



Parents Speak Out Views on Embedded Interventions

Family leaders from across the nation share their experiences with embedded interventions.

Peer Support

“Jon learned best from his peers and the providers were often the guiding tools. He loved to watch his peers and to do as they did. Early on it was his peers that taught him how to use the monkey bars in the playground – something his therapist had not been able to do.” —*Lourdes Rivera-Putz*

“When Pete was in preschool into first grade, I chronicled our efforts to include him. I named the series "Educating My Peter Too" because I was so inspired when the HBO documentary on Peter Gwadalukas and his year of inclusion (“Educating Peter”). The series is posted here—<http://www.peatc.org/>. See part 3 for his experiences with peers.

“I don't think we should call interactions between children ‘peer support.’ We should call it friendships or reciprocal support. People need to understand and celebrate the mutual benefits of interacting with all types of children.”
—*Cherie Takemoto*

“Peer support as tutors in child care settings is always difficult, as you note. First, some peers who are given the status of tutors can become overly doting and possibly smothering Luke's self-esteem. I would recommend selection and initial monitoring, to ensure good peer support, become part of the IEP, if it is not occurring naturally. Luke's teacher would have to identify the kids who interact with Luke the most naturally. Those who appear to be overly ambitious or doting might not be the best match.

“My daughter had several good friends in elementary school. One Saturday, they were all invited to our home. My daughter lost one friend that day when she realized her friend liked her because she could treat her like a doll. It was difficult to watch the sad expression in my daughter's eyes that day. She never wanted to interact with her again. It was a hard lesson for us all to learn.

“It is extremely important, though, for teachers and parents to intervene when this type of activity occurs. We need to monitor and teach appropriate interactions and discourage inappropriate ones. Good peer supporters are often evident from their natural, age-appropriate interactions. They should show respect and genuine care/friendship toward Luke. They should also give Luke assistance when he seems to need it and allow Luke his independence when he doesn't. These are the kids from my experience who might be asked to take on a more structured responsibility of peer supporting Luke.”
—*Kathy Brill*

“Peers help my daughter so much. It was my daughter's preschool program and her friends that helped us with potty training, communicating, sharing, growing confidence.” —*Samtra Devard*

Environmental Modifications

“Jackie might do well by teaming FIRST with Luke's mom. Together they can voice their mutual concerns and see if there might be ways to help Luke and others in the classroom enjoy a successful year. Who will program the communication device? How might its use and Luke's sign language enrich other learners in the classroom? For Christine, I would say that, although I have continued to take my now 21 year old son, Pete, to a private speech therapist, it is what has happened in the classroom that has made all the difference in his communication and his friendships with teachers and students (with and without disabilities).”
—*Cherie Takemoto*

“You bring up a great point about interacting with Luke's communication device. I have a friend whose son uses one, and in order to facilitate greater inclusion with his peers and teachers, she has his device programmed with phrases and words he uses regularly, including kids' names, etc. Since he has a great sense of humor, she has his device programmed with his favorite jokes and riddles, which he can then readily use at any time to interact with peers, which helps to facilitate stronger friendships. It seems as if Pete had similar positive experiences in the classroom!” —*Kathy Brill*

“The inclusive day care experience very soon melded into our home and community. When we would go to restaurants in the community, there would often times be kids from day care there with their families. The kids would always excitedly interact, and our families would begin to chat and get to know each other. One of my most prized memories of the success which an inclusive day care brings to a child and family was the day I got a phone call from a dad of a boy in my daughter's day care. My daughter and his son had become very good friends. They were inseparable in school. This dad told me that when he asked his son what he wanted for his birthday, he was told his son didn't want anything other than to take my daughter out to lunch. Well, his dad asked if they could come to our home, toting Happy Meal lunches from McDonald's, since my daughter's power wheelchair wouldn't fit in his car! They had a wonderful time at our house over lunch. On Monday morning, my daughter's friend said to her, ‘You can now visit me, too, whenever you want! My daddy and I went to Lowe's after we left your house to buy some boards to make a ramp so you can get into our house!’”

—*Kathy Brill*

Implementing Embedded Intervention Requires Support for Teachers, Families, and All Team Members

“I encouraged teachers to explore new ways to implement their lessons and if necessary to use the help of an aide. At times his teachers would create small groups of 3-4 children and in this way it would be easier for her to divide her time. I would also suggest that Jon be placed in the group that needed the least amount of assistance so that it would give his peers an opportunity to share and learn from each other (including Jon). His peers were always amazingly patient and loved to celebrate Jon's successes.”
—*Lourdes Rivera-Putz*

“If I were in Jackie's place, I would seek information, guidance and mentoring so I can serve Luke's needs too, since I committed to being a teacher for all children.”
—*Sophie Arao-Nguyen*

Handout 1.5

“My experiences with general education students and teachers too are similar to Jackie’s. I find that many students are so very willing to try to make inclusion work. I also have found many general education teachers who just get it and think about so many creative ways to make inclusion work for a child with significant disabilities. Early childhood teachers are the most creative individuals I know. When they are willing to go the extra mile because it is the right thing to do it is an awesome thing to watch. It is also a win-win situation for children and their families. I sometimes worry about the support these enthusiastic willing teachers receive from peers and administration. Each district is so very different in their culture related to inclusion. I hate to see a strong enthusiastic teacher with creative ideas left without support. With support Jackie would realize that she did not have to work with Luke one on one every day. She would need someone to help her with strategies (peer mentoring, adaptations, modifications, etc.). I also like a co-teaching model in early childhood where the strengths of the EC and SPED teacher are utilized together to benefit all of the students in the class. This is especially important in states without a blended or duo teacher early childhood special education licensure.”

—Mary Murray

“Jon’s teachers and other providers always recognized that I was his first teacher so that my input was necessary and very significant when it came to developing strategies for the classroom. Even when we developed plans for addressing behavioral concerns around transitions, I was a part of all the discussions. This experience serves as my foundation for moving on as the years passed and Jon’s needs changed as he got older. My involvement was always an absolute necessity. We all recognized early on each year that there were things that we would not know the answers to, but that whatever they were we would work at finding the answers together. We stayed on top of all the resources that might be out there and never limited our opportunities to use them. Materials for modifying curricula, books, and videos on best practices and most importantly always giving Jon and his peers every opportunity to work together. The important thing is always to be creative and prepared to think outside the box—to improvise whenever necessary and always set high expectations.”

—Lourdes Rivera-Putz

Credits

Parents Speak Out was developed by CONNECT’s National Family Expert Panel. Members include Sophie Arao-Nguyen, Sharman Davis Barrett, Kathy Brill, Theresa Cooper, Samtra Devard, Nancy DiVenere, Christine Lindauer, Tricia Luker, Mary Murray, Nancy Peeler, Lourdes Rivera-Putz, Rich Robison, Lisa Stein, Cherie Takemoto, Aracelly Valverde, and Conni Wells. These family experts are leaders of national family organizations, faculty in universities, and key personnel in state educational agencies. They represent over 300 years of parenting expertise.

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