



DIGNITY AND DISABILITY

Creating Opportunities for Inclusion

TERMS AND IDENTIFICATION

- The term “Disability” satisfies the legal, medical, and educational definitions of a diagnosis requiring accommodations
- Not all people identify as “disabled”
- I acknowledge that every child’s identity and journey is unique

DIGNITY AND DISABILITY

- **Dignity** is the experience of being treated with compassion, kindness, respect, and being of equal value.
- **Inclusion** is more than an invitation; it's equal representation and participation
- **Accessibility** is the tool which enables **opportunities** for inclusion
- Children with disabilities routinely encounter barriers to access which require they sacrifice dignity
- **Inaccessibility and exclusion** are pervasive systemic issues

HOW DO WE CHANGE THE NARRATIVE OF INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY?

- “Have to” versus “Get to”
- Have to...
 - Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
 - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and California Ed Code
 - Lanterman Act (California Regional Centers)
- Get to...
 - Invite the perspective of individuals from different backgrounds
 - Set the example for other organizations and communities about the value of persons with disabilities. Prioritizing dignity and inclusion.
 - Provide experience to neurotypical children who will grow up to be the educators, therapists, employers, medical providers and parents of children with disabilities
 - Be a life changer and have your life changed

FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- **Social capital** refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.
- Families of children with disabilities generally withdraw their social capital faster and in larger quantity than those without disability
- This is not a disability issue, this is an inclusion issue
- Families require more educational, medical, legal, and social-emotional resources due to frequent inaccessibility and lack of inclusion awareness
- As a result, families experience trauma, emotional and physical fatigue, social isolation, mental health stress, and financial stress
- Always being in a position of need can take from a person's dignity

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

- “This world was not built for your child”
- Become conscious of ableism or able-bodied privilege
- Learn how cultural approaches to disability influence communities and families
- Low incidence disability awareness and resources
- Misconceptions about neurodiversity & communication modalities
- Creating educational plans which support the child now and the child 10 years from now
- Employability and independent living
- We all want resilient, happy, and healthy children

PRIORITIZING DIGNITY

- Inclusion is a VERB not a noun
- Ask “how can I help?” not “why should I?”
- We can't do everything, but we can do more than we are doing right now
- Acknowledge the things you don't know
- Learn from those who are willing to teach you
- Develop plans to make gradual but impactful changes



“When someone is truly INCLUDED, no one questions their presence, only their absence.”

-Renee LaPorte