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SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NURSERIES

A Compassionate Guide

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2. INTRODUCTION

Creating an inclusive and supportive nursery for children with special needs is a wonderful goal. This e-book aims to provide nursery professionals with practical insights, strategies, and real-life examples to help them make their space truly inclusive and supportive for every child.

3. UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE NEEDS

Start by understanding the diverse needs in your nursery. Explore various conditions and disabilities, recognising each child's unique strengths and challenges.

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** Learn about the characteristics and preferred learning styles of children with ASD. Routines and clear communication are essential for creating a comfortable environment

Case Study:

Oliver, a child with ASD, thrived in the nursery setting when nursery staff implemented a visual schedule, allowing him to be aware of changes and reducing his anxiety.

- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** Explore strategies to engage children with ADHD effectively. Incorporate movement breaks and offer clear, concise instructions to facilitate their learning experience
- **Down Syndrome:** Understand the developmental characteristics of children with Down Syndrome. Encourage social interactions and provide additional support for language development
- **Cerebral Palsy:** Familiarise yourself with the physical challenges children with Cerebral Palsy may face. Implement adaptive equipment and activities to promote mobility and independence

Real Life Examples:

Grace, a nursery nurse, shared how introducing accessible play equipment allowed a child with Cerebral Palsy to actively get involved in playtime with other children.

- **Learning Difficulties:** Tailor your approach to accommodate varying levels of intellectual abilities. Provide clear instructions and offer additional support as needed

4. ADAPTING ACTIVITIES FOR INCLUSIVITY

Tailoring activities to meet the diverse needs of children in your care is pivotal to promoting an inclusive environment. Consider adjustments and accommodations that increase participation and cater to individual needs.

- **Sensory-Friendly Play:** Introduce soft-textured play mats or bins filled with safe, sensory materials like scarves, soft balls, or squishy toys. This provides a gentle introduction to different textures for younger children
- **Visual and Auditory Exploration:** Incorporate simple visual aids and soft, soothing sounds into activities. Use picture cards or play soft instrumental music during quiet playtime to engage children with diverse learning styles
- **Motor Skill Play:** Set up a mini obstacle course using soft cushions, tunnels, and low ramps for crawling and exploring. Engage older toddlers with stacking blocks or balls for fine motor skill development. Toddlers and older children can participate in a crawling exploration, promoting gross motor skills and spatial awareness
- **Mess-Free Art Exploration:** Provide mess-free art options suitable for different ages. Use finger painting or offer crayons for younger ones, while older toddlers can explore textured art with safety scissors and glue. Create age-appropriate art stations – soft sponges for finger painting or tearing paper for older toddlers – encouraging creativity in a controlled environment
- **Interactive Story Time:** Incorporate interactive storytelling with age-appropriate props. Engage children with an interactive storytelling session using soft animal toys, promoting language development and attention span
- **Musical Movement Play:** Organize simple music and movement activities using soft, age-appropriate instruments. Encourage rhythmic movement with soft shakers, allowing children to explore music and enhance coordination
- **Structured Routine Play:** Establish structured routines using visual schedules for older toddlers. This provides a sense of predictability and comfort during daily activities. Create a visual routine chart with pictures for activities like snack time, playtime, and nap time, aiding in understanding and routine comprehension
- **Outdoor Sensory Play:** Set up an outdoor sensory exploration area with soft play surfaces and age-appropriate textures. Consider activities like filling a water table with soft items for tactile exploration. Offer a sensory-friendly outdoor play area with soft grass or foam mats and bins filled with age-appropriate sensory materials

5. CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Inclusivity goes beyond activities; it's about fostering a culture of acceptance and support in every aspect of nursery life.

- **Promoting Peer Understanding:** Promote understanding among peers by incorporating age-appropriate discussions about diversity and encouraging empathy. Through guided discussions and activities, nursery teams enabled a positive environment where children learned about differences and celebrated each other's unique qualities
- **Collaboration with Parents:** Establish open lines of communication with parents, seeking their insights and expertise to create a collaborative support system

Real Life Examples:

The collaboration between nursery professionals and parents played a pivotal role in supporting Lily, a child with communication issues. Consistent communication strategies were shared, creating a seamless transition between home and nursery.

6. CONCLUSION

Supporting children with special needs in nurseries requires empathy, understanding, and continuous learning. Your commitment to embracing diversity, adapting activities, and encouraging inclusivity significantly contributes to the growth and development of every child in your care.

As you embark on this journey, let stories of success and real-life examples inspire you. Your dedication to creating an inclusive nursery environment will leave a lasting impact, furthering a sense of belonging and equality for every child.