

A Brief Guide for Including Those with Learning Disabilities in Your Church's Educational Ministries



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Association of United Church Educators

A Brief Guide to Common Learning Disabilities

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

www.help4adhd.org

A condition that is characterized by problems with attention, impulsivity, and overactivity. Formerly known only as Attention-Deficit Disorder, ADHD is now the official clinical diagnosis. More specifically, people with ADHD tend to:

- Fail to give close attention to details
- Have difficulty sustaining attention to tasks
- Do not seem to be listening
- Fail to follow directions completely
- Forget or lose important things
- Feel restless; fidget, squirm
- Run or climb excessively
- Often talk excessively

Nonverbal Learning Disorder

www.nlda.org

A neurological disorder that causes varying degrees of problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative, and holistic processing. Characteristics include:
Advanced verbal and auditory memory
Lack of coordination, balance
Poor visual recall
Difficulty with spatial relations
Inability to comprehend nonverbal communication
Difficulty adjusting to transitions, novel situations
Deficits in social judgement

Sensory Processing Disorder

www.spdfoundation.net

A condition that exists when sensory signals don't get organized in the brain into appropriate responses, resulting in motor clumsiness, behavioral problems, anxiety, and the like, within a wide spectrum of severity such as sensitivity to touch, light, sound, food, and/or other sensory input. Other cases show little reaction to stimulation such as extreme hot and cold.

Autism

www.autism-society.org

Autism is a complex developmental disability defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a spectrum disorder that affects individuals to varying degrees. Persons with autism may be identified by:

- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g., hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- Persistent fixation on parts of objects

Asperger Syndrome

www.aspergersyndrome.org

An autism spectrum disorder, people with AS have a normal intellectual capacity ("a different, not defective, way of thinking") but have other characteristics which include:

- Failure to develop friendships
- Impaired use of non-verbal behaviors (facial expression, body language)
- Lack of empathy
- Impaired ability to identify non-verbal cues
- Literal interpretation of language
- Unusual intensity and focus on a special interest
- Preference for routine and consistency
- Motor clumsiness
- Auditory and tactile hypersensitivity
- Give considerable attention to detail over the "big picture"

PDD-NOS

www.autismspeaks.org/navigating/pdd_nos.php

Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified is a condition on the autism spectrum where some, but not all, of the symptoms associated with classic autism can be identified. This can include difficulty socializing with others, repetitive behaviors, and heightened sensitivities to certain stimuli.

Do's and Don'ts with Disruptive Children

Don't...

...make assumptions about the reason for the behavior.

...dish out consequences or ultimatums for disruptive behavior.

...forgo the rules and expectations.

...compare one child's behavior with that of the others.

...define or label a child based on his/her behavior.

The hurt that troubled children and youth cause is never greater than the pain they feel.

- Dr. Richard Lavoie

Do...

...assume that there is always a reason for disruptive behavior.

...use positive reinforcement instead of relying only on punishment; offer choices.

...seek out the cause of the behavior after the episode is over and *take time to listen* to the child.

...request desired behaviors rather than focusing on undesirable behaviors.

...provide indirect praise for desired behaviors.

...remember that positive relationships make all the difference in the world.

...pray for and with the children.

Based on work by Dr. Richard Lavoie

Some Tips for Welcoming Children with Learning Disabilities In Your Educational Ministries Programs

- ❖ Get to know the child's parents and ask for their input and advice often. They are the experts for that particular child. Then make a plan. Public school special educators can help as well.
- ❖ Offer disability awareness and sensitivity/hospitality training in your congregation (see the Disabilities section of the bibliography). Involve the support of the pastor.
- ❖ Make religious education less like school (Faith is not measured by intelligence or rate of growth):
 - Mix age groups
 - Provide experiential activities
 - Focus on relationships
 - Engage the class in storytelling
 - Be consistent and predictable
 - Always explain what's coming next
 - Teach through example that God loves everyone
 - Utilize Multiple Intelligences (see attached handout)

These tips were compiled from information found in the Disabilities section of the bibliography.

