



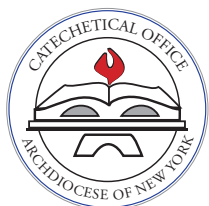
RECOGNIZING THE GIFT



Handing On the Faith with Excellence

A Parish Resource Guide for
Welcoming Children with Disabilities

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A Parish Resource Guide for
Welcoming Children with Disabilities

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In Memory of

JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR

January 15, 1920 – May 3, 2000

Eighth Archbishop of New York

From 1984 until his death, John Cardinal O'Connor led the Archdiocese of New York with courage, candor, wit and kindness. One of the most distinguished churchmen in America, he remained at heart the idealistic young priest from Philadelphia who delighted in handing on the faith to children with developmental challenges. His love and advocacy for persons with all types of disabilities were hallmarks of his 55-year priesthood. As Archbishop of New York, he began the tradition of confirming children and youth with disabilities in St. Patrick's Cathedral on Pentecost. Those who knew him, worked with him, and loved him will never forget him.

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OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL
1011 FIRST AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY 10022

June 2014

Dear Friends in the Lord,

It is my joy to introduce this manual prepared by our Archdiocesan Catechetical Office, assisted by a grant from the Order of Malta (American Association) and dedicated to the memory of one of my esteemed predecessors, Cardinal John O'Connor, who had a special love for persons - especially youngsters - living with disabilities.

You will, I trust, find this manual helpful and encouraging in your efforts to ensure that members of your parish community living with disabilities receive the same opportunities as all others in coming to know, love, and serve the Lord.

Any parish outreach to a person with a disability, particularly through our dedicated catechists, must be based on Church teaching that every person is made in the image and likeness of God and, through baptism, is called to participate fully in the life of the Church. This manual helps make this possible so that every parishioner, with or without disabilities, is an active member of and can enrich their parish family.

A thank you to Sister Joan Curtin, CND, director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office, is in order for having overseen the preparation of this manual. As well, I am grateful to its authors, Mrs. Linda Sgammato, director of special religious education, and Sister Anne Ryan, PBVM, our archdiocese's first director of special religious education who continues to serve us as a consultant.

With prayerful best wishes, I am,

Faithfully in Christ,

Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York

FOREWORD

This guide contains over three decades of wisdom for directors and coordinators of religious education and catechists in our parishes. Why three decades? Because it represents the combined tenures and experiences of two seasoned, dedicated directors of special religious education for the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office: Mrs. Linda Sgammato, director of special religious education, and Sr. Anne Ryan, PBVM, who was our first director and now serves as consultant.

We in the Catechetical Office are deeply aware of the important place Catholics with disabilities have in their parishes. By their baptism, they are called to build the Kingdom to the best of their ability. It is our responsibility as religious educators to assist them in fulfilling this baptismal call.

Most of our parish catechists are not special education teachers and it is not necessary to have a special education degree in order provide opportunities that enable people with disabilities to take part in worship, to live their faith, and serve the Church. However, as our parish catechists and catechetical leaders have told us, they do need certain tools and approaches in order to work with persons with disabilities and their families.

To answer this need, Mrs. Sgammato and Sr. Anne have developed simple adaptations of the content and methodology they use as professional special educators. These adaptations will equip catechists who are called to this ministry, which is a “sacred calling,” with the necessary tools to hand on the faith to each child, youth or adult.

Every parish in the Archdiocese of New York probably has someone with disabilities in its community of faith. This manual will give the parish religious educator the confidence to meet that person wherever he or she may be in his or her journey of faith.

A word about the remarkable man to whom this manual is dedicated: John Cardinal O’Connor, archbishop of New York from 1984 to his death in 2000. God graced Cardinal O’Connor with the understanding that each child with special needs has a gift to give the world and the Church. From his days as a young priest-catechist for children with developmental disabilities to his collaboration with the Catechetical Office, to those memorable Pentecost Sundays at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, where he conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation to children and youth with disabilities, the Cardinal recognized and celebrated the gifts they brought to the people of God in this archdiocese. Both his successors, Edward Cardinal Egan and now Cardinal Timothy Michael Dolan, have continued his mission.

