

# WORKING WITH ALL ABILITIES

VBS is filled with all kinds of kids—kids with different abilities, kids who've never been to church, kids who come maybe 3–4 times a year, and of course, kids you see every Sunday! With such a wide array of children, the challenge is how to make sure that each child feels welcomed and engaged.

In your crew times, help these children by giving instructions one at a time, ignoring harmless annoying behaviors, and praising children sincerely and often. Use the positive-language suggestions in the “What’s a Crew Leader?” page in the Crew Leader Guide. Use this document as a resource for other helpful tips.

## Adaptations for Those New to Your Church ... or Church at all

- **Play name games** every day. Hearing that someone knows his/her name can even better help a new child feel at ease. Helping him/her make friends who also know his/her name? Even better.
- **Explain expectations.** Take time to talk about what the day will look like, what rotations kids will go to, or how they will be moving around campus. Cover rules briefly as mentioned in assembly and with any specifics for your crew or space.
- **Be patient** with kids who don't know “church” rules, such as staying quiet while someone is praying, focusing during Bible story time, following safety guidelines, and so forth. In fact, give instruction before doing those things so that expectations are clear.
- **Don't embarrass any child.** Speak quietly, at eye level, and one-on-one when guidance is necessary.
- **Stay away from “church-ese.”** Speak their language. Define church words often. Some won't know who Jesus is, what sin is, what it means to be born again, what it means to be baptized, or what “resurrection” or “rose again” mean.
- **Teach Bible skills** as if no one has ever heard them so a child doesn't feel like the odd one out. This is especially true for older kids. Many will not know how to find a specific Bible book or verse. Some may not even truly know what a Bible is. Refer to your “*Helping Kids Learn to Use Their Bibles*” page.
- **Remind kids of details.** Take time daily to remind kids of what was learned during previous sessions. This will help new kids as well as those who might struggle with remembering from day to day.



## If More Support is Needed

When you learn that one of your crew members is disabled in some way, tell the VBS Director. She will find out from parents or caretakers about specific needs, such as whether kids have special equipment such as wheelchairs, what kids can and cannot eat, what kids need help doing, and what kids like to do for themselves; then she will pass this information on to you and other volunteers your crew will interact with.

**We may be able to provide an aide** for a child who requires assistance because of a disability. The aide can assist one-on-one, monitor safety at all times, can reteach or redirect during a Bible story or activity, and/or can alter the environment as needed (such as moving chairs out of the way for a wheelchair to have table access).

## Adaptions for those with Learning Disabilities

Educators estimate that up to 20% of today's children have some type of learning disability. This means that in a program with 200 kids, up to 40 kids could be living with dyslexia, ADHD, or other learning disabilities. Children with neurological differences aren't lazy or unintelligent, they just learn differently from other children. Here are some tips for working with kiddos who have learning differences:

- **Level the playing field.** Do things most kids will handle equally well. For example, don't rely heavily on reading skills or an already acquired knowledge of Biblical things, even with older kids. Ask for volunteers to read, and don't push.
- **Use visual cues as well as audio** to help kids who think more visually.
- **Use actions or body movements** for Scripture memory, story review, etc. This will help kids who need to keep their bodies moving to engage with the information.
- **Ask your YoGger to work directly as an aide** for a student who needs extra attention. Work with your YoGger to help him/her know how to encourage their friend to pay attention, wait their turn, or obey simple instructions.
- **Reach out for help when you need it.** We want every child and grown-up (including you!) to feel successful at the end of each day. We hope every kid will want to come back tomorrow. If you have a challenging situation in your group or area, reach out to staff on your break or in the afternoon for some ideas.
- **Be gracious.** Our goal is always that our kids would feel loved more than anything, both by us and ultimately, by Christ. Slow down when you need to, breathe deeply, and love BIG. Every kid needs your grace and kindness more than your information.
- **Be patient.** A huge advantage of the small crews and plentiful help is that kids can process in their own time. Allow kids to do all they can on their own, with one-on-one support or extra time as needed.

## Adaptations for those with Physical Disabilities

**Make environmental changes** so that those with special needs are able to participate.

- Move floor activities to a tabletop so kids with mobility issues or in wheelchairs can more easily participate.
- Increase the font size of handouts or posters to improve visibility for those with vision limitations.
- Use a clear color contrast for print such as a black background with white print or a white background with black print.

**Adapt activities** to allow kids the opportunity to participate with a level of achievement.

- Provide pool noodles to extend reach for kids with limited mobility to reach things like posters on the wall (“Point to the \_\_\_\_.”) or to use in simple tag games like “Duck, Duck, Goose.”
- Offer options that would include the child such as being the timekeeper or scorekeeper and be sure these are offered to others as well so that no one feels singled out unnecessarily.

**Modify content** for the kids.

- Provide a visual schedule (icons or pictures to represent the day’s sequence of events). Hang this on the focal wall or another easily visible location.
- Use picture cues whenever possible for learning and review.

