

Tips for Working With Children With **SPECIAL NEEDS**

for Teachers, Parents,
and Peers

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Terrific Tips

GENERAL TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Understand that a child with special needs has the same spiritual needs as other children.
- Talk with the parents about what can make the child feel more comfortable. Learn the child's favorite songs, Bible stories, or activities.
- Learn about the child's special needs. Most teachers want to help but just don't know how.
- Use visuals—simply listening to stories is hard for a child with special needs.
- Experiment to find out what works best for the child.
- Stability and routine are crucial. The simplest change in routine can be traumatic for the child.
- Remember that children with special needs are more like other children than they are different from them.
- Be aware that most curriculum and activities can be modified or adapted to involve all the children in classroom routines.

TIPS TO SHARE WITH PARENTS

- Take your child to church early to help her become familiar with the classroom.
- Bring your child's own snack. Snack time can be very traumatic because it can be a change in routine from what a child usually eats.
- Keep your expectations realistic based on the extent of your child's special needs and resources available.
- Pray for the teachers involved in the spiritual development of your child.
- Be available to the teachers for possible solutions to special situations that come up in the classroom.
- Don't withhold information or be embarrassed about your child's condition.
- Keep the teacher informed of family situations that may affect your child's response and behavior in the classroom.

TIPS TO BUILD PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Ages 2 to 4

How children respond:

When preschoolers see children with special needs, their primary response is curiosity. They want to get close to the children, look at them, touch them, and see them up close. They may ask lots of questions, including “why” questions. Children this age don’t experience the embarrassment or social discomfort that older children (and adults) do. So kids may ask innocent questions that others may find uncomfortable.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Let children get close to a child with a disability. Usually, children ask reasonable questions to get information.
- Have the child’s parents come to your class to answer questions.
- Talk about how God made all the children of the world and loves each one.
- Emphasize how each child is unique and special in God’s sight. Give examples of Jesus’ compassion to different kinds of people; for example, the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) or the man with leprosy (Matthew 8:1-4).

Ages 9 to 12

How children respond:

Older children may focus more on themselves than on a child with a disability. Kids are more concerned about their own feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, and anxiety than about how to relate to a child with special needs. As a result, kids this age may appear calloused and unfeeling, and seem to ignore or exclude the child with a disability. This exclusion is a clue to a child’s discomfort and inability to relate.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Have a class discussion when the child with a disability isn’t present. Focus on children’s thoughts and feelings. Help them see the world from the viewpoint of the child with special needs.
- Brainstorm ways to show kindness to the kids’ classmate. Emphasize the golden rule: “Do to others as you would like them to do to you” (Luke 6:31).
- Be prepared to answer kids’ questions about why God lets bad things happen to innocent people.

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