

# Getting to Know Children with Special Needs

## ► Why try to teach children with disabilities?

1. God makes it clear that *all* the little ones are important to Him (Mark 10:14-15; Matthew 18:14).
2. All children have the same basic needs whether they are affected by some disability or not.  
Knowing God satisfies a child's needs for . . .
  - Unconditional \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_ as a part of God's family
  - Order and \_\_\_\_\_ in the world
  - \_\_\_\_\_ in times of darkness <sup>1</sup>

## ► Meeting the needs of children

1. Understanding the greatest need of children regardless of age, race, or abilities is Jesus Christ as Savior. (Romans 3:23; Romans 3:10)
2. Learning how to apply \_\_\_\_\_ to life.

“Children with special needs don't necessarily have more problems than their peers, but their challenges and experience are unique.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Answering tough questions related to his/her disability.
  - a. Does Jesus know when I'm hurting?
  - b. If Jesus loves me, why doesn't He fix my disability?
  - c. Is Jesus disappointed in me when I'm not brave?
  - d. If I can't do very much, does Jesus still want me?
  - e. Does Jesus know when I'm going to die?<sup>3</sup>

## ► What disabilities might I see?<sup>4</sup>

1. Developmental Disabilities
  - a. Can affect decision-making, \_\_\_\_\_, emotional and social skills
  - b. Include Parents
2. Learning Disabilities
  - a. May have visual or auditory processing problems
  - b. Often also accompanied by ADHD
  - c. Often easily distracted or impulsive
3. Autism Spectrum Disorders (Affects their sensory perceptions)
  - a. Cannot generally handle a lot of noise; distractions; even people.
  - b. May need certain sensory items that comfort and enable the child to participate better (a fuzzy blanket; a squishy exercise ball to sit on)
  - c. Can often have special dietary needs – prepare for those by asking parents and teachers
  - d. May need to be separated from the other children for part of the club (retain the sight-line with other adults/have 2 adults with child(ren))
4. Down Syndrome<sup>5</sup>
  - a. Causes physical, mental and speech difficulties
5. Physical Disabilities
  - a. Could include paralysis and need of a wheelchair; use of leg braces; any number of physical restrictions, for example the disease cerebral palsy (CP)
  - b. Would necessitate altering games and activities so that everyone can join in regardless of physical abilities
  - c. Would require making sure that children with physical disabilities are asked to help in ways that they are able
6. Epilepsy
7. Hearing Impairment <sup>6</sup>

8. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)<sup>7</sup>
  - a. An anxiety disorder that is accompanied by repetitive behaviors and/or uncontrollable thoughts.
9. Sensory Integration Disorder which entails the inability to take in information from the senses and respond appropriately because the information is not processed correctly<sup>8</sup>
10. ADD/ADHD<sup>11</sup> which is usually an inherited disorder but can have other causes:
  - a. The child has difficulty remembering, ordering information, and following directions.
  - b. The child is often hyperactive and it is difficult for him/her to be still and maintain self-control. Children with this disorder often need less sleep.

▶ **What common misconceptions do we need to combat?**<sup>9</sup> (6 min.)

1. The behavior is intentional – Willful.
2. The child has the ability to control or change his behavior on command.
3. The parent is at fault.
4. Medication is the answer.

▶ **Responses to those with disabilities**<sup>10</sup> (6 min.)

1. Make appropriate eye contact. (some disabilities make direct eye contact uncomfortable for the child)
2. Be personal – use his/her name.
3. Make appropriate physical contact.
4. Include them in all ways that they are able to participate.
5. Listen to them.
6. Be sensitive to individual needs.
7. Welcome their families.
8. Pray for them.
9. Be Jesus to them.

- <sup>1</sup> Verbal, Pat. Give Them Jesus: Evangelizing Children with Special Needs. (Agoura Hill, CA: Joni and Friends International Disability Center. 2007) p. 6.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 7-8.
- <sup>4</sup> General information in this section gleaned from the following:  
Schultz, Joani et. al. pocket guide to SPECIAL NEEDS: QUICK TIPS to Reach EVERY CHILD. Loveland, CO: Group. 2008.  
Other information notated.
- <sup>5</sup> Westridge Young Writers Workshop. Kids Explore the Gifts of Children with Special Needs. (Santa Fe, NM: John Muir Publications, 1994) p. 22-23.
- <sup>6</sup> Westridge Young Writers Workshop. p. 80-81.
- <sup>7</sup> National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/anxiety-disorders/obsessive-compulsive-disorder.shtml>
- <sup>8</sup> Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation: <http://www.spdfoundation.net/about-sensory-processing-disorder.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> Westridge Young Writers Workshop. p. 50-51
- <sup>10</sup> Rapada, Amy. The Special Needs Ministry Handbook. (CGR Publishing, 2007) p 17