

Disability & Trauma - Supporting the Intersection

Studies show that children who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are more likely to also experience trauma than their peers who do not have disabilities.

This means that if we want to create a supportive classroom environment, we need to be aware that sometimes a child's struggle may not be due to their disability, but it may be a trauma trigger instead. Today we are going to look at a few reasons why trauma is more common to children with IDD, as well

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-Informed Care is an approach to working with people that understands that most people have been through trauma. Therefore, creating environments that are supportive for them is important. Trauma-Informed Care is based on five principles: Safety, Choice, Collaboration, Trustworthiness and Empowerment. When we incorporate these principles into our classroom environments, we can help people feel safer, more empowered, and accepted just as they are.

Why Might Trauma Be More Likely

There are many reasons why trauma may be more likely to happen to children with disabilities, including the reasons below.

- Communication barriers can make it difficult for a child to express needs and wants, or tell someone if abuse is going on.
- Some disabilities can increase a child's dependency on adults, which may make them more vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.
- Children who have repeated medical procedures can experience medical trauma.
- Sensory differences, such as those often associated with Autism Spectrum, can make everyday things in the environment feel overwhelming and traumatic sometimes.
- Being different from others can put children at risk for isolation, bullying, or feeling invisible.

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Common Examples of the Disability/Trauma Intersection at Church

1. Feeling Invisible - Students with IDD sometimes feel invisible when others assume that they don't have things to share. At church, this may look like someone talking about them to others in front of them, not asking their opinion, or assuming they can't serve or lead. Find a way to communicate with the student. This may mean getting training on his communication devices, using visual aids, or slowing your speech to give him time to process what you are saying and respond. Always ask if the student would like to be included in each activity. Respect his preference. Look for ways for your student to serve and use the gifts God gave him to contribute to your class.

CHOICE, COLLABORATION, EMPOWERMENT

2. Restraint - Many students with IDD have past trauma from things happening to them that were beyond their control. Sometimes, at church, when students have challenging behavior adults may physically restrain them to try to gain control over the situation. Although this is not intended to be distressing, it can trigger feelings of trauma and powerlessness. Also, without proper training, restraint can sometimes even be dangerous. While you should always put safety first, and use your best judgement, unless there is imminent danger to the student or someone else, **do not restrain the student**. Instead, try to learn more ways of preventing or dealing with challenging behavior in the classroom. A great place to start is by watching - Wonderful Works Talks - Disability Inclusion and Challenging Behavior - Best Practices for the Church Classroom.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

3. Trauma Before Church - If a child goes through something traumatic before coming to church be aware that she may not be able to handle all of the things that she normally can. The best way to help is to reduce stressors from the environment. This can include taking a sensory inventory and dimming lights, turning down the volume, having a quiet area ready, as well as, being intentional about making all expectations clear.

SAFETY

**While we can't stop trauma from happening to our students,
we can choose how we support them at church. What you do matters!**

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well. - Psalm 139:14