



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Tips for Including Children with Disabilities in Your Spiritual Community

- Develop an attitude with your entire congregation that you are including all children.
- Remember that children with disabilities are more like other children than they are different from them.
- Use appropriate language.
 - Teach and model "People First" language. For example, "Joey is a child with autism," not "Joey is an autistic child."
- Be a positive role model. The children will watch you closely and will be strongly influenced by your attitudes and behaviors.
- Prepare all children, those with disabilities and typically developing children, for inclusion in the classroom.
 - Deal directly with other children's reactions to the disability
 - Explain to the children that they can not "catch" the disability
 - Encourage all children to be sensitive
 - Enhance positive attitudes and positive experiences
 - Allow the child with the disability to visit the classroom. Explain who will be there and the typical routine.
- Seek training and support for the staff
 - Locate community resources for available training and information
 - Research what other spiritual communities are doing to include children with disabilities in their programs. This is a way of gaining new ideas and strategies.

- Use parents and caregivers as resources.
 - Ask them what works best for their child
 - Find out what strategies are used in other environments (school, home)

- Create a classroom notebook for each child. Include in the notebook:
 - Registration Form
 - Child Profile Form
 - Emergency/Medical Information

- Train children without disabilities to become classroom buddies and peer tutors to enhance the learning for all children in the classroom.
 - Provide opportunities to develop compassion and sensitivity
 - Teach acceptance and tolerance that can be passed along

- Take notice of the progress that each child is making. Make sure that children are benefiting in some way from your efforts.

- Plan activities that will open the community for the child. Try to choose those places that are accessible to children with disabilities and will allow them to participate fully with the group.

- Be creative.
 - Instead of trying to figure out how to get a child who uses a wheelchair into the second floor classroom, think about moving the classroom into another area of the building that is accessible.
 - Children with disabilities can participate in most activities with small adaptations. For example, a child in wheelchair can help with passing out classroom materials by simply having the children come to them, instead of the other way around!

Resources

Pierson, J. & Korth, R. (1989). *Reaching out to special people: A resource for ministry with persons who have disabilities*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing.

Christian Church Foundation for the Handicapped. *Inclusion in Sunday School*. ccfh.org

About Community Connections

Community Connections is a grant at the University of Maryland at College Park funded by the U.S. Department of Education (#H324M000069). The goal of this project is to facilitate the participation of young children with disabilities in community settings by offering: Resources, Awareness, Networking, Training and technical consultation and Support for families

The Community Connections Staff

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