

Special Needs Ministry

Reaching ALL children

Luke 14:21b - 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

General things to know

- 1) People with disabilities and their families often feel judged and don't feel welcome at church or it's really hard to get there.
- 2) Get to know the child - what do they like? What do they not like? If they have a particular disability, try to learn about it.
- 3) Use age-appropriate language and activities
- 4) Show respect for the child not pity. Be patient and praise when you can.
- 5) Teach the other children about the child and their needs. Maybe ask the parent/carer how best to do it - e.g. with the child in the room or without.
- 6) Keep communication open with the family. Be aware of food allergies or dietary restrictions.
- 7) If possible, create an ISP - Individualized Spiritual Plan - <https://www.keyministry.org/church4everychild/2020/6/18/creating-isps-individualized-spiritual-plans-for-every-student-in-your-special-needs-ministry>
- 8) Assume competence - We don't know what the children understand, so assume that they understand you and teach them the love of God.

Special Needs and How to Help

Developmental Disabilities

Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Autism, Fetal alcohol syndrome, Attention Disorders/ADHD

Ways to help:

- Smaller/quieter classes - If your group is large, consider dividing it.
- Repeat things often.
- Make adaptations.
- Avoid putting a child in the spotlight unless they choose to be.
- Allow more time for the child to respond.
- Offer a choice of activities.
- Praise when you can.
- If possible, have peer helpers.

Managing Behaviours

Generally, children with developmental disabilities can have challenging behaviours. When we accept children, we accept all of whom they are - behaviours and all.

- Know that all behavior is communication.
- Be calm.
- Be consistent.
- Have regular routines. Keep instructions and rules simple. Be firm about your expectations.
- Follow through. Don't promise what you can't/wont do.
- Use language to help the situation like "Now/Next" or "First this, then that."
- Runners - limit exits. If the child does run, have two people following them.
- Use calming exercises.

Talk with the family about what works and what doesn't work.

Physical Disabilities

Spinal cord injury, missing limbs, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, visually impaired, hearing impaired, etc

Ways to help:

- Talk with the family to see the best way to help. Find out ways to help the child be as independent as possible.
- Be sensitive to how the child feels about their disability.
- What space do you have, do modifications need to be made?

- Consider games played - can you adapt it to include children with physical disabilities.

How to start Special Needs Ministry

- 1) Ask and Listen - what do you actually need.
- 2) Assess the area - do changes need to be made to the building/room
- 3) Recruit volunteers - they don't have to be experts to be qualified. Godly character is the most important quality for them to have.
- 4) Train volunteers -
 - When choosing volunteers, don't just look for people you would think of as "qualified." Look for people who exhibit the fruit of the spirit.
 - Give them information about disabilities they will be working with and tips of how to help.
- 5) Prepare the church - Volunteers aren't the only ones needing training.)
- 6) Perfection isn't necessary, but persistence is. You will get things wrong, but don't quit as a result of it.

Planning ahead for church ministry

1. Learn about the child - strengths and challenges.
2. Have materials to help the children: sensory toys, noise cancelling headphones, timers, visual schedule
3. If possible, have a quiet area (sensory room) for the children
4. De-Stress
 - Build breaks into the schedule.
 - Provide sensory materials
 - Explain what will be happening (visual schedule)
 - Give clear rules/expectations. Chaos breeds chaos/stress.
5. Adapt your curriculum

- Focus on the main points and restate it in the simplest, most concrete way you can. Avoid abstract language or figures of speech if possible.
- Incorporate Action - sign language, motions for songs, motions for verses
- Use multiple methods of teaching - Incorporate auditory, visual or tactile activities into the lesson.
- Teach Jesus - We aren't there to entertain the child or give the parent a break.

Inclusion vs Separate classes

- 1) Buddy program
- 2) Special Needs classroom
- 3) Hybrid

Outside of a Sunday

- Respite night, don't forget about siblings
- Family outreach
- Including special needs children in events

Resources

- Key Ministry - website and podcast
- Joni & Friends - website & podcast
- The Irresistible Church Series - books from Joni & Friends - <https://joniandfriends.org/church/irresistible-church-training-series/#engaging-game-changers>
- Same Lake Different Boat - book
- Trueway Kids - <https://truewaykids.com/> - has inclusive lessons for kids
- The Adapted Word (Teachers Pay Teachers) - <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/store/the-adapted-word>