As director of the Archdiocese Catechetical Office, I want to express my gratitude to Mrs. Sgammato and Sr. Anne for creating this manual. I would be remiss if I did not also note the contributions of Miss Anne Coghlan, who also served this office as director of special religious education and went on to become director of the Archdiocesan Office for Persons with Disabilities. I also thank the members of the staff of the Catechetical Office for their input and insights.

A special thank-you to the Order of Malta, American Association, U.S.A., whose generous grant has helped make the publication of this manual possible.

My deep gratitude, of course, goes to the parish directors and coordinators of religious education and the catechists for their ministry to persons with disabilities. Finally and most importantly of all, I thank all those children and their families who have enriched and will continue to enrich our Church and our lives by their witness.

Sr. Joan Curtin, CND, Director
The Archdiocesan Catechetical Office



Much of this guide would seem aimed at placing the child in a small separate group, or in a one-on-one situation. However, many children with a disability, can be placed in the regular grade level class, with a knowledgeable and patient Catechist. Throughout this guide, are suggestions for understanding and helping children who have Asperger Syndrome, ADHD, hearing disability or mild cognitive needs participate in the regular session.

INTRODUCTION

*“We are a single flock under the care of a single shepherd.
There can be no separate Church for persons with Disabilities”*

*— Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities
USCCB, 1998*

As a catechetical leader, you do have everything you need to welcome, support, and catechize the children in your parish who have disabilities. You will find that the efforts you make on behalf of particular children have a way of reaching a much wider sphere. By extending an invitation to all families to take part in faith formation, you set a tone of inclusion and provide a model of acceptance for all those under your leadership.

Meeting the needs of children with disabilities takes time and is accomplished with a step-by-step approach. This manual will increase your awareness of what is needed for a successful experience. It will help you learn how to welcome and support the family, observe the child’s abilities, gather information from the regular school setting, including the Individual Educational Plan (IEP), understand the particular disability, review and choose simplified and appropriate curriculum, and finally, identify and support a catechist.

As you meet the challenge of accepting and assisting the child with disabilities, expect your own faith to grow. The ultimate purpose of this manual is to help you discover the giftedness and sacredness of those very persons whom Jesus, in his earthly ministry, repeatedly touched with his kindness and graciousness.



*Encountering
the
Disability*

DID YOU KNOW...?

- Children with disabilities are not bound by a required Religious Education curriculum. Their presence in the program is the most valuable part of their curriculum. Within the program they become aware of their acceptance into the family of the Church and experience firsthand the kindness and love that Jesus extends to all in his family.
- The child with a disability does not have to attend the 90-minute session required of other students. The timing and frequency of instruction can be adapted to the child's particular needs and abilities.
- The catechist for children with disabilities does not need a background in special education. Simplified textbooks and methodologies are now available to help catechists meet the needs of these children.
- Almost all children with disabilities can be prepared in a simplified manner to receive the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation.
- Although all children are encouraged to learn and pray the basic prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, Sign of the Cross), memorization of these prayers is not a requirement to receive the sacraments. Many children with disabilities have great difficulty memorizing. For some children and parents, requiring such memorization can cause anxiety and stress.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation may be received (and is often recommended to be received) at a later date, rather than just prior to receiving First Eucharist.
- The Archdiocese of New York provides a special diocesan-wide Confirmation for children with disabilities in an atmosphere of understanding, acceptance, and a family-friendly celebration!
- The Archdiocese will provide ongoing support, presence, and resources for those parishes that initiate a Special Religious Education component. For assistance in meeting the needs of children with disabilities, contact the director of special religious education (see Resources).

