



Save the Children®

# RAISING AN ALLY TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY

A Guide to Building an Inclusive World



Zainab\* has been deaf since birth. She attends Save the Children's sign language classes and is learning how to sign different things, like food and animals.

\*Name changed to protect the child.



International  
Day of  
Persons with  
Disabilities

3 DECEMBER



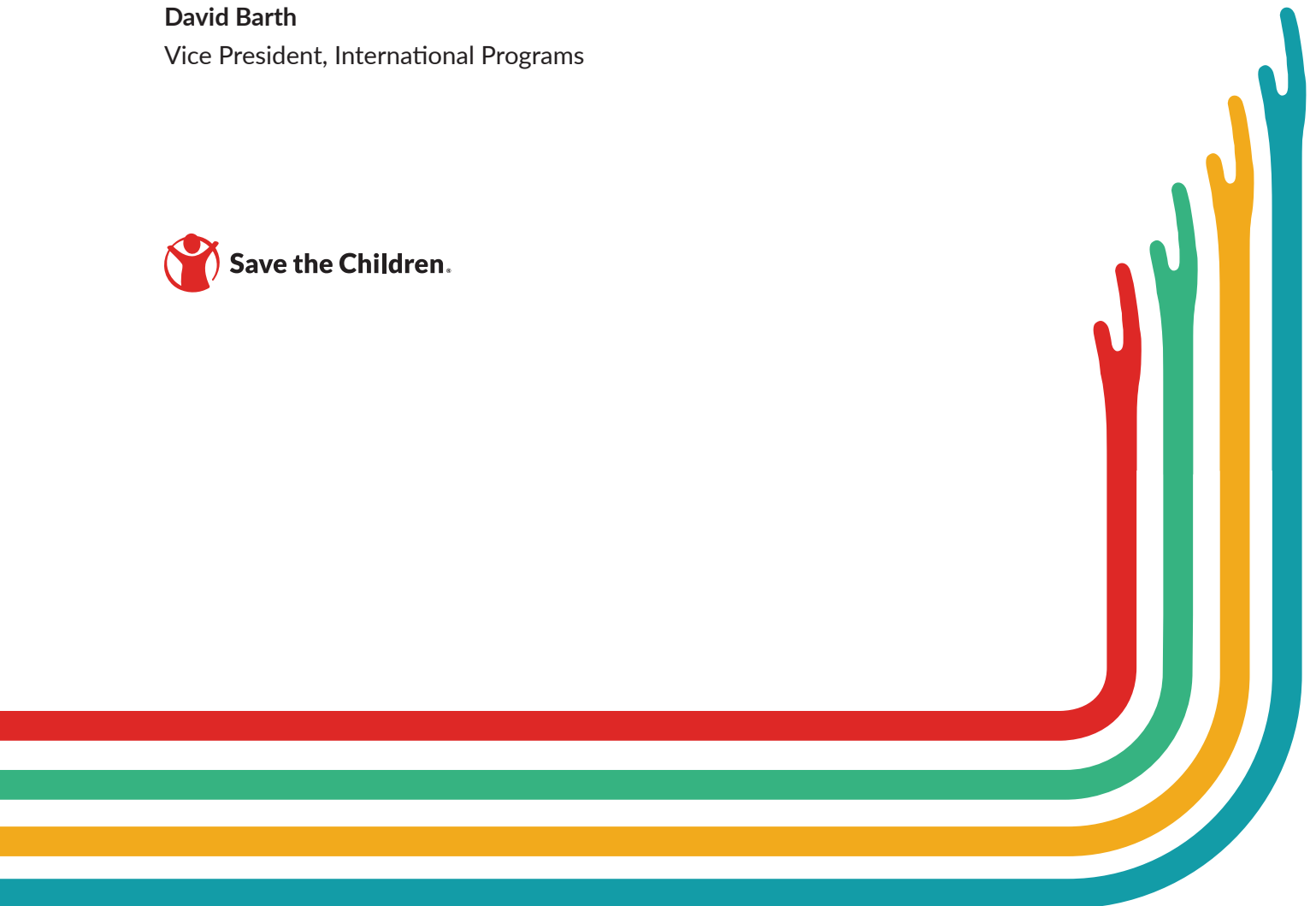
## STAND FOR KIDS' RIGHTS!

Save the Children is committed to creating an equitable, accessible and inclusive world for all. We work around the globe to realize the rights of the 240 million children who live with a disability, elevating their voices and emphasizing accessibility in our programs, partnerships and advocacy. Save the Children is also a disability-confident workplace, taking pride in our employee diversity which includes staff with disabilities.

In celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we've created this guide to give non-disabled parents and children foundational tools to ally themselves with the disabled community. The most effective way to be an ally is to ask your peers with disabilities for their input, respecting their agency, autonomy and voice.

