



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
INSTITUTE FOR  
DISABILITY STUDIES

## SAVE THESE DATES

### Upcoming PREPARE Trainings

#### Ongoing Informal Child Assessment in an Inclusive Environment

May 3	9 a.m.-noon	Wesson
May 31	9 a.m.-noon	Ellisville
June 7	9 a.m.-noon	Booneville
June 21	9 a.m.-noon	Columbus

#### Including Families in the Early Childhood Inclusive Environment

May 3	1 p.m.-4 p.m.	Wesson
May 31	1 p.m.-4 p.m.	Ellisville
June 7	1 p.m.-4 p.m.	Booneville
June 21	1 p.m.-4 p.m.	Columbus

More information about these workshops is included inside this issue. Register online at [www.usm.edu/ids/prepare](http://www.usm.edu/ids/prepare).

Please remember that child care trainings are also available in March and April.

For more information, call Becky McPhail at 601.266.6790 or register online at [www.usm.edu/ids/prepare](http://www.usm.edu/ids/prepare).



Project PREPARE is funded by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Office for Children and Youth (GR# 525Q7481A).

# Possibilities

## Early Childhood Inclusion

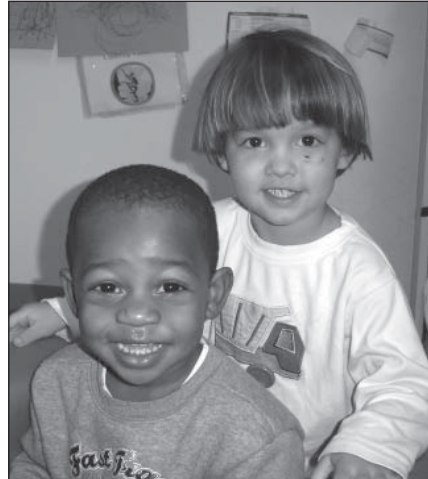
Institute for Disability Studies - Project PREPARE  
Mississippi's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities  
Issue No. 15 • Spring 2008

### PREPARE Essentials

Philosophy or mission statements of all child care centers should emphasize the importance of parent involvement. Maintaining quality relationships with parents is paramount to success in early child care programs. That relationship begins the moment a parent contacts your center seeking child care for their child. Communication and the exchange of information begin before a child enters your program. The more providers and families communicate, the more involved parents will be in center programs and follow-up activities at home.

Maintaining constant communication is the best way to foster trusting relationships between caregivers and parents. This is

especially true for all parents of children with disabilities. Parents who feel that their input really matters will be much more likely to express their own ideas and concerns about their child's development. Parents and caregivers should work as a team, bridging the gap between home and preschool.



Need a workshop? If you are interested in hosting a staff development or workshop in your area and would like the staff of Project PREPARE to present, please contact Ann Henson at 601.331.7369 or toll free at 1.888.671.0051. For further information, visit our Web site at [www.usm.edu/ids/prepare](http://www.usm.edu/ids/prepare) or call 1.888.671.0051.

#### In this issue

PREPARE Essentials .....	1
A Teacher's Perspective on Inclusion .....	2
Getting Started: Including Parents .....	3
Training Opportunities .....	3
Resource Room .....	3
PREPARE Workshop Registration Form .....	4

## A Teacher's Perspective on Inclusion

An interview with Margie Pittman, Toddler Lead Teacher, Families First Children's Center, Hattiesburg, Miss.

### How did you become an early childhood educator?

Growing up, I was always involved with youth groups and enjoyed the experiences of learning something new and having fun. Because of my experiences as a youth, I wanted to provide experiences that allow me to be the one that opens windows and teaches young children. Those experiences are a vital part of building the person they are to become; just as my experiences were vital in building the person I am today.

In addition to teaching children, I wanted to become an early childhood educator as a learning experience for myself. My ultimate goal is to open an early childhood center in which I am the director; however, before jumping in, I wanted the experience of being a teacher working in a center. I wanted to learn about what it takes to have a successful center in which children are constantly learning.

### How long have you been working in an inclusive child care environment?

I have always been open to working in an inclusive environment. For the past ten years, I have worked with children with and without special needs in a variety of settings including private child care centers, Head Start, and now a university-affiliated child care center.

### What do you see as a benefit of inclusion for you as a child care professional?

The best benefit of inclusion is giving children with special needs the opportunity to be treated like their peers. I make it a point to treat each child in my classroom equally whether they have a disability or not. Whatever the activity, everyone has the opportunity to participate. Because everyone is treated equally, I am able to guide the children in my class to treat all of their peers the same.

### How do you think parents of children with disabilities benefit from inclusion?

Parents benefit from inclusion because it gives them the opportunity to see their child grow and learn as the other children grow and learn. The only difference is that children with special needs sometimes have therapists that help with their development. Those therapists are a resource for me. They give me ideas about things that we can do throughout the week that help meet the developmental goals of the children.

### What are the benefits of inclusion for the children without disabilities in your classroom?

All children in my class are treated equally. Children with disabilities are more similar to other children in the classroom than they are different. I guide the children in my classroom to learn that God has created us equally. This means that children with a physical disability who may use a wheelchair or wear braces need those items to help them move just like all the children move in the classroom. To help with this understanding, I share the equipment with everyone explaining what it is and allowing all the children to see and touch the equipment. This helps make the equipment familiar and helps the other children feel comfortable around something new and different.