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

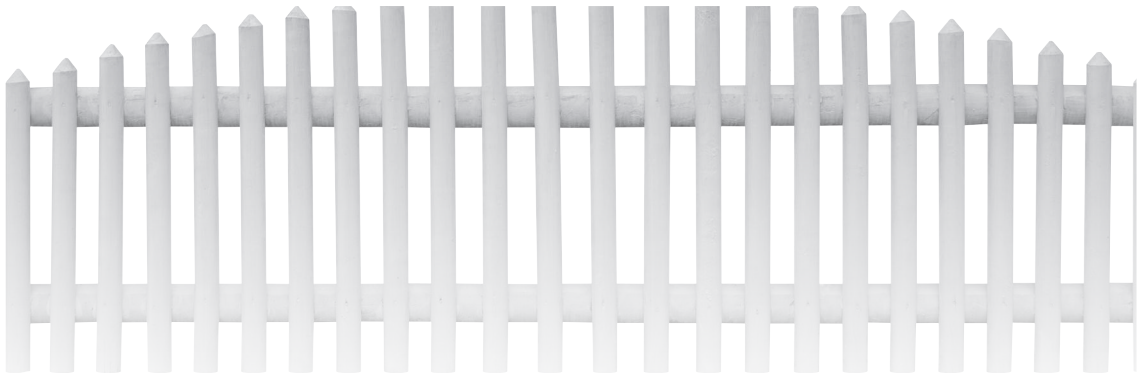
Sooner or later, you will come face to face with a family who wants their child with a disability to be part of your parish religious education program. Your initial response is crucial because it sets the tone for your future relationship. This most important initial response does not have anything to do with how much you know or don't know about the disability. It has everything to do with your openness and willingness to include all children. It requires that you react not with sentimentality or pity but in the firm belief that this child does belong in the program. If you convey openness and a genuine desire to be supportive, your positive attitude will ease the anxiety of the family who needs to know that their child is accepted and included.

MOVING THE FENCE

“During the Second World War, two soldiers carried their dead comrade many miles to a French village. Wanting to give their friend a decent burial, they asked the village priest if they might bury their friend in the parish cemetery. The problem was that the deceased was not a Catholic. The priest said that they could bury their friend just outside the cemetery.

The two soldiers later returned to the village to visit the grave of their friend, but could not find the grave. They went to see the priest. Father explained that he began to feel very sorry for insisting that the dead soldier be buried outside the cemetery's fence. He got up in the middle of the night and moved the fence to include their friend's resting place.”

*From Reflections on Inclusive Education by Patrick Macken, C.R.,
Inclusion Press, 24 Thome Crescent, Toronto, Ontario, M6H2S5 Canada.*



When you respond to the need of a family, you reflect the face of the God of inclusion. When you say “yes” to include their child, you are saying “yes” to the whole family. Your “yes” means we are truly a Church that will move fences to make sure that there is a place for everyone.

WELCOMING THE FAMILY

“The Pastor, in accord with norms established by the Diocesan Bishop, is to ensure that catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally impeded, insofar as their condition permits. This requires the Pastor to provide religious education for persons with disabilities”

— Code of Canon Law, Canon 777, #4.

Your work in the parish as a director/coordinator of religious education requires you to be a welcoming person. This is particularly important when it comes to children with disabilities and their families. The director/coordinator can become a witness of inclusion for the entire parish community. Without signs of welcome and acceptance from you, families may hesitate to come forward; some may turn away completely.

Making time for families with children who have disabilities is possibly the single most important step you can take. But how do you do this when you face a demanding schedule yourself and are already pressed for time? Here are some suggestions.

- Get the word out early for the following year's registration (late spring for the fall classes) that your parish desires to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Use the parish bulletin and website to announce specific days and times that you will be available for appointments with families.

Sample Bulletin Announcement

St. Michael's welcomes all children into our parish religious education program. If you have a family member with disabilities and want to register your child for religious education in the parish program, please call the Director/Coordinator at 999-9999 or e-mail dre@churchmail.com.

