

# matan



## High Holidays and Families with Disabilities: Make it or Break it



**[www.matankids.org](http://www.matankids.org)**

**Meredith Polsky, National Director of Institutes and Training**  
**[Meredith@matankids.org](mailto:Meredith@matankids.org)**



- **MISSION STATEMENT:** Matan educates Jewish leaders, educators and communities, empowering them to create learning environments supportive of children with special needs, through training Institutes and consultations across North America.
- **VISION STATEMENT:** By advocating for the inclusion of diverse learners, Matan enables the Jewish community to realize the gift of every individual and fulfill its obligation to embrace all children regardless of learning challenges in every Jewish educational setting.

**15%-20%**

**children and youth ages 3–21 have  
a diagnosed learning disability**

**1 in 68**

**children in the United States has  
an Autism Spectrum Disorder**

**200,000**

**students in the Jewish  
community with  
special needs**



# A Community of Inclusion



The ideas and strategies that help create an inclusive community benefit **everyone** – not just individuals with special needs and disabilities.

# What is inclusion?

---

Inclusion is an attitude and approach that ensures every person regardless of ability or background can meaningfully participate in all aspects of life.

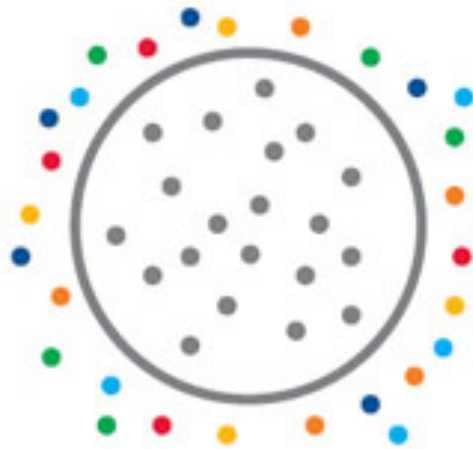


# Stated another way, inclusion is...

- Offering the same opportunities for people with and without disabilities
- Welcoming everyone into your community
- Emphasizing cooperation
- Seeking to understand and accommodate differences
- Having facilities and areas that are accessible and easy to use by everyone
- Providing a safe and socially comfortable environment for all
- Teaching respect, understanding and dignity to people of all abilities
- Embracing changes that facilitate full participation
- Fostering a sense of belonging to community as a respected and valued peer
- Honoring the intrinsic value of each person's life

# Special Needs Program vs. Inclusion

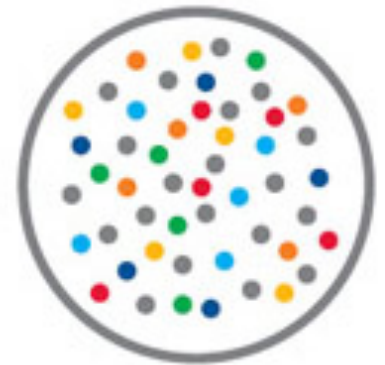
What's the difference?



**EXCLUSION**



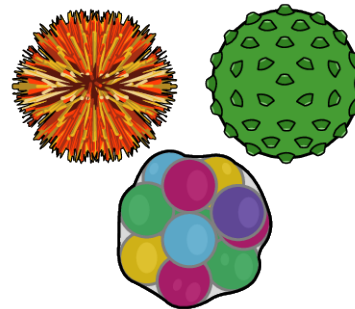
**INTEGRATION**



**INCLUSION**

# The Sanctuary

- The role of the Rabbi
- The role of the Cantor
- The role of the Congregants
- Props







# Preaching what we Practice

“And God spoke to Moses saying: Instruct Aaron and his sons to be scrupulous about the sacred donations that the Israelite people consecrate to Me, lest they profane my holy name, I am the Lord.”

– Leviticus 22:1-2

“Every person that enters into our communities has something to offer that is unique to them and reflective of their means... We are not in a position to judge the worthiness of the individual or the quality and nature of their offering.”

