

What to do if you have a child in your class with special needs.

1. Get to know the child and his/her parents.
2. Have a conversation with the child and parents about the special needs of the child.
3. Find out what works and doesn't work for the child.
4. Find out the gifts and personality of the child.
5. Learn about the special need/disability.
 - See – Catechesis/Attends Mass Participation: Getting to Know the Person Worksheet
 - Getting Meaningful Faith Formation Opportunities for Children with Autism Worksheet
 - A Biography of Special Needs Resources
6. Establish a setting within the classroom that meets the needs of all the children.
7. Move away from direct instruction to an inclusive setting.
8. Experiment with various teaching strategies and environment, but remember that routine is important.
 - See - Planning Sheet: Individuated Religious Education Program Worksheet
 - Tips for Working with Children and Youth with Special Needs Handout
 - "I Like It/I Don't Like" It Handout
9. Reach out to the family and child for extra help/conversation/learning.
10. Love the child as a child of God.

Remember... all children are special.

A few key things working with any child with a disability:

- Have a basic understanding of the child's gifts and needs
- Have a basic understanding of the disability
- Provide an area and objects so the child can be "calm"
 - o Have a "break time" area
 - o Sound blockers, such as headphones are a good soother
 - o Rocking chairs or trampolines help stimulate calmness
 - o Weighted blankets or objects and beanbag chairs may help to sooth
- Don't expect the child to make eye contact
- Be aware that touching the child in any way may have positive or negative results
- Routine and repetition are good
- Avoid Overload – sound, motion, color, information
- Plan for obstacles – transitions, interruptions, outbursts, struggles, emotions, inattentiveness, etc.
- Working one-on-one with the child may be the best learning experience and testament to God's love the child may ever receive
- It's not a matter of the amount of content you teach the child, but rather the awareness of love and God's presence in their life

You will notice that similar techniques are helpful to any group of children with a disability. Therefore, they must be good techniques for all children.

Specific Needs

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Each child is unique
- Can be very rule-oriented
- May be unable to understand common body language or social cues
- May have poor coordination
- May repeat actions over and over

What to do...

- Learn about this child's specific needs
- Be as concrete as you can
- Prepare the child for any change in routine
- Know what the signs are for if the child gets stressed or irritated and what to do about it
- Avoid verbal overload
- Break down activities into smaller parts
- Keep the classroom as calm as possible
- Use repetition to teach the child new concepts

Down Syndrome Disorder

- Usually can learn and function like any other child – there may be a range of mental abilities
- Will have specific physical characteristics
- May have some health issues with respiratory, vision, hearing or heart

What to do...

- Laugh with and love the child
- Learn what the child's abilities and limitations are
- Use hands-on projects
- Use visual aids for learning
- Use a step-by-step teaching style with review and repetition
- Break down activities into smaller parts

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- May experience anxiety or compulsive behavior
- May experience impulses related to contamination, sorting, touching, counting, body waste or hoarding
- May be embarrassed by their behavior
- May experience tantrums, unrealistic worries, extreme distress when routine is disrupted, repeated rituals, low self-esteem or anxiety that he/she is "crazy"

What to do...

- Know the child's medications and side effects
- Listen to the child's feelings
- Plan for classroom transitions
- Praise the child's efforts to control impulses
- Help with peer interactions, don't allow others to bully, tease or mock
- Don't rush the child
- Plan for and circumvent anticipated problems
- Maintain routine

Sensory Integration Disorder (SID)

- The brain isn't able to process all the sensory information effectively and results in sensory overload

What to do...

- Try to control overly stimulating sensory inputs (loud music, extreme pictures, excitable activities)
- Maintain good eye contact with child
- Learn about and monitor the child's frustration level
- Develop a signal with the child so he/she can tell you he/she needs help
- Mask distracting noises with neutral sounds
- Allow the child to use sensory inputs in their mouths or hands (water bottles, gum, squeezies)
- Allow the child to have a stimulating activity to concentrate on the classroom activity (bounce, stand, swing, sit in a beanbag)

- Approach the child from the front
- Put the child's work area out of traffic