

How to Be a Special Needs Advocate in Children's and Youth Ministries

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Every parent's goal for their child with disabilities:

- ◆ Welcomed
- ◆ Included
- ◆ Accommodated as needed
- ◆ Wanted
- ◆ Safe

The Ministry Leader's Perspective

- ◆ Methods of communication for newcomers
- ◆ How to prepare leaders for your children
- ◆ How to prepare children/youth for church
- ◆ Conflict Resolution 101
- ◆ What ministry leaders want you to know
- ◆ Be encouraged

Building the Relationship

- ◆ Parents and ministry leaders
- ◆ Children and ministry leaders



We are all brothers
and sisters in Christ

Methods of Communication



For Newcomers

- ◆ Online Forms
 - ◆ Check church website
 - ◆ Facebook page
- ◆ Call children's / youth ministry leader to ask questions about ministry activities; discuss accommodations / accessibility

How to Prepare Ministry Leaders for Your Child

What They Need to Know

- ◆ Diagnosis
 - ◆ Severity or level of functionality
- ◆ Communication with child
- ◆ Cognitive abilities
 - ◆ Can they follow 1-2 step directions
 - ◆ Reading/writing abilities
- ◆ Behavioral issues
 - ◆ Triggers
 - ◆ How to respond to behaviors
 - ◆ What is okay or NOT okay for leaders to do with your child
 - ◆ Elopement
- ◆ Sensory Sensitivities

- ◆ Mobility / Accessibility needs
- ◆ Medical issues
 - ◆ Allergies / food aversions
 - ◆ Respiratory ◆ Feeding tube
 - ◆ Seizures ◆ Hearing aids
 - ◆ Toileting needs
 - ◆ Medications
 - ◆ Side effects

- ◆ Strengths
- ◆ Weaknesses
- ◆ Fears
- ◆ Likes / dislikes

How to Prepare Children for Church Activities

Questions / Requests

- ◆ Plan visit to tour church facility outside of church activities
 - ◆ Understand check-in location and requirements
- ◆ Request schedule of activities
- ◆ Request pictures of teachers / Request meeting with teacher outside of class
- ◆ Create a social story
- ◆ Discuss expectations and positive reinforcement or consequences with child

- ◆ Discuss with child plan if they need you
 - ◆ **Communicate this with leader**
- ◆ Give calming item for anxious kids
 - ◆ Reminds them that you are available if they need you, and that you love them
- ◆ Keep tools in your toolbox for transitions

What Ministry Leaders Want You to Know

- ◆ We are NOT perfect, and we will get it wrong
- ◆ Recruiting volunteers is very difficult
- ◆ Teachers / buddies are mostly volunteers
 - ◆ Typically not professionals in disability or special needs
- ◆ Please be patient as we figure things out together
- ◆ We want the same thing you want

- ◆ You **might** have to model it first before expecting us to emulate it
- ◆ Be open to dialogue and conversation
- ◆ Don't be offended if child is placed in different age group
- ◆ Transition happens
- ◆ Your family is welcomed and loved

Conflict Resolution 101

I may seem quiet and reserved, but if you mess with my children, I will break out a level of crazy that will make your nightmares seem like a happy place.

“SHARE” IF TRUE



GOAL:

Win them over to your perspective

2 Basic Principles

- ◆ Self-Awareness
 - ◆ Emotional awareness and maturity
- ◆ Others-Awareness
 - ◆ Compassion and empathy

Something happened...

Now what?

How ministry leaders would like for parents to handle problems

Talk **TO** Us, Not **ABOUT** Us

Basic Principle #1: Self-Awareness

- ◆ STAY AWAY FROM SOCIAL MEDIA
- ◆ Emotional awareness
 - ◆ Take some time to calm down and cool off before addressing the issue with leader
- ◆ Get as much information as you can FIRST

Talk **TO** Us, Not **ABOUT** Us

Basic Principle #2: Others-Awareness

- ◆ Give the benefit of the doubt
- ◆ Emotional awareness
 - ◆ If you put them on the defensive, you will miss out on receiving compassion
- ◆ Awareness of time
 - ◆ Find a good time to discuss things. NOW is not always the best time for either of you
- ◆ Remember who they are:
 - ◆ Volunteers = NOT PROFESSIONAL THERAPISTS

Hearing & Responding to the Heart of the Leader

- ◆ Ask questions
- ◆ Repeat answers back as you understand them

“I hear you saying that... is that correct?”

- ◆ Respond with understanding and validation

“I understand my child has trouble with (issue), and that can be frustrating for you.”

Put yourself in their shoes - how would you like for a parent to respond to you in a difficult situation?

Care more about building a safe,
trusting reciprocal relationship than
#WINNING

Be *s l o w* to offense

- ◆ When it seems like they don't care
- ◆ When they use words or terminology you don't prefer
- ◆ When you don't like their ideas
- ◆ When they messed up
- ◆ When they ask you to help

Parent's Help Requested

- ◆ Not necessarily a cop-out
- ◆ Might be necessary to model first before expecting them to emulate
- ◆ Give time boundaries while they find help

BUT...

- ◆ There are ways to declare your own needs without being entitled
- ◆ Struggling with grief over new diagnosis
- ◆ Need a break
- ◆ Need to be disciplined and participate in worship freely
- ◆ Ask: “Are you sure you can’t help *at all*?”

2 Possible Resolutions

1. The church will advocate FOR you

- ◆ SEE your needs
- ◆ VALIDATE your needs
- ◆ ENABLE your needs

Looks like:

- ◆ Make accommodations
- ◆ Make every effort
- ◆ Teach and train teachers / volunteers
- ◆ Find helpers
- ◆ Be creative in strategies

2 Possible Resolutions

2. The church will NOT advocate FOR you

- ◆ SEE your needs
- ◆ NEGATE your needs
- ◆ REFUSE your needs

Looks like:

- ◆ Hard-heartedness
- ◆ Ill-willed
- ◆ Apathetic
- ◆ Bitterness
- ◆ Gossip

Be Encouraged!

What Leaders Have to Say To You

◆ DON'T GIVE UP

- ◆ On the local church
- ◆ On the Church as the bride of Christ

- ◆ What isn't good won't last forever
- ◆ What is good might change: Be patient
- ◆ Might have to lower expectations
- ◆ Continue to be an advocate
- ◆ Be the change-maker for future generations
- ◆ Persevere in faith
- ◆ Demonstrate faithfulness

God Commands Us to Gather Together as His People

- ◆ We can obey if it's already good
- ◆ We can obey until it *gets good*

You are NOT of those who
shrink back.

NEVER GIVE UP

You ARE of those who
persevere.

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