– Rabbi Ilan Schwartz, contributor to Matan’s d’var torah project

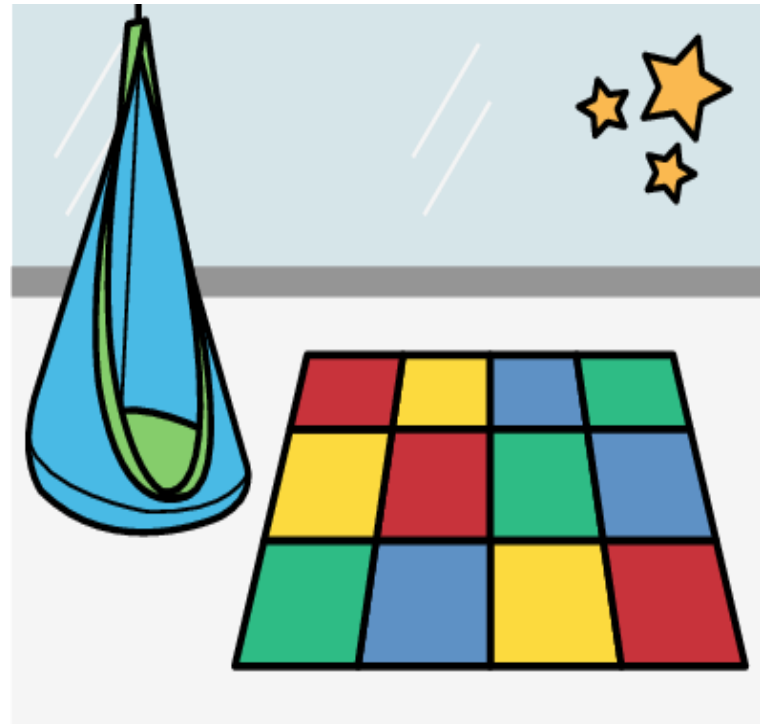
# Children's Programming

- Visual Schedules
- Different modes of learning
- Fidgets
- Parent Communication



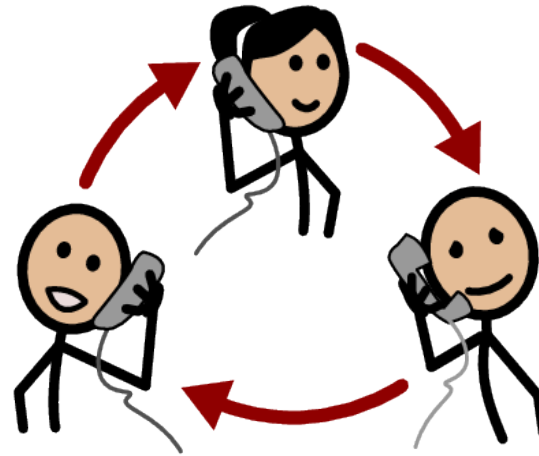
# Sensory/Break Room

- Quiet Space
- Dim lighting
- Quiet sensory toys
- Fluidity



# Training

- What are your expectations?
- What are your protocols?
- Be proactive.



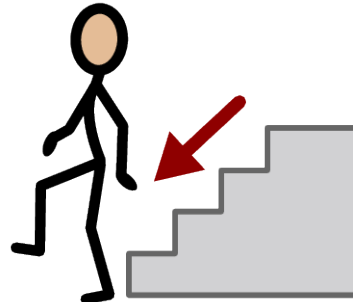
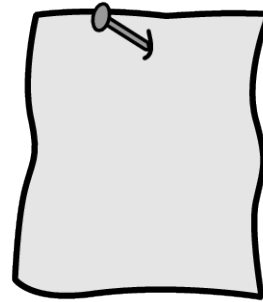
# Communication is Key

- Best-kept secret?
- High Holiday materials
- Contact person



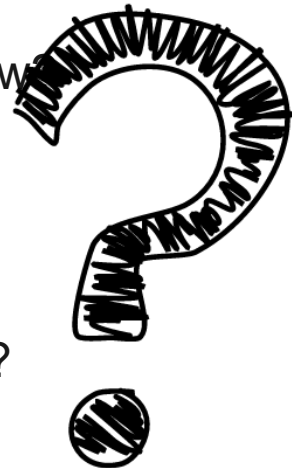
# Signage

Don't underestimate the importance of good signage!



# Top 8 Inclusion Questions

- ❑ How is the physical accessibility throughout your building?
- ❑ Do you provide inclusion training for ALL staff, including membership and front desk employees?
- ❑ What are your hiring practices as they relate to inclusion?
- ❑ What do users see? What is it about your organization that demonstrates inclusive values?
- ❑ Who can people contact re: special needs? How do they know?
- ❑ How transparent are your inclusion goals?
- ❑ Are there protocols in place for different departments to communicate with one another?
- ❑ How do you utilize other organizations in your own backyard?



# Top 7 Tips Towards Achieving Inclusion

1. See the person first. People are people; they are NOT their disabilities.
2. Focus on ability. All people have strengths and weaknesses.
3. Anticipate differences. Inclusion is a proactive effort.
4. Inclusion is a group effort. Everyone MUST believe in it for your community to be truly inclusive.
5. Parents, caregivers and the individual themselves are usually your best resource.
6. Create opportunities for formal and informal feedback and act upon it; ensure that input shapes decision making
7. Relax. There is no secret to inclusion. Inclusion is another way for your program to work with individuals both with and without disabilities.





# Inclusion is a Process!

---

“PEOPLE MAY  
**DOUBT**  
WHAT YOU SAY,  
BUT THEY WILL  
*believe*  
WHAT YOU DO”

~LEWIS CASS

# REACH OUT!



## matan



*For every child. For every community. The Gift of Jewish Learning.*

520 Eighth Avenue, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
(866) 410-5600

[www.matankids.org](http://www.matankids.org)