

Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Support Map

M Movement

Some children need to move more than others. Setting boundaries for appropriate movement can allow the leader to meet the needs of the group while also meeting the needs of the child. Mark a place on the floor with tape, a mat, or a pillow. Be clear that the child can move within this space. Sometimes having two spots (chairs and pillows or mats) can be helpful.

T Transitions

Transition times provide a challenge to children. Clear expectations, follow-through, and routine help with those times, but they may not be enough for some children. For children who struggle with transitions, consider quick physical activities—such as doing chair push-ups, squeezing your hands together, and stretching—before or after the transition.

TD Tactile Defensiveness

Sometimes children struggle with textured objects such as glue, clay, finger paint, and chalk. For some children, textures create real anxiety. Allow and encourage children to explore textures without pressure, and provide opportunities to wash or wipe their hands right away. For children who struggle with texture, find a way to participate in the activity without getting their hands dirty, such as being a timekeeper.

A Adapting Activities

You can adapt an activity by process, product, or environment—the way that something is done, what is done, or the setting in which it is done. Giving extra support in the completion of a task is an example of changing the process; having children make something different is an example of changing the product. Instead of thinking, “This child can’t do this,” think, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”

B Behavior

Children’s behavior can challenge us, disrupt the group, and lead to unsafe situations. Be clear about what you expect before you do the activity. If you don’t want children to touch one another while they are in a circle, tell them that before they touch one another. Clear expectations let children know what the rules are. Using the included visual schedule is a great way to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for children to remember.

C Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty Communicating

Reach out to parents and caregivers about alternative forms of communication used by children. Learning a few words in American Sign Language, becoming familiar with the Picture Exchange Communication System, or exploring how to support with other assistive technologies are examples of showing hospitality to the children. In addition, give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.

FA Food and Other Allergies

Remove all food and other products containing allergens. Post signs to help people remember the allergy. Have all children wash their hands and faces to avoid triggering a reaction.

L Listening

Attending to a story or comprehending instructions can be a challenge for children who struggle with attention. Supporting these children requires consistency, clear expectations, and organization. Some hints that may help include clearly communicating expectations before the activity, checking for understanding, providing visual support as well as verbal instructions, building movement into activities, and supporting transitions.

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LG Leadership and Generosity

Focus on the strengths of the children, and learn to see them as gifted members of your community. Look for opportunities for them to express generosity. Offer them ways to practice leadership, such as passing out items, holding visual aids, helping other children, or serving as the example in games and activities.

LD Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty with Reading and Writing

Whenever children read aloud, ask for volunteers. Calling on a child who does not read at grade level may make him or her feel embarrassed and unwelcome. Always encourage children to write or draw pictures as part of their responses. Children then can share their drawings.

MS Supporting Children with Mobility Supports

As you set up, think about ample space between furniture to maneuver a wheelchair or walker. Think about materials and how they are positioned. Doing a roll-through in a wheelchair or walker can be a helpful way to make sure that your room setup is accessible. Think about including your children who use assistive devices. For example, seating all children on chairs or placing materials for a game on a table instead of on the floor are simple ways to create a more welcoming community.

VI Visual Impairment/Blindness

Talk with parents, caregivers, and children about the strengths and abilities of the child, as well as the best ways to offer support. Large print or special lighting may allow full access to the materials. Talk with parents or caregivers about the use of the copy machine or scanned images and a computer or tablet to enlarge print. Encourage children to describe their pictures and other creations in words as they share them.

D Deaf/Hard of Hearing

To create a welcoming environment for children who are deaf or have difficulty hearing, provide visual supports, such as written instructions and copies of the stories told. Employ an interpreter, and encourage children and adults in the community to learn to communicate through American Sign Language. Limit background noise. Face a person before speaking. Become familiar with children who use assistive technology. Be sure to check with parents or caregivers of children who use cochlear implants or hearing aids about any special considerations.

F Fairness

To make every child feel welcome and successful, think about fairness in a different light. Fairness is not every child getting the same thing; it is every child getting what she or he needs.

SD Sensory Defensive

Some children have strong reactions to different stimuli. Help them feel more comfortable by putting them in charge of the challenging sensations, allowing them to take actions such as turning the lights on or off.

Ask for Help

A team approach to including people with disabilities in your congregation helps build understanding and knowledge in the congregation, provides support for the child and family, and makes including all of God's children in church school an attainable goal.