



Navigating Barriers to Inclusion in Child Care: How Parents Can Advocate

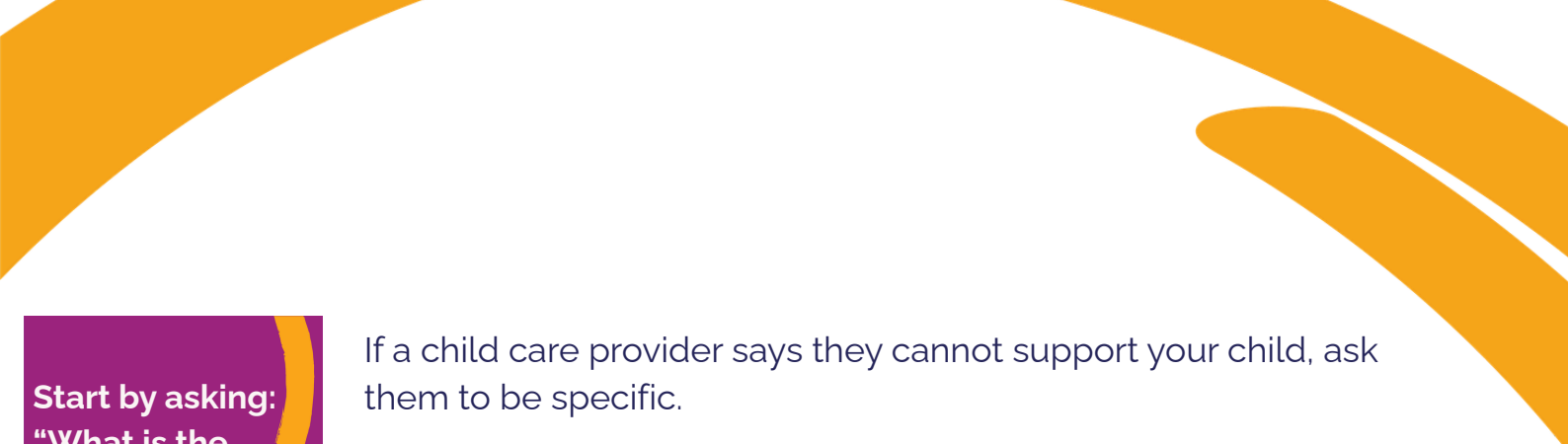
Finding child care can be stressful for any family. For parents of children with disabilities or children who need additional support, it can be even harder.

Families who contact our Advocacy Line often tell us they have been:

- unable to find a child care space
- told that a child care provider cannot support their child
- offered fewer hours than their child needs
- asked to keep their child home when child care staff is unavailable
- told that the child care provider does not have the training or resources to support their child
- waiting too long for additional support through Supported Child Development Program (SCDP)

Children with disabilities have the right to equal access to early learning and child care and should have meaningful opportunities to participate alongside their peers. When barriers come up, parents do not have to navigate them alone.

In the following pages, you will find some helpful strategies to overcome barriers to accessing child care.



Start by asking:
“What is the
barrier?”

If a child care provider says they cannot support your child, ask them to be specific.

- Is there a way to address the concern without preventing my child from attending?
- What support does my child need to participate?
- What is preventing my child from participating?
- Is the concern staffing, training, funding, space, safety or something else?
- What would need to change for my child to participate?
- Have you spoken with the Supported Child Development Program in our area?
- What supports or accommodations have you considered?

Getting specific about the barrier helps you identify possible solutions.



Ask for the
decision
in writing

If your child is denied a space, asked to leave, offered reduced hours, or told they cannot attend in certain circumstances, ask the child care provider to explain the decision in writing.

You could say:

“Could you please provide me with the reasons why you are unable to accommodate my child at this time and what would need to change for my child to participate?”

Having this information in writing can help you understand what is happening and determine your next steps. It also gives you a clear record of what has been discussed if you need to ask for help or take the concern further.



Ask about training

Sometimes parents are told, "Our staff aren't trained to support a child with these needs."

Instead of allowing this to end the conversation, ask:

What information or training would help staff feel confident supporting my child?

The goal is to understand what support staff need and what changes could help ensure your child can participate, rather than focusing on challenges or barriers.

You can share resources such as B.C.'s [Inclusive Child Care Toolkit](#) and the various training options available on the [Inclusive Child Care website](#).

Child care providers can find valuable information and practical strategies for creating more inclusive child care environments.



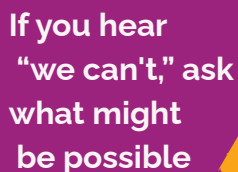
Explain what your family needs

Don't be afraid to explain how the lack of child care is affecting your family.

For example:

- "I cannot return to work without child care."
- "I have had to reduce my work hours."
- "There are no other child care options in our community."
- "The reduced hours are not enough for our family."
- "This is affecting my ability to attend school or work."
- "My child is missing opportunities to participate with their peers."

Your family's circumstances are important. Sometimes explaining the impact helps everyone understand why finding a solution matters.



If you hear
"we can't," ask
what might
be possible

If you are told that your child cannot attend because of their disability or support needs, you can ask questions and explore what might be possible.

- What has been tried?
- What would need to change?
- Who can help make that change?
- Can the Supported Child Development Program be involved?
- Can we meet to develop a plan?

You don't have to figure out the solutions on your own. You can ask the child care provider, the Supported Child Development Program and other members of your child's support team to work together to identify possible solutions.



What can I do if talking with the provider does not resolve the issue?

Here are a few steps you can take once you have tried the suggestions above:

- Ask for a meeting with the next level of management of the child care provider.
- Contact the Supported Child Development Program in your area to share what is happening and explore how they could support you.
- Keep a written record of your concerns, requests, and steps you have taken.
- Ask for support from a family support worker or another advocacy organization in your community.
- Learn more about your rights and possible complaint processes.

Inclusion should be the starting point, not something families have to advocate for after barriers arise. Advocacy for inclusion is not about expecting one person to solve every challenge on their own. It means clearly identifying barriers, working together to explore reasonable solutions, and ensuring every child has a meaningful and equitable opportunity to participate.