

Serving Students who are Nonverbal What Parents Want You to Know

When it comes to children's ministry and serving kids, one of the most important things is clear communication. So, what do you do if the child you are serving is nonverbal? We asked the experts - their parents! Find out what they had to say.

1. Nonverbal does NOT mean noncommunication.

- When people say, "nonverbal", they can be referring to those who have no spoken language, those who are minimally verbal, or those who have a speech delay.
- Most nonverbal people can understand what is said to them or in front of them.
- Don't talk about the person in front of him as if he is not present. Speak directly to him and watch for nonverbal cues as his response.
- Communication comes in many forms, including body language, vocalizing, and pointing.

2. Ask questions. (Questions listed on page 2)

- The best way to learn how a child communicates is to ask his parent or caregiver questions. Be specific and seek to understand.
- If he has a communication device, find out how the parent envisions you supporting the child with it. This means ask more questions.
- If a child does not have a communication device, create a picture board that a student can point to when prompted. Then ask him questions and let him point to his response.

3. Invite others in.

- Children who are nonverbal are the same as everyone else, they like to be included. Advocate for the child by inviting his peers to play with him. Use the opportunity to teach them how the student communicates.
- If the child does not want to socialize, that is OK too. Watch his nonverbal cues to see how he is responding and then respect his preferences.

Continuing to learn how children who are nonverbal communicate, and helping others understand too, makes a big difference in their lives. Let's be difference makers!

Questions for Parents of Nonverbal Students

If a student is nonverbal ask, his parent or caregiver, questions to better understand how he communicates. Here's some to get you started!

1. How does your child communicate?
2. Does he sign? If so, what are three signs we should learn?
3. Does he use different types of vocalizations or body movements to signify different feelings?
4. Does he use gestures to communicate?
5. Does he point, or nod yes and no, when prompted?
6. Does he have a communication device?
 - What kind of support does he need with his device?
 - Does he need help carrying it or turning it on?
 - Does he need prompting?
 - Is he proficient or is he still learning to use the device?
 - What should we do if the screen locks up? Is there a password?
 - Can we have a quick tutorial?
 - Is there anything else that we should know?

|