- Schedule appointments with families for times when you will not be pressured for time or interrupted. Allow enough time to adequately listen to their needs and desires for their child.
- Reassure the family that their child belongs to the parish faith community and that you will find the best possible way for the child to participate in the life of the parish. Acknowledge that you may need time to find the "best fit" for the child. Remain in contact with the family as you do your planning and research.
- Relieve any anxiety families may express about reception of the sacraments, class time requirements, or memorization. Help parents understand that the sacraments are for all of God's people and that their children will not be excluded. Share the document *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* (see Resources). Putting families at ease will, in turn, relieve pressure on you to move too hastily toward a solution.
- Help parents who have children with disabilities connect with one another by organizing an informal meeting. The opportunity to network and support one another within the parish can help families overcome a sense of isolation and meet their own needs. Once the group is formed, you can step back.
- Organize a night of information for families and invite the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office's director of special religious education to share the most current information on the Church's response to persons with disabilities.

Once children with disabilities enter a program, be sure to include the parish in the welcoming process. At Sunday Mass the celebrant could explain that children with disabilities are now a part of the religious education program and parishioners may see them at Mass. Some children may exhibit atypical behavior. What may appear to parishioners as disruptive, undisciplined behavior might well be an inability on the part of the children to control some of their behaviors, actions, and sounds. A brief explanation to parishioners helps relieve the anxiety parents may feel about attending Mass with their child.

The background of the slide features a series of overlapping, curved, grey shapes that resemble stylized leaves or petals. These shapes are layered, with some appearing more prominent than others, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Overview of Disabilities

What are the spiritual needs of children with disabilities? How will you assess and meet the child and family who have come to you for help? While this manual cannot address every disability, it does examine those that are most likely to surface in a Religious Education program. Some disabilities are physical, others affect the way the brain functions, and others are emotional. Disabilities often involve overlapping issues, so even if a family comes to you with a particular disability, we encourage you to read about them all.

Understanding the Child with a Physical Disability

Children with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and other disabilities that limit mobility can usually be accommodated in the regular program, provided a building is handicap-accessible and the director/coordinator is creative in overcoming structural restrictions. Certain exceptions in terms of attendance, amount of work covered, and general sacramental requirements or projects might need to be made. Since some children with serious physical problems are more prone to colds, viruses, and seasonal illnesses, attendance flexibility may be required.

Children who are deaf or seriously hearing-impaired: Children with a hearing disability may need specialized help to be part of a parish Religious Education program. Assistance in meeting the catechetical needs of these children may be sought through collaboration with the Catholic Deaf Centers in Manhattan (see Resources).

Children who are blind or seriously vision-impaired: Children with a vision disability may also need specialized help to be part of a parish religious education program. The director/coordinator should contact the Catechetical Office director of special religious education for help in evaluating, planning for, and supporting a child who is blind or seriously vision-impaired. The Xavier Society (see Resources) can assist in providing Braille copies of religion textbooks, provided sufficient time is allowed to produce a translation.

Understanding the Child with an Intellectual Disability

Children with intellectual disabilities develop in the same way as persons who are not intellectually delayed but at a slower rate, and they reach a lower overall level of functioning. They have unusual difficulty with learning and social development. Intellectual disabilities can be mild to severe, depending on the cause of the disability. Children with Down Syndrome are included in the group of persons with intellectual disabilities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

- **Inability to abstract.** The child has difficulty understanding the printed word or making a connection between the physical world and the abstract. Concepts like “courage” or “trust” can be meaningless without examples or stories; it is always much better to read the story first and then teach the word. A child’s physical surroundings are frequently confined to home, school, church, and doctor; this limited physical exposure also hampers the child’s ability to make connections.
- **Difficulty seeing cause and effect.** Often the child does not grasp that performing a particular action will result in a particular consequence. This inability to connect cause and effect impacts the child’s ability to socialize and impairs problem solving.
- **Poor self-concept.** A child with an intellectual delay often experiences failure, rejection, and lack of friends. This can cause the child to feel lonely or worthless. The child needs to be praised, complimented, and affirmed on every effort he or she makes. Because of fear of failure, the child often refuses to try new things and can appear to be stubborn.
- **Short memory span.** The child has difficulty remembering what was previously learned. Repetition is the core of this child’s learning. The catechist may be bored, but the child will feel a great sense of accomplishment in repeating what has become familiar and soothing. The child loves the same snacks, the same stories, the same songs. Once the memory is prodded with a familiar cue, the child will take delight in responding.
- **Limited learning capacity.** The child’s capacity for learning is limited, and there are problems transferring what is learned in one area to another area. The child cannot absorb too many concepts at a time. At other times, the child will focus on a single concept and apply it to everything he or she learns. For example, everything becomes a sin.
- **Short attention span.** The child can be very easily distracted. A cluttered room can interfere with the child’s ability to focus.