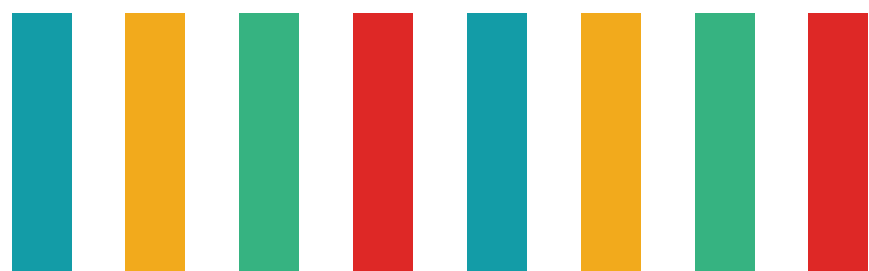
**David Barth**

Vice President, International Programs





**240**  
**MILLION**  
**CHILDREN**  
**LIVE WITH A**  
**DISABILITY**





# BE AN ACCESSIBILITY ALLY

## What's Disability Inclusion?

Disability inclusion means providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people with disabilities through accessibility, accommodation and acceptance.

## Why is it Important?

**1 in 10 kids worldwide has a disability.**

They should have access to the same tools, experiences and opportunities as their non-disabled peers – but society upholds ableist barriers that make their lives more challenging.<sup>2</sup>

Together, we can break those barriers. By raising an ally to the disability community, you're helping us build an inclusive world for every child.



Zahoor\* attends classes for children with visual impairments.

\*Name changed to protect the child.

Save the Children values and respects people with disabilities as part of human diversity.

We promote the inherent dignity, individual autonomy and independence of both adults and children with disabilities.

We recognize that disability is one aspect of identity, and that many individuals with disabilities identify as part of a global community.

Excerpt from Save the Children's [Disability Inclusion Policy](#)

<sup>1</sup>Language disclaimer: In this resource guide, Save the Children has used person-first language when speaking about children with disabilities. Person-first language places the person ("children") before the descriptor ("with disabilities"). The alternative option, identity-first language, places the descriptor of ("disability") first (i.e., "disabled children"). While Save the Children has defaulted to person-first language, different individuals with a disability have different preferences. If you are unsure how a certain individual with a disability prefers to be referred to, you can ask them!

<sup>2</sup>Ableism: A misguided, biased understanding of disability that leads to the assumption that the lives of persons with disabilities are less valuable than those without. Ableism can take many forms, including harmful language.

# TALK LIKE AN ALLY

Being an ally to people with disabilities starts with using thoughtful, inclusive language. You might stumble across some unfamiliar terms — and that’s okay!

## Tips

- “Disability” isn’t a bad word — the more we use it, the less uncomfortable kids and adults will be when they hear it.
- Pay attention to the language people with disabilities use.
- Offer the same respect and boundaries you’d give anyone else.

**Remember: your goal is to foster a sense of belonging.**

## Say This Not That

DO NOT SAY	INSTEAD, TRY	WHY?
Handicapped; for example, “a handicapped bathroom stall”	Accessible	Anyone can benefit from accommodations – not just people with disabilities
Differently abled/ crippled/special needs	Disability	Don’t imply that people with disabilities are less than others
Courageous/brave/special	Person with talent/skills	A person’s disability doesn’t automatically make them courageous
Normal/healthy	People without disabilities	Avoid making people with disabilities feel like something is wrong with them
Person with a disability; for example, “the girl in the wheelchair”	Their name	Describing someone solely by their disability can be dehumanizing
Special ed	Person with a learning/ cognitive disability	This term stigmatizes special education
Wheelchair-bound/ physically challenged	Person who uses a wheelchair/ has a physical disability	Always put people before their disability





## ACT LIKE AN ALLY

We developed a short [disability inclusion guidance](#) note as a companion to our existing [Life Skills for Success \(LS4S\) Common Approach Toolkit](#). It's a brief introduction to the key ways we work to include adolescents and youth with disabilities in our programs, touching on Save the Children's rights-based disability inclusion global policy.

### Tips for Being an Ally to the Disability Community

#### **For children with hearing impairments:**

- Speak directly to the child, not the sign language interpreter or parents.
- Always face the child and make eye contact.
- For children with visual impairments:
- Use their name to get their attention.
- Always face the child when speaking to them.
- Keep background noise to a minimum.

#### **For children with visual impairments:**

- Use their name to get their attention.
- Always face the child when speaking to them.
- Keep background noise to a minimum.

#### **For children with physical impairments:**

- Speak at their eye level (when talking with a person who uses a wheelchair, it's appropriate to sit down and talk face-to-face).
- Don't touch a person's wheelchair, cane or scooter.
- Ask before you help.



## DISCUSSING DISABILITY AT HOME

1. Follow the lead of people with disabilities. Use the language they use to refer to themselves.
2. Highlight similarities, not differences. Talk about who a person is as a whole — not just their disability.
3. Show how inclusive spaces are beneficial for everyone — they foster a sense of safety.
4. Teach your child not to interfere with access tools: service dogs, mobility aids, interpreters, etc.
5. Create an inclusive home environment. Lead with kindness, and your family will, too!
6. Read books written from the perspective of someone with a disability.  
Choose stories that inspire positivity, not pity.

## THE FAMILY GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS

The Family Guide to the Special Education Process is a resource guide created to help families understand the process of special education and what certain services mean for their child's future.

### Who is this for:

- Families of children with disabilities
- Those who work directly with children
- Allies of the disability community
- Self-advocates and disability advocates
- Anyone who wants to learn more about the special education process

### What's in it:

- Key terms defined
- Important people involved in the special education process
- School age information AND early intervention information for babies and toddlers
- Roadmap of an IEP/IFSP (read the guide to learn more about these acronyms )
- Meeting tips for guardians
- So, so much more!



## Why is it important:

- Special education is complicated
- Families should have an easier way to learn about this topic
- Any section can be read independently of the others so the reader can pick the sections they find most relevant
- Part of advocating for children and families is understanding the systems they are a part of

LEARN MORE

## OUR DISABILITY INCLUSION BOOK LIST

For Kindergarten-2nd graders:

*Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You!*

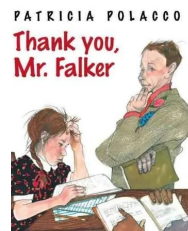
by Sonya Sotomoyor



For Kindergarteners-4th graders:

*Thank you, Mr. Falker*

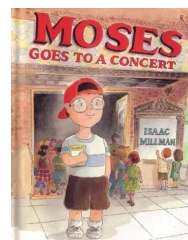
by Patricia Polacco



For Preschoolers-2nd graders:

*Moses Goes to a Concert*

by Isaac Millman







8-year-old Bassem\* lives in Beit Lahia, Gaza, with his father, mother and two siblings. He was severely injured and lost his sight from an explosive device.

\*Name changed to protect the child.

## BE AN ADVOCATE!

The International Children with Disabilities Protection Act was introduced in early 2023 and is now moving through Congress.

### This bipartisan legislation would:

- Bolster our nation's support for children with disabilities and their families globally.
- Help disabilities rights organizations around the world.
- Create the "International Children with Disabilities Protection Program," a \$10 million fund supporting global advocacy through the State Department.
- Strengthen U.S. policies to prevent the institutionalization of kids with disabilities around the world.

To stay up to date on the legislation and future advocacy opportunities, please sign-up here.

[SIGN UP](#)

## INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING AT SAVE THE CHILDREN

### In the U.S

- In 2023, we provided 10+ trainings for staff working with children in our school age and kindergarten readiness programs to make activities accessible, inclusive and fun for every child!
- We continue to help parents and caregivers connect to local supports for their child with a disability or developmental delay, such as early intervention and their local parent training and information centers
  - Creating an inclusive and supportive environment is essential to successful programming, so we share strategies and resources to make sure ALL children are included in every aspect.
  - Being a parent or caregiver of a child with a disability can be hard to navigate, so we created resources like the Family Guide to the Special Education Process in Spanish and English!



\*Name changed to protect the child.



## Around the World

Our disability inclusion programming is in 63 countries. To honor the disability movement's mission statement — Nothing About Us Without Us — we partner with Representative Organizations of Persons with Disabilities around the world.

- We support parents, caregivers and teachers, encouraging early intervention through play and positive parenting.
- We help make classrooms inclusive and learner-friendly.
- We provide access to assistive technology — from glasses and hearing aids, to digitized textbooks and screen readers, to specialized walkers, braces or chairs.
- We train health workers on the nutritional and feeding needs of children with disabilities.
- We advocate for family-based care as an alternative to institutions, where kids with disabilities are disproportionately found.

We also created a [child-friendly version of our Disability Inclusion Policy](#) to ensure all children have access to information about how we're championing the rights of people with disabilities all over the world!

**OUR DISABILITY  
INCLUSION  
PROGRAMMING IS IN**



**63**

**COUNTRIES**



# APPROACHING ALLYSHIP

## Shaping an Inclusive Future

One of my fondest memories is of hearing a three-year-old boy sternly say, “Mom, you can’t pet that dog – that’s a circus dog,” as my service dog and I walked by. I was impressed that he knew not to distract service animals – and even more impressed that he was already acting as an ally.

Kids are meant to be curious – we should nurture that. If your child sees a person using a mobility aid or communicating in sign language, they’re allowed to ask questions! When children approach me with genuine curiosity and respect, I’m usually happy to educate them.

To me, tone is most important. I’d rather talk about the creative ways I’ve learned to participate in the world and co-exist with my disabilities, rather than my medical history, diagnoses or struggles.

**Annesley Clark**

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Associate

Save the Children

### Try Phrases Like

- “How does your wheelchair help you?”
- “Does your dog have a job?”
- “Would you like any help?”

### Avoid Questions Like

- “What happened to you?”
- “What’s wrong with you?”

## Lead with Respect

An important part of encouraging curiosity is teaching mutual respect. Just as your child has a right to be curious, their peer with a disability has a right not to answer!

Have an ongoing conversation with your family about consent, reminding them that “no” means “no” and boundaries are a good thing.

Disability inclusion starts with the individual – and we can’t thank you enough for bringing it into your home.

[A Guide to Help Bring Disability Inclusion to Your Home And Community | Save the Children](#)



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