Resources for Including Children with Learning Disabilities in the Church

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Tony Attwood (ISBN-10: 1853025771; ISBN-13: 978-1853025778)

A complete introduction by the world's leading authority on Asperger's Syndrome.

Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practice Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns by Brenda Smith Myles and Jack Southwick (ISBN-10: 0967251435; ISBN-13: 978-0967251431)

Brenda Smith Myles is a leading expert in Asperger's Syndrome in the US who provides helpful advice for de-escalating turbulent situations for children with Asperger's Syndrome.

Asperger's and Girls by Tony Attwood. ed. (ISBN-10: 193256540X; ISBN-13: 978-1932565409)
Experts throughout the world have contributed their knowledge and experience of Asperger's Syndrome in girls through their essays on the subject.

This Is Asperger Syndrome by Elisa Gagnon and Brenda Smith Myles (ISBN-10: 0967251419; ISBN-13: 978-0967251417), ages 6-12

An introduction to Asperger's Syndrome for siblings, peers and other children through brief vignettes and whimsical black-and-white cartoon drawings.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon (ISBN-10: 1400032717; ISBN-13: 978-1400032716)

A novel written by a man who has worked with people with autism and has effectively crafted a believable story that gets one inside the mind of a teenager with Asperger's Syndrome.

OASIS (Online Asperger's Syndrome Information Support)
www.aspergersyndrome.org

Tony Attwood: the world's leading authority on Asperger's Syndrome
www.tonyattwood.com/au

Asperger's Association of New England
www.aane.org

Autism

Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders by Barbara J. Newman (ISBN-10: 1592552730; ISBN-13: 978-1592552733)

Thinking In Pictures: My Life with Autism by Temple Grandin (ISBN-10: 0307739589; ISBN-13: 978-0307739582)

As a person with autism, Temple Grandin explains the condition from her very personal perspective.

Autism and the God Connection by William Stillman (ISBN-10: 1402206496; ISBN-13: 978-1402206498)

Extraordinary accounts of spiritual giftedness in autistic children and adults.

Captain Tommy by Abby Ward Messner (ISBN-10: 1885477589; ISBN-13: 978-1885477583), grades 1-4

A story of the way one boy becomes an important contributor to the life of a fellow student with autism.

Autism Research Institute

www.autism.com

Future Horizons: World Leader in Books, DVDs, and Conferences on Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

www.fhautism.com

Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood Through Adulthood by Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey (ISBN-10: 0684801280; ISBN-13: 978-0684801285)

A helpful overview of ADD that continually emphasizes its special, positive qualities.

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

www.chadd.org

Attention Deficit Disorder Association: Helping Adults with ADHD Lead Better Lives

www.add.org

Sensory Processing Disorder

The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Stock Kranowitz (ISBN-10: 0399531653; ISBN-13: 978-0399531651)

Carol Stock Kranowitz is the leading authority on this problem in which the central nervous system misinterprets messages from the senses.

Asperger Syndrome and Sensory Issues: Practical Solutions for Making Sense of the World by Brenda Smith Myles and others (ISBN-10: 0967251478; ISBN-13: 978-0967251479)

Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation

www.spdfoundation.net

Disabilities

Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities by Barbara J. Newman (ISBN-10: 1562127772; ISBN-13: 978-1562127770)

Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities by Sally Patton (ISBN-10: 1558964797; ISBN-13: 978-1558964792)

Includes a chapter entitled, "Religious Education That Welcomes All Children."

Rhythms of Grace: Worship and Faith Formation for Children and Families with Special Needs by Audrey Scanlan and Linda Snyder (ISBN-10: 1606740555; ISBN-13: 978-1606740552)

Written for use in the Episcopal church, but adaptable for all denominations. Helpful information on what to know about autism.

UCC Disabilities Ministries

www.uccdm.org

Accessible To All (A2A) Study Guide

Friendship Ministries (resources for sharing God's love with people who have cognitive impairments)

www.friendship.org

UCC Bibliography for Disabilities Ministries

www.ucc.org/education/bibliographies/pfd/disabilities-ministries.pdf

National Organization on Disability

www.nod.org

There is nothing more unequal
than the equal treatment
of unequals.

- Dr. Richard Lavoie