Suggestions for Working with the Child Who Is Intellectually Challenged

A catechist needs to understand that, for children with limited mental ability, experiences of community, acceptance, and patience are of much greater value than any textbook or factual information we are able to pass on. The child who is unable to remember what has been taught will never forget what it feels like to be a loved, accepted, and treasured member of Christ’s family, the Church. It is crucial that the catechist is well prepared to meet the needs of the intellectually challenged child. Here are some approaches the catechist can take.

- **Expand the child’s horizons.** Rather than talking about the church, take the child to see the church. Visit the sacristy and show the child the articles of the Mass. Let the child meet the priest instead of just hearing about him.
- **Engage the senses.** Provide short sessions and engage as many senses as possible to hold the child’s interest and attention. When using a textbook, focus in on a particular picture and teach around what the picture is portraying.
- **Keep it simple.** Begin with simple terminology that the child can understand. As the child grows more familiar and comfortable with the concepts, you can introduce more precise language.

SIMPLE	ADVANCED
God's house	Church
Jesus bread, God's holy bread	Communion
The Jesus cup	chalice
The Jesus table	altar
Jesus' friends	apostles
God's holy meal	Mass

Avoid extraneous details when teaching a new idea. Keep sentences short and uncluttered.

YES	<i>"Mary is God's mother."</i>
NO	<i>"We know Mary is God's mother because we read it in God's holy book."</i>

In teaching about God, start with Jesus and then introduce "Father God." Using the word "God" to refer to both the Father and Jesus is initially confusing to all children but especially to children who have developmental disabilities.

- **Remain flexible.** There will be days when all the child can handle is to quietly play a game or listen to a story. On those occasions, the catechist can model God's unconditional love by just "being" with the child in a loving supportive manner.
- **Be firm.** Remember, you are the boss. Don't allow the child to manipulate you. Young children with Down syndrome are champions at touching your heart. Children with developmental disabilities truly do need the catechist to be in control of the direction the lesson takes. Be sure to pose questions that offer concrete direction.

YES	<i>"Would you like to color or would you like to work with clay?"</i>
NO	<i>"What would you like to do?"</i>

- **Constantly review, repeat, and connect.** The catechist has to make the associations and connections for the child. Every lesson should begin with a review of concepts previously taught. Don't begin a lesson with a question unless you give the answer right away. When children feel they do not know the answer, they will become insecure and withdrawn.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD WITH AUTISM

Autism is a physical disability of the brain that affects the way a child processes information or responds to stimuli. It is important to remember that autism cannot be “disciplined” away. Autism is not a singular disorder but a continuum of conditions with overlapping symptoms.

Characteristics of Autism

Children with autism have great difficulty with change: change of routine, change of place, change of catechist. Routine and repetition are paramount needs in their lives. Their intellectual abilities are highly variable. Many children with autism are exceptionally bright but do not have the language ability to communicate. Some communicate only at certain times with certain people. Some will talk only about a particular topic that interests them. The characteristics described here may be present in varying degrees in children who have autism.

