

You Have Started a Special Needs Ministry, Now What?

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Sharing the Gospel on their level/ Baptism:

- Make the Gospel easy to understand. Don't use "big church" words. Sin=wrong choices. Pray with the child/ over the child. A non-verbal child can nod yes or no to answer questions. Talk to the parents.
- Baptism: What would that look like in your church? Would your ministry have kids that would not be able to go completely underwater? Your team should be prepared to have baptisms after services for kids with autism/anxiety and other disabilities. You should even think through how you would baptize someone in a wheelchair. Would you need to make disclaimers to the church body before the baptism? No one should be excluded from baptism because of their disability!

Curriculum:

- Choose the best curriculum for your TIME/MONEY and for the KIDS!
- Do you want to stay with your current Children's Ministry curriculum? Do you need to adapt the curriculum, if it doesn't have SN material?

Our Forms:

- Short intake form for guests: the leader would fill this out by asking the parent the questions on the form. We are trying to get to know the child quickly so the parents can enjoy service. Having the leader take the information gives one on one contact with the parent!
- Long Application: We send this home on the first day. It is also on the website.
- Medical Form (Medically Fragile Children): We found that we needed to create a medical form for certain families when we didn't want to give them the long form.
- Sunday Evaluation Sheet: This is for leaders to pass information off to one another from week to week for each child.
- Classroom Observation: This is used when Elementary/ Preschool leaders request a Special Needs leader to come into their classroom to observe a child. This can be done several times before a recommendation is made.

Policies:

- Have them displayed or on your website! Hand them to new parents.
- We have them initial next to policies on our long form.
- We ask that parents supply all required communication devices, food, drinks, snacks and toileting needs.
- Depending on the child's age/medical condition, parents will be asked to change their child.
- Our team does not feed with feeding tubes.
- We encourage parents to show us how to care for their child but, they are not asked to serve in the Special Needs ministry.

Emotionally Disturbed Children:

- Have a plan on how you are going to handle a child who is emotionally disturbed. Work with and help train your security team. Run through scenarios with them before they happen.

- Have a plan of action in place with your administration.
- Could you possibly have a paid paraprofessional to work in the ministry?
- Work with the parents! Continue to let them know their child is loved!

Website:

- When will your SN ministry go on your church website?
- Will your Special Needs ministry be linked to other ministries or churches? When families search, there will be a greater chance for them to find you if you are linked.
- Is your team ready to put it on a website?

Growing a Special Needs Ministry:

- Think about where your SN Ministry will grow and if your existing space will accommodate new growth?
- What will happen to your kids as they become teens/adults? Do you have a plan or vision beyond the children's area?

Training new volunteers:

- Have new trainings: use video via dropbox /Trained Up
- Have training dates so volunteers can fellowship, have food, listen to vision, and commit to praying for one family (write notes of encouragement).
- Ask local experts to come in and talk to your team on topics

Reaching Families:

- LISTEN TO FAMILIES! IT ALL STARTS BY LISTENING! They will know you care when you listen to their concerns and fears. Don't dismiss their concerns!
- Listen to their aspirations for their children! Try to work together on goals together!
- Provide places for parents and guardians to have their time to worship/ connect with God and other believers.

Outreach:

- Respite
- Vacation Bible School
- Night to Shine prom
- Parent Dinner
- These events give guests an opportunity to see your Special Needs ministry. Shine!
- At outreach events, have someone from your team ready to walk a family through the SN ministry space.

Providing places for teens and adults with Special Needs to serve:

- Partner with other ministries
- YOU should work within that ministry before you ask for help!
- Serving provides self-worth for the teen/adult! It also gives volunteers in these ministries a wonderful understanding of Special Needs ministry! They just fall in love with the teens and adults they serve with!