

11. Be creative.

- Instead of trying to figure out how to get a child who uses a wheelchair into the second floor classroom, think about moving the classroom into an accessible area of the building.
- With small adaptations, children with disabilities can participate in most activities. For example, a child in a wheelchair can help pass out classroom materials by simply having the children come to him or her instead of the other way around.

To order copies of this brochure, contact Kirsty DePree, coordinator for discipleship, at (800) 968-3943 or kdepree@rca.org



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Including Children with Disabilities in Your Spiritual Community

RCA Task Force on Disabilities

Tips for Including Children with Disabilities

1. Develop an attitude with your entire congregation that you are including all children.
2. Remember that children with disabilities are more like other children than they are different.
3. Use appropriate language. Teach and model “people first” language. For example, “Joey is a child with autism,” not “Joey is an autistic child.”
4. Be a positive role model. The children will watch you closely and will be strongly influenced by your attitudes and behaviors.
5. Prepare all children—children with disabilities and all other children—for inclusion in the classroom.
 - Deal directly with other children’s reactions to the disability.
 - Explain to the children that they cannot catch the disability.
 - Encourage all children to be sensitive.
 - Enhance positive attitudes and positive experiences.
 - Allow the child with the disability to visit the classroom; explain who will be there and the typical routine.
6. Seek training and support for the staff.
 - Locate community resources for training and information.
 - Research what other spiritual communities are doing to include children with disabilities in their programs. This is a way of gaining new ideas and strategies.
 - Use parents and caregivers as resources.
 - Ask them what works best.
 - Find out what strategies are used in other environments (school, home).
7. Create a classroom notebook for each child. Include in the notebook:
 - a registration form
 - a child profile form
 - emergency/medical information
8. Train children without disabilities to become classroom buddies and peer tutors to enhance learning for all children in the classroom.
 - Provide opportunities to develop compassion and sensitivity.
 - Teach acceptance and tolerance that can be passed along.
9. Take notice of the progress that each child is making. Make sure that children benefit in some way from your efforts.
10. Plan activities that will open the community for the child. Try to choose places that are accessible to children with disabilities and that will allow them to participate fully with the group.

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