

SOME STRATEGY SUGGESTIONS – A SUMMARY

- **Attend to Communication - Receptive/Expressive/Combination**
 - Is it happening? What are the capabilities?
 - Use shorter phrases; Avoid speaking in the negative; Wait before repeating yourself
 - Visualize sequenced directions
 - Avoid misunderstandings
- **Preparation for Transitions - Advance Warning Systems***
Verbal countdown Picture or word schedule Concrete language
- **Using Visuals to Reinforce What We Say***
- **Writing Stories to Help Anticipate New Situations***
- **Thinking Alongside the Person***
- **Behavior Supports**
 - Schedules (Promotes Independence; Provides predictability; Allows Self-Mgt)
 - Making Routines Comfortable*
 - Task Analysis
 - Shaping
 - Prompt and Fade
- **"Faith at Home" work**

* Barbara J. Newman. *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2006.

"FAITH AT HOME" WORK **Some Tips for Parents**

- **Say basic prayers every night with your child.**
- **Listen to religious songs with your child.**
- **Play a matching game with pictures of people important in the Church and your parish.**
- **Take photographs of important elements and places in your church. Make flash cards out of them or a "Church Tour."**
- **Visit your church with your child when no one is around.**
- **Have the child match the picture to the actual object in your church.**
- **Tell the child how long the Mass or liturgy will be.**
- **Incorporate Catholic ritual and expressions of faith into your home and family life as much as possible.**

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CLERGY, CATECHETICAL LEADERS & CATECHISTS
SUGGESTIONS FOR CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITIES, LEARNING OR DEVELOPMENTAL

- ✦ Present an overall attitude of openness and a desire to be supportive.
- ✦ Let the parent(s) know that your goal is to provide as positive an experience as possible. Therefore, certain information would be helpful.
- ✦ Ask the parent(s) what they are hoping for.
 - ♥ Specifically, are they hoping for inclusion in a 'mainstream' religious education group with his/her peers? Potential possibilities are inclusion with the appropriate supports, within a group for children with special needs, one-on-one religious education or some combination.
- ✦ What are his/her special interests?
- ✦ What are his/her special gifts?
- ✦ How would they describe his/her social relationships?
- ✦ What methods of communication are used?
- ✦ What have been effective learning strategies?
- ✦ Are there any aggressive or inappropriate behaviors?
- ✦ What are possible triggers of aggressive or inappropriate behavior?
- ✦ What is helpful for holding his/her attention?
- ✦ Are they willing to share a copy of his/her IEP, or at least what the requirements of it are?
 - ♥ It is important to recognize and respect the confidential nature of such a document.
 - ♥ Again, let them know that the reason for requesting it is to improve the quality of the experience for their child.
- ✦ Does she/he have any diet or environmental issues?
- ✦ Does she/he have any medical issues you need to be aware of?
- ✦ As you do with any new family, it is good to get a sense of the role that faith plays in their life. Remember, also, though, if they have not been able to attend worship regularly, it may be because they are very de-energized from dealing with disability in their family. A welcoming community can go a long way to helping them participate more.
- ✦ Is there anything else the parent(s) would like to share about their son/daughter?

ONE TASK, MANY ROLES

The one task is supported inclusive religious education, yet there are many ways that people in your community can contribute. It is possible for people with a wide variety of skills, time availability and/or interest to contribute to the task. Not everyone needs to be a catechist. As for any role involved in religious education, training is required to support the level of interaction of the task.

1. Catechist – Catechist with skills as an educator, particularly special education, although does not necessarily need to be professionally trained. Sense of humor and flexibility are a huge asset.
2. Aides/Assistants - Caring adults who can be present in groups to be extra eyes, hands, legs and hearts. Sense of humor and flexibility are a huge asset.
3. Teen Aides - Caring teens who can be present in groups to be extra eyes, hands, legs and hearts. Sense of humor and flexibility are a huge asset.
4. Buddys – Someone who will support one person in particular in a larger group, in a noninvasive way. Buddies would also be very helpful for modeling/teaching particular behaviors for worship. Sense of humor and flexibility are a huge asset.
5. Inclusion Consultants – People with special education background that can serve as consultant/support for catechists.
6. Hall 'Monitors' – Some facilities have many entrances and exits. It's good to have extra people around for the restroom and keeping in those who belong inside and keeping out those who belong outside.
7. Crafters – Some materials/activities may require extra preparation for children with limited fine motor skills. It can be a huge help to religious educators if someone else can prepare the material once he/she has determined what is needed.
 - a. For people with limited or no ability to read, it is beneficial to adapt the materials used. For example make books interactive to allow for matching or selection of important items in a picture; creating story boards for storytelling.
 - b. People with computer skills talented graphics software, such as Boardmaker, to make picture schedules or social stories, and/or can use a digital camera for the same purpose or to make a "Tour" of your community's worship space.
8. Audio Recorders – Someone with a good speaking voice to record prayers, songs, and other catechetical material. This is especially for children with visual impairments or who are blind, but also helpful for others, particularly children with attention issues.
9. Special Needs Coordinator or Assistant – This person expands the bandwidth of the religious education director. **As an assistant**, someone who can make the phone calls to schedule meetings and make contact for adaptive services noted above. **As a coordinator**, the person could reach out to families who have indicated special needs on the registration form for their child, and/or coordinate the "religious education IEP" process for the program. Sense of humor and flexibility are a huge asset for both. Understanding of education process is helpful for coordinator.

Remember, people with autism and/or other disabilities are also called to serve and love to contribute. They can do some of the tasks above, or others in the life of the congregation. Let their gifts and your creativity guide you.

INCLUSION IN YOUR CHURCH: TIPS TO PARENTS FROM A PARENT*

1. Introduce yourself and your child to someone on your pastoral staff before you attend, if possible. Ask if there are other children or adults with autism in the congregation. Explain what autism is, and your child's limitations and potential. But first, let them know how important participation in a religious community is to your family, and that this is an area of concern for many families.
2. Offer to help provide information, educational opportunities, or people who can assist religious educators to include your child. Professionals may be quite willing to give guidance to religious educators and to help figure out how to adapt a curriculum. There may be other ways that you as a parent can volunteer in the religious education program to help overall teaching and staffing resources. There are also on-line resources and materials.
3. Find a family oriented worship service where a little noise is not uncommon.
4. If your child is too young to pay attention to the service, bring books or other engaging toys to occupy the child.
5. If the expectations are for children to sit in a religious service for 45-60 minutes or more, make sure the child is able to do this at home first, or has an opportunity to practice.
6. Figure out a way to come to the sanctuary with your child and go through the steps of the service so it is familiar space. Practice can happen outside the service and at home. Video modeling—a video of what happens in the service and what people do— can be a way of helping a child learn visually.
7. Use concrete language and visual aides when instructing your child.
8. Use a digital camera to make a picture book of your worship service and space, important parts of the service, key people, etc. You can use the pictures to help a child learn the names of the places, actions, and people. Practice at home; reward the child when he/she labels them in public.
9. Find something in the worship service that your child enjoys and can participate in and succeed at to make attending services fun for your child.
10. Learn how to use a motivational system and then make it as discrete as possible.

* Adapted from "Inclusion in Faith Communities: Some Tips for Getting Started" by Mary Beth Walsh and Bill Gaventa, Autism and Faith Task Force. A collaborative effort of COSAC of New Jersey and The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities.