

Meet Claire

Claire is a staff member in your program. A new child has just enrolled who has significant disabilities. Sam uses a wheelchair and a feeding tube and has a tracheotomy. Sam has a care plan in place, and Claire has been trained on the plan. A nurse is also available for Sam. Claire comes to you very upset. She says she is overwhelmed by Sam's needs. He coughs all the time and blows out mucous. She knows from his care plan that this is normal and nothing to worry about, but she can't help but be a bit squeamish about it. She doesn't think Sam should be included in the program; his needs are just too intense, and she is losing time for the other children.

1. How do you respond to Claire's concerns? Is she being reasonable?

Comfort Claire and let her know it's normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes. Thank her for coming to you. Ask her to describe her concerns and feelings. When she's calm, shift the conversation to Sam. Emphasize that Sam is a child just like every child, and he has a place in your program. Take a problem-solving approach. Ask Claire what she would need to feel comfortable. Brainstorm how you could help her get the training or help she needs.

2. How will you involve the nurse and Sam's family?

Perhaps the nurse could spend more time in the program area until Claire feels more comfortable calling her as needed. The family could also be invited to spend time in the program or to show Claire ways to interact with Sam.

3. Who else should Claire talk to (administrator, nurse, health consultant) in your program?

Responses will vary. Provide supports that will help Claire know how to integrate Sam into the daily life of the classroom or program, and will help Claire plan activities and experiences that fit Sam's needs. For example, your nurse Sheyvaughn has direct experience with this special health care need. She tells Claire that a newly inserted tracheotomy differs a lot from one which has been in place for years. Sheyvaughn then offers Claire support in becoming more comfortable with the device. As a trainer, you may want to suggest ways to adapt materials and the quiet reading environment so that Sam can participate fully.