



member of the class: tips for teachers

Tips for Teachers is a continuing series of practical strategies that teachers and other caregivers can use in their classrooms and other early learning settings. These Tips are based on research evidence and professional knowledge.

Membership is a key feature and a goal of true inclusion.

Membership encompasses such terms as belonging, acceptance, and positive relationships with other members of the classroom community. Perhaps the best way to describe being a member of the class is when the child is described as “just one of the kids”.

What does membership look like?

Membership is important for all children. Becoming a member of the classroom has been identified as an essential value for general education. For children with disabilities and other special needs, the process of becoming a member of the class may serve as the foundation for positive peer relationships and development of friendships.

Shared experiences are vital to becoming a member of the class.

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, SHARED EXPERIENCES INCLUDE

- Participation in the planned learning opportunities like free play time
- Participation in the routine activities like snack time
- Participation in special events like field trips and class parties

A sense of classroom community is also important to helping children be members of the class.

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, A SENSE OF COMMUNITY MEANS

- Children and their teacher think of themselves as a group
- Everyone knows each other's name
- There is a climate of kindness and respect

Support for peer interaction and development of friendship are other indicators of classroom membership.

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, SUPPORT FOR INTERACTION MEANS

- Children have opportunities to get to know each other
- Children have opportunities to interact
- Teachers model, encourage and teach positive social interaction skills



How do teachers help children be members of the class?

TO PROMOTE SHARED EXPERIENCES –

- Make sure that every child has a name card for the attendance chart and a cubby to store their belongings.
- Assign class jobs or responsibilities to every child in the class.
- Make sure that every child has the opportunity to be a leader and to be a helper
- Make accommodations so that every child has the opportunity to answer questions, make choices, or make a comment. For example, put the names and pictures of songs on a chart so that children can make their choice by naming or pointing to the song.

TO CREATE A SENSE OF CLASSROOM COMMUNITY –

- Refer to the classroom by name and point out that children are members of the classroom.
- Start the year with an All About Me theme so that children get to know each other. Bring in photographs or drawings from home to share. Recognize individual children's interests and preferences.
- Make visual records of field trips or classroom events. Create photograph books or bulletin board displays.
- Help children understand that all participate in activities and routines but that sometimes activities will be adapted for some children.

TO SUPPORT POSITIVE PEER INTERACTIONS –

- Keep some groupings consistent so that children have the opportunity to get to know each other.
- Plan projects that can be done as groups or by pairs. For example, make a class mural or collage.
- Introduce Group Friendship Activities. Take a familiar song, like "If You're Happy and You Know It" and change the words to a friendly gesture (like "shake hands").
- Use social toys. Some toys, like dolls and building blocks are likely to encourage social interaction. Use playgroup equipment like tandem tricycles, tire swings, and trikes and wagons that can encourage social interaction