

Fostering Sensitivity to Children with Special Needs (and their Families)

Spaulding Outpatient Center for Children Sandwich strives to be sensitive to the wide range of special needs of our patients. We also appreciate how stressful and challenging a child with disabilities can be for parents. You can count on our staff to be accepting of every family who comes through our doors; it is our expectation that parents and other children will be equally as accepting.

While physical limitations may be obvious in one child, another who appears less physically impaired may, in fact, be experiencing significant cognitive or communication challenges. Spaulding Center for Children aims to create an open, welcoming, supportive and safe environment for each patient, each family.

Toward that end, we ask that you have a conversation with your child *before* coming to our Center about the importance of being sensitive to children with special needs they may encounter. The way in which you, as parents, respond to questions from your child will play a vital role in how your child thinks about disabilities as they mature. We encourage you to answer your child's questions in a clear and respectful manner while emphasizing the commonalities between him/her and a child with special needs. The conversation provides a wonderful opportunity to foster an attitude of acceptance and compassion.

Please consider the following talking points to discuss with your child:

- Children with special needs and disabilities are like all other children. They want to have friends, be treated nicely, and to be included.
- You can't "catch" a disability from someone else.
- Some children's brains are put together differently, which makes it hard for them to walk, talk, eat, hear, learn, and behave.
- Name-calling is unacceptable. Words hurt. An apology to both the child and his/her parent is necessary if you make a hurtful remark.
- Some children need to use a wheelchair to help them move around because they have a hard time walking - this is a physical disability. Some children may not be able to talk to you because they have a hard time speaking and using words - this is a cognitive disability.
- No two people are the same. Differences are a part of our world. Some differences you can see and others you cannot.
- Avoid referring to non-disabled children as "normal" as it implies abnormality in others.

Thank you for helping make Spaulding Center for Children a warm, supportive environment for all.