

## Small Groups & Families Affected By Disability

Small Groups help people find community and grow in their faith! But did you know that being part of a Small Group can sometimes be challenging for families affected by disability? Today, we are going to look at three small ways your church can make a BIG difference here.

### 1. Understand Childcare Needs

Finding appropriate childcare can sometimes be an obstacle to joining a weeknight group. This is because often the church childcare workers or group babysitters are not equipped to serve children with special needs. This can cause families to stay home alone. But there are ways that churches can help:

- **Offer Specially Trained Childcare** - Talk to your families and your church leadership (remember to check on those church policies too) and see if offering specially trained childcare could be an option for your church. If so, consider equipping childcare workers with disability training or inviting those with professional backgrounds in disability to serve as volunteers. You can also consider looking at community partnerships with local organizations that offer respite care.
- **Ask the Family if Hosting a Group at Their Home would be Easier** - Hosting a small group at a family's home will allow them to control the time and location. This can be helpful in many ways. For families who live with mobility issues, hosting a group will allow their family members to stay in a wheelchair accessible environment. For families who have children with developmental disabilities (or families who are caring for elderly parents with dementia), having group at home provides a familiar environment and normal daily routine.
- **Offer An Online Option** - Another great way to make inclusion possible is by offering an online or hybrid option for families to stay connected to a group even when they cannot attend in person.

## Small Groups & Families Affected By Disability

### 2. Make Support Specific-

One of the best things about being in a small group is supporting each other when times are tough. Parents who are raising children with complex needs are more likely to experience medical or behavioral crises than those who are not raising children with complex needs. So, understanding the best way to support them is important.

- **Don't Make General Statements** - Saying things like, "Let us know what you need." or "Is there anything we can do?" may communicate that your group cares about a family, but rarely results in actually helping them. This is because most people won't make specific requests because they don't want to burden others, or they may not have the brain space to even think about what specific things they actually do need.
- **Do Make Specific Asks** - Offer specific ways to help and give choices. You can say things like, "Can I pick up your son from soccer practice or walk your dog?" or "Our group wants to help, can we take care of your lawn this month?" This will help families feel assured that the group feels comfortable helping in these ways and greatly increase the chance that the family will accept the help. Check out Wonderful Works Tangible Support video for some great ideas.

### 3. Train EVERY Small Group Leader-

Disability does not just affect a few people. It can happen to any family at any time. So, train all of your Small Group leaders about disability by inviting people impacted by disability to share with them. This will help your groups be better equipped to serve parents of children with special needs, couples caring for elderly parents, people who are medically fragile, and any number of things that can make life more complex. The more prepared groups are to serve everyone, the more people can grow in their faith and find their community. And that is a BIG WIN for everyone.