



HELP CHILDREN *with* SPECIAL NEEDS *Belong* IN YOUR MINISTRY

You don't need a dedicated ministry, building or coordinator to reach children with special needs. Here are a few tips to start serving these children in your children's ministry today!

1 *Prepare Hearts*

- First, pray. Ask for God's guidance and blessing on your ministry.
- Recruit and train loving, caring adults to serve as volunteers. Some children will require one-on-one assistance. Who is God calling to serve your church body in this way?
- Be flexible and give grace to the child and yourself.
- Identify same-aged peers who would make excellent "buddies" to come alongside children with special needs and help them feel included.

2 *Prepare Each Child*

- Introduce each child to their teacher and classroom before their first day in a new room.
- Remember that all behavior is communication, so set expectations, be consistent and have a predictable routine.
- Find ways for students with special needs to serve in your church body.

3 *Prepare Families*

- Talk to the parents. Each child is unique, and parents know their children best. They can help you discover what does and doesn't work with their child.
- Love the child AND the family well. Many times, families feel isolated. Have a lunch or dinner for the families or offer a parents' night out. Send them encouraging notes. The possibilities are endless.

4 *Prepare Your Lesson*

- Adapt your curriculum by considering the children's needs — whether fine motor, gross motor, communication, auditory, visual, sensory or intellectual.
- Use visuals such as a visual schedule with picture cards or a visual communication card.

5 *Prepare Your Space*

Create inclusion bags (or an entire sensory space!) for every classroom as a quick resource, with in-the-moment tools and supports.

You could include:

- Fidgets and sensory items
- Adaptive seat cushions
- Large pencils
- Regular and large pencil grips
- Small weighted blanket
- Sound-canceling headphones
- Cleaning supplies
- Visual communication boards

With prayer, a little bit of preplanning and minimal resources, you can provide a safe, welcoming environment for your most special kids — one in which they can join others to learn how much God loves them and has a plan for their life.