- **Avoidance of eye contact and/or disinterest in interacting socially.**
- **Echolalia.** Echolalia is the constant repetition of words previously heard. The child repeats the words randomly, sometimes hours after he has heard them. Throughout the movie “Rain Man,” Raymond, a man with autism, repeats with many different inflections, “I’m an excellent driver!” Many times echolalia is an effort to communicate a certain idea.
- **Unusual or highly repetitive play with toys or objects.** This play may involve unusual body gestures. The child may lack facial expression and have an abrasive-sounding voice.
- **Difficulty in relating to another person’s perspective.** The child appears oblivious to or ignores another person’s distress. For example, the child sees an adult crying but remains focused on getting a glass of orange juice for himself/herself.
- **Difficulty with any change in routine.** The child must have the same snack given by the same person, or must use the same box of crayons while sitting in the same seat.
- **Heightened sensitivity to sound.** Group singing or any musical sound may cause physical distress.
- **Heightened sensitivity to light.** Fluorescent lighting may cause distress.
- **Heightened sensitivity to touch.** Even a gentle tap on the shoulder by the adult catechist can cause some children with autism to flinch, cry out, or scream.
- **Impaired social skill.** Many children with autism must be taught how to look at the person who is speaking to them and to greet or acknowledge other persons in the group. They are frequently unaware of personal space when dealing with others.

Suggestions for Working with the Child Who Has Autism

It is important to talk with parents or guardians about the characteristics of their child. Since autism is as varied as the number of autistic children, parents can give important information as to what works with their child. If possible, review the child's individualized education plan (IEP) from school. An IEP is drawn up for every child with a disability. Information in the IEP can help the catechist gauge the child's interest and strengths.

- **Use icons.** Since most autistic children have trouble processing information, the use of standard religion textbooks may be too intricate. For some autistic children, every item in the picture is equally important; a cloud in the sky may be more important to the child than the image of Jesus. Using an icon of Jesus (an image of Jesus alone on a small card) helps the child to focus on Jesus. To tell the story of the loaves and fishes, introduce a single icon with each new part of the story; pictures of Jesus, the apostles, the boy, the loaves and fishes, the wicker baskets, and so forth are added as the story progresses. Flannel board stories or physical objects can also be used.
- **Keep speech simple.** Children with autism cannot deal with a lot of words. Keep sentences short and direct. Avoid overloading with words. Repeating phrases over and over may bore you, but children with autism love the repetitive sound.
- **Invite gestures.** For the child who is nonverbal, use icons and ask questions that can be "answered" by pointing or a gesture. Commands such as "Show me Jesus," "Give me Jesus," or "Pick up Jesus" help the child to focus and show understanding of the material.
- **Remove distractions.** Tangible materials should be organized and should relate to the lesson being taught. Keep materials, toys, or items not related to the day's lesson out of sight. Face desks or work tables away from windows or doors as any new image will distract the child. Choose a quiet work area, as the child with autism is unable to filter out background noise. Stray noises may distract the child from your voice.

ASPERGER SYNDROME

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism that impacts on the child's ability to communicate and socialize, among other limitations. It begins in childhood and persists throughout adulthood and affects the way the person reaches "common sense" perceptions, as well as the way they process information with other individuals. Children with Aspergers find human interaction challenging, and the way they use imagination and creative thought is usually very different from their peers. Aspergers is found more often among boys than girls.

Most children with Asperger's have average or above average IQs, with average or above average vocabularies and reading abilities. For this reason, many children can be mainstreamed into the regular catechetical program. Some children are registered by parents without the parent disclosing that the child has Asperger syndrome. Asperger Syndrome can be particularly challenging in a catechetical program because the child is often capable of learning the material but the child's mannerisms, behaviors, and interests set the child apart from the other children.

Some general characteristics of Asperger's which may affect the catechetical student are:

- **Obsessive interests**
Some become experts in a single topic or object. The subject can range from trains, computers, memorizing special dates, and even objects as strange as snakes, and collections of old VCR tapes. They can talk incessantly about their special interest whether or not anyone is listening or paying attention. The catechist may notice a tendency to fixate on particular aspects of the lesson. Angels, devils, or anything that hints of the magical or afterlife can easily become a focal point for their fixation.
- **Formal and/