

## Excerpt from Interview with Alexandra Yuster

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(Alexandra Yuster is UNICEF Senior Advisor on Child Protection.)

Children with disabilities face a whole range of obstacles that societies have set up for them. First of all most services don't take into account what their needs might be, so they're less likely to be able to access education or to have health care which meets their needs.

We know that children with disabilities are in fact at greater risk, we know that they are more likely to be institutionalized, to be separated from their families and they are more vulnerable to abuse. Even their parents or others who are caring for them may feel a certain sense of frustration that may lead to abuse.

One of the most important things that UNICEF is working on is trying to promote an inclusive approach to education—trying to make sure that children with disabilities are included in the school environment and that schools environments are adapted to make sure that they are included. Some children with disabilities will require some additional special education—like children who are blind will need to learn to read Braille, children who are deaf will need to learn sign language—but that's no reason why they need to be entirely segregated from other children.

It is important to note that this is important not only for the children with disabilities, it's important for all the children. Because if we're going to fight this kind of exclusion that exists in our society, whether against people with disabilities, or people of a different race or a different ethnic background, then children need to come into contact with and understand the abilities and the contributions of all children from whatever different situation they come from.

If we ensure that children are included in school and help other children to accept that kind of diversity, then we are doing ourselves a great favor of building more accepting and, in the end, more peaceful societies.

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Source: adapted from [www.unicef.org/sowc06/profiles/child7.php](http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/profiles/child7.php)