

Disability Inclusion and Adapting Church Curriculum

Reaching ALL students with the Good News of Christ's love matters. However, sometimes the lessons we teach don't always connect with students who learn differently, including those who have developmental disabilities. The good news is that church curriculum can be adapted to better reach different types of learners.

4 Key Points For Adapting Curriculum

1. Multi-Sensory Teaching.

Combining the senses, such as sight, hearing, and touch can increase engagement and promote learning. Plus, it's really fun too. Check out these ideas below:

- **Bible Character Story** - Print out a few of the characters from the story. As the teacher reads, have students pick up the character each time it is mentioned in the story. Felt characters and objects also work.
- **Interactive Story Time** - Have students make sounds while listening to Bible stories to help the story come alive. Start by telling the students that you would like them to help you tell a Bible story. Tell them you need them to make some sounds to make the story more fun. Then give them a couple of sounds that they will make. Say "When I say there was a big storm, I want you to pat your legs like this", then demonstrate for the kids and have them try it. Have them do two to three different sound effects depending on the age of the kids and the length of the story. You could also consider dividing the kids up into groups and giving each group one sound to make. (i.e. you can be the wind, you can be the thunder, etc.) Have noise cancelling headphones handy, just in case a student is sensitive to noise.
- **Memory Verse Jump** - Break the memory verse into a few phrases. Print each one on a circle and place on the floor. Have students recite each phrase and jump from circle to circle. Celebrate at the end with bubbles or clapping.
- **Sensory Memory Verse** - Put shaving cream on the table and have students write key words from the verse as a helper reads. If students needs support, teachers can use the hand over hand method to help guide them. If students put things in their mouths, try whipped cream instead - BUT always check for food allergies first!!!!

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2. Break it Up - Repeat - Give Praise

Many students who have developmental disabilities have shorter attention spans. Set them up for success by breaking the lessons into shorter time frames. Add in activities that have the same theme, and then review the main lesson at the end of the day.

- **Example Schedule -**

Tell Bible Story - Break - Memory Verse - Break - Craft - Break - Review Bible Story
Planning for breaks, sets the child up for success, while still letting you be the one in control. Win. Win.

- Repeating themes benefits students who need extra time to process information.
- When a student engages - give praise (AND MAKE IT BIG). Giving praise reinforces expected behaviors and helps students become successful in the future.

3. Incorporate Preferred Interests - Adding in a student's favorite thing to the lesson increases engagement. Be creative. Try this fun idea:

- **Dino Hunt (or other favorite character) -** Print out a few dinosaur pictures. Number 1 - 4. Put different parts of the Bible story on the back of each. Then hide them in the room. Invite students to go with you on a Dino Hunt. Once they find each picture, flip them over and read the Bible story. Bonus points if you use character voices!

4. Meet the Student Where He Is - Understand that many of the things that are commonly incorporated into our activities, like abstract concepts, socializing, and multi-step directions, can be very hard for some of our students, such as those who have autism. So, offer alternatives. Replace abstract concepts and metaphors (like object lessons) with a Bible story that shows the same theme. Allow students who are stressed by socializing to have a quiet table activity to do instead. Assign a peer to help students with directions, by modeling what to do and giving directions one at a time.

Good News! Adapting curriculum helps everyone hear the Good News!