

Physical Health and Motor Development Special Needs Scenarios

Allie

Mr. and Mrs. Steffen searched their community for a child care center that was willing to accommodate their daughter, Allie. Allie is 28 months old and she was recently diagnosed with ataxic cerebral palsy (CP).

Ataxia is a less common form of CP which affects balance, coordination, and precise motor skills. Allie uses an assistive walker to help her with balance and mobility and to allow her to cruise along while leaning on it. She is currently receiving Early Childhood Intervention services from a program that makes home visits once a week.

Mr. and Mrs. Steffen have been disappointed several times while searching for child care. The story has been virtually the same at three separate programs. They call a child care center and are told there is an opening, but when they arrive with Allie to take a tour, the staff gets quiet and says something like, "I am not sure we have the resources to take care of your daughter." Before even asking about Allie's needs, one individual told the Steffens, "All children her age have to be toilet trained." Allie is toilet trained! The Steffens understand that their daughter may need some extra support, but they are frustrated that the child care staff rule out caring for her even before they have taken time to get to know her and understand her needs.

All of that changed a few months ago when their neighbor told them about an inclusive child care program. The center is a little further away, but the Steffens are extremely grateful that they found it. When they called the program to set up an appointment, the staff person asked the Steffens to bring Allie with them so they could meet her. Once there, the Director told them that for all children with special needs, they go through an individual assessment with the family to see if they can adequately accommodate the child and to make sure everyone involved agrees that it is a good fit. The Director also asked the Steffens for permission to meet with their Early Childhood Intervention therapist and review Allie's previous evaluations and progress reports. The Steffens felt very welcomed and so did Allie. The Director went on to say that she thought they could definitely meet all of Allie's needs and provide her with

every opportunity to participate in the center's learning activities. A few days later, the Steffens met with their Early Childhood Intervention therapist, the Director, and key staff to review Allie's Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). The IFSP includes Allie's learning goals and also the supports, services, and strategies needed to ensure the goals are met. The group planned to revisit the IFSP in three months, to review Allie's progress and to make changes, as appropriate.

Allie loves going to child care. She likes the painting center and the listening center the best. The Steffens are very pleased, as well. They speak with Allie's teacher and the assistant teacher often about her physical development. Balance and supporting herself physically are areas the staff is focusing on and she is gaining a lot of strength. She is also making marks on paper and trying to feed herself independently, although making quite a mess along the way. Allie's teacher uses clay and squeeze balls to help Allie work on her grip, and they practice making marks on paper with a weighted oversized marker. She also has an adapted set of utensils that work well during mealtimes. Allie's child care center has made a positive impact on Allie and her development, and the Steffens are delighted with her care.

Xuan

Xuan is a 23-month-old boy who has some sensory processing challenges. Children with sensory processing challenges have difficulty processing and acting upon information received through the senses. Mary, Xuan's child care provider, and Xuan's mother, Giang, have both been concerned for the last eight-ten months about Xuan's sleeping and eating issues, and Mary has noticed his withdrawal and tantruming during open playtime with his peers.

Xuan has consistently not been able to sleep during naptime in Mary's classroom and has trouble sleeping through the night at home, as well. He wakes up to the slightest noise, which makes it very difficult to sleep in the classroom and challenging for Giang, who worries about moving around or doing tasks around the house when Xuan sleeps. Mary discussed Xuan's sleeping habits with Giang, letting Giang know that Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) may be able to help. Giang made a call to her local ECI provider and

soon she and Mary were working with an occupational therapist to support Xuan. ECI occupational therapists are professionals who support children in learning skills needed for play and daily living. They provide adaptive strategies and assistive devices to support children and their caregivers.

The occupational therapist recommended that Mary start placing Xuan off to one side of the classroom by himself during naptime with a stereo near him, playing soft, rhythmic sounds to help drown out the other noises in the room. Also, Mary now puts a heavy blanket on Xuan during his nap because she learned that the weight of the blanket actually helps to calm Xuan's central nervous system and helps him relax. To her surprise, Xuan is now able to fall asleep in her classroom, and he often has been able to stay asleep for long periods.

Mary and Giang also came up with a consistent meal plan for Xuan. They worked together to identify the foods and textures that Xuan seems to enjoy and decided to stick with feeding Xuan those foods. If Giang introduces a new food item to Xuan, she makes sure that it is at a comfortable temperature and only introduces a small amount. She gives Xuan the same amount of the new food each day for a week to allow him to become comfortable with its taste and texture. Mary has also done her best to ensure that she gives Xuan plastic silverware in the classroom because it makes less noise, and she created a single seating arrangement for mealtime so that Xuan always sits in the same place each time he eats.

Mary has also had difficulty helping Xuan feel safe and comfortable during playtime. She now understands that the unpredictable sounds, physical interactions, and toys in open playtime quickly overwhelm Xuan, causing him to withdraw. If he cannot withdraw, he often tantrums and can become inconsolable. Mary has noticed that Xuan has good skills with the toys and enjoys playing, as long as he can avoid the unpredictability of his peers. After speaking to Xuan's occupational therapist about how to help Xuan, Mary decided to create a separate play space for him in her classroom. From there, Xuan can still see his peers and keep track of what is going on without encountering more sensory input than he can handle. Mary also observed that Xuan has certain toys

that he likes to play with repeatedly, so she does her best to encourage Xuan's developing skills and does not force the introduction of new toys into his play.

Mary and Giang have learned a great deal from the occupational therapist. The knowledge they gained and their willingness to work together to meet Xuan's needs have given him a much better home and child care experience.