. Cyber bullying makes all children an easy target. Cyber bullying can easily go unnoticed if we're not watching. Your child can't be cyber bullied if he or she doesn't have a presence on the web. Keep track of the sites your child visits, as well as monitor text messaging and apps that are downloaded on their phone, if they have one.

The most important thing for all adults to do is be available for our children when they reach out to us for help. Our children must know they can come to adults they trust when they feel they're in trouble and need help. We also need to listen and watch for signs of bullying even when they are not that obvious. All children deserve the right to be themselves and feel comfortable with who they are. They must feel safe in all of their environments, whether it's at home, school, or in the community.   We must work together to teach children not to label or judge others based on their looks, clothes, ethnicity, learning abilities, disabilities, or other differences. All children are different. Children must learn to embrace diversity and appreciate people for who they are.
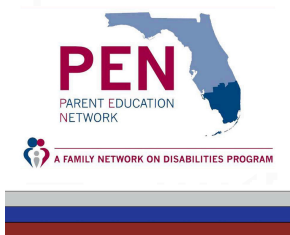
This program provides PTI services the following counties:
Alachua, Baker, Bay, Bradford, Calhoun, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Escambia, Flagler, Franklin, Gadsden, Gilchrist, Gulf, Hamilton, Holmes Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Leon, Levy, Liberty, Madison, Marion, Nassau, Okaloosa, Putnam, Santa Rosa, St. John's, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Volusia, Wakulla, Walton, & Washington.

This program provides PTI services to the following counties: Brevard, Citrus, De Soto, Hardee, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River, Lake, Manatee, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota, Seminole, St. Lucie, and Sumter.

This program provides PTI services to the following counties: Broward, Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach.

Our POPIN-PSN-PEN programs help to ensure that parents of children with the full range of disabilities have the training and information they need to prepare their children for not only school, but to be able to lead productive, independent lives to the fullest extent possible.

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