

## **PANEL ONE: From Isolation to Awareness (1821-1959)**

### **FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**Overview:** This panel introduces students to a challenging period in Missouri history when children with disabilities were isolated from education and community life. Use these discussion questions and activities to help students understand historical context, develop empathy, and recognize the importance of inclusive education.

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#### **FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (Ages 5-10):**

1. **Look at the photograph together:**
    - "What do you notice about this classroom?"
    - "Does it look different from your classroom? How?"
  2. **Talk about belonging:**
    - "In our family, everyone belongs and is important. Can you think of ways we show that?"
    - "What would you do if someone said a friend couldn't come to school?"
  3. **Introduce the concept simply:**
    - "Long ago, some kids couldn't go to school because they learned differently or needed extra help. Teachers and parents worked hard to change that. Today, all kids get to go to school together. Why is that important?"
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#### **FOR TWEENS/TEENS (Ages 11-17):**

1. **Discuss historical context:**
  - "Why do you think children with disabilities were kept separate from others during this time period?"
  - "What role did fear, misunderstanding, and limited medical knowledge play?"
2. **Connect to modern experiences:**
  - "How is your school different from the classroom in this photo?"
  - "Have you noticed how our school supports students with different learning needs?"
  - "Do you think all students feel fully included today? What could still improve?"
3. **Explore advocacy:**
  - "The panel mentions parents forming support groups in the 1940s-50s. Why do you think connecting with other families was powerful?"
  - "If you saw something unfair happening at school, what would you do?"
4. **Discuss language:**
  - "The panel mentions that words used during this era are now hurtful. Can you think of other examples where language about groups of people has changed over time?"
  - "Why does the language we use matter?"

**FOR FAMILIES WITH PERSONAL CONNECTIONS:**

If your family has been touched by disability, whether you have a child receiving services from United Services, a family member with a disability, or personal experience with these issues, this panel may bring up complex feelings.

**Conversation Starters:**

- "What was different about your experience compared to what families faced in this era?"
- "What supports made a difference for our family?"
- "Who were the advocates, teachers, or professionals who made a positive impact on our journey?"
- "What advice would you give to families just beginning this journey?"

**For Families Currently Receiving Services:**

- "How does knowing this history make you feel about the services available today?"
  - "What are you grateful for that wasn't available in earlier generations?"
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