Ms. Margie has fun with the children.

### What would you like to say to those who may have fears of inclusion?

For those who have fears of inclusion, I say to you that it's ok to be a little fearful, but know that in the long run, the children will have learned so many things from each other that you have helped them develop year after year after year. To help ease fears, you should communicate with parents, other teachers, and therapists and discuss goals and objectives for the children as well as best ways to help serve the children in the classroom. The support you get from parents and therapists helps make the transition into the classroom a smooth one and when help is needed, all you have to do is ask!

#### AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Nationally, the month of April is designated as Autism Awareness Month. In December 2007, the United Nations declared April 2 as the international Autism Awareness Day. Raising awareness will hopefully lead to more money being spent on early diagnosis and research. Please visit [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org) for more information about autism which affects 1 in every 150 children.

## Getting Started: Including Parents

Even before children come into the early child care environment, they will have had many learning experiences in their family environment. Those experiences will vary tremendously from one child to the next. Regardless, families are a primary influence in a child's development and learning. Knowing this, it is crucial that early childhood programs embrace a family-based philosophy. Opportunities to involve parents should be varied and abundant.

Some suggestions for involving all parents:

- Have in place a procedure to follow when parents contact you about your center. Set up a tour of your facility, have them meet their child's potential child care providers and give them an opportunity to ask questions.
- When a new child is accepted into your program, send a welcome letter to the parents that includes any information that you would like to share and a personal greeting from the child's new teacher.
- Write special celebratory notes to parents about their child's accomplishments and new skills. This opens the door for conversations about child development and fosters a sense that parents and providers together celebrate successes.
- Planned parent-teacher conferences should be held in a comfortable environment away from noise and distractions. Always begin with discussion of a child's strengths before discussing any areas of concern. Be sure to end on a positive note. Be sure to keep a written record of the conference briefly documenting topics discussed.
- Encourage parents to allow children to bring in items from home to child care center related to an upcoming theme. Make a list of suggested theme-related items that could be used in the classroom. You may want to include this information in a note sent home to parents.
- Encourage parents to volunteer for field trips or to come in and read to their child's class.



## Training Opportunities

### *Ongoing Informal Child Assessment in an Inclusive Environment*

This workshop offers participants an opportunity to become familiar with common techniques of documenting individual child progress. Participants will discover the importance of informally assessing children and how the information can be used to improve the quality of developmentally appropriate activities. This workshop will be presented in the months of May and June.

### *Including Families in the Early Childhood Inclusive Environment*

This workshop will focus on building relationships with families. Strategies for parents and family involvement will be discussed. This workshop will be presented in the months of May and June.

All workshops are free and have been approved for three hours of child care facility staff development by the Child Care Facilities Licensure Division of the Mississippi State Department of Health. Please use the PREPARE Workshop Registration Form on page 4 to sign up.

## Resource Room

Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center (MS PTI) is a grant program funded through the U.S. Department of Education. This program provides information on

- Communicating more effectively with parents
- Including more parents and family members in meaningful ways
- Building stronger family and school partnerships
- Understanding cultural diversity
- Improving the Individualized Education Plans and Individualized Family Service Plan meetings
- Effecting positive change in your school

This program offers help to parents of children with special needs such as

- Learning about early intervention, special education, and related services
- Learning about the transition process from early intervention to preschool

If you would like further information about the MS PTI, e-mail the helpdesk at [mspti@mscoalition.com](mailto:mspti@mscoalition.com).

# PREPARE Workshop Registration Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Child Care Facility \_\_\_\_\_  
Director's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/PO Box \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please check which workshops you would like to attend. Complete one form for each attendee. For more information or if special accommodations are needed, please call Becky McPhail at 601.266.6790 or 1.888.671.0051.

### Mail registration form to

The University of Southern Mississippi  
Institute for Disability Studies  
Attn.: Becky McPhail  
118 College Drive #5163  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Or fax to 601.266.5114 Attn.: Becky McPhail

Or register online at [www.usm.edu/ids/prepare](http://www.usm.edu/ids/prepare)

### Ongoing Informal Child Assessment in an Inclusive Environment

- May 3 9 a.m.-noon Wesson
- May 31 9 a.m.-noon Ellisville
- June 7 9 a.m.-noon Booneville
- June 21 9 a.m.-noon Columbus

### Including Families in the Early Childhood Inclusive Environment

- May 3 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Wesson
- May 31 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Ellisville
- June 7 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Booneville
- June 21 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Columbus



**Possibilities** is a free newsletter published quarterly by the Institute for Disability Studies at The University of Southern Mississippi.

To subscribe or to submit materials (pictures, articles, etc.) for consideration, contact Kristie Bowlin at 662.397.1902 or [kristie.bowlin@usm.edu](mailto:kristie.bowlin@usm.edu). Alternate formats available upon request.



AA/EOE/ADA  
USM 56592.5163 5/07

Nonprofit  
Organization  
US Postage Paid  
Hattiesburg, MS 39402  
Permit Number 148

The University of Southern Mississippi  
Institute for Disability Studies  
118 College Drive #5163  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

