

Supporting children with additional needs

Lee liked going to school. He liked playing with his friends, doing science, and he especially liked sports on Friday afternoons.

Unfortunately, Lee got sick a lot and sometimes had to go to hospital. Lee had a genetic condition that meant his body didn't always work properly by itself. Lee didn't like having to take special medications and going to doctors all the time.

When Lee came back to school after being sick, he felt nervous and shy. His friends all seemed to have other friends and new games to play. But when the class needed a goalie for soccer, Lee was ready. He loved playing goalie and being part of the team.

Lee's teacher worried that he might get hurt playing soccer. She decided to talk to Lee's parents to find out more about his health and other needs. Together Lee's teacher and parents worked out some important things the school could do to include Lee safely and help meet his social and learning needs.

We're all 'differently abled'

Differences exist amongst all children and they will all benefit from having their individual needs met. Children with additional needs (such as children affected by a disability or medical condition) may face additional challenges when attending school or in the community.

When a child has additional needs, it may restrict them from being able to do some of the things that other children can do. For instance, chronic or permanent illness may affect children's physical health, as shown in Lee's story. Children with additional needs have their own unique strengths and abilities that need to be promoted to build resilience and support their learning, mental health and wellbeing.

Supporting children with additional needs

Supporting children with additional needs enables them to participate and feel included at school and in their community, and helps promote their strengths. Providing all children with the support they require helps to meet their needs and enables them to grow and achieve with their classmates. For children with additional needs, developing individualised strategies to support their needs can be beneficial, based on the child's individual requirements (eg routines and structure can often be helpful for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder). However, children do all vary and can respond differently to strategies. It is important to always consider the child's individual needs. By working together, families and schools can make sure that children with additional needs are well supported which is important for their mental health and wellbeing.

Schools can support students with additional needs by teaching children how to include and respect others

To include students with additional needs, schools can:

- work with parents and carers to meet children's physical, social and emotional needs
- teach children that we all have strengths and differences and that everyone has a right to feel respected and valued
- provide opportunities for children with and without additional needs to play and learn together
- promote cooperative, caring and helpful behaviours for all students
- celebrate all children's differences (eg culture, race, ethnicity, additional needs).

How parents and carers can help

Parents and carers of children with additional needs can talk to school staff about their child's needs and strengths and about ways to make sure they are included at school. All parents and carers can:

- encourage their own children to include those of different abilities in their play
- support their child to identify strengths in themselves and others
- teach social skills that can help children manage friendships
- be role models for inclusion by showing through their actions how to be caring and respectful towards others.

What Lee's parents and teacher decided to do

- Lee's parents and teacher communicated regularly about how Lee was going at school and at home so they could coordinate support.
- Together they decided that Lee's teacher would explain to the class why Lee kept getting sick and encourage his classmates to support him.
- Lee was given the role of classroom leader for science. This helped him and his classmates see what a valuable class member he is.
- Lee's teacher also arranged for one of Lee's health workers to come and talk to school staff about his condition and ways to support him and help him manage at school.

The following websites may be of interest

Parenting a child with a disability: www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting a child with a disability: www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Promoting inclusion: www.learninglinks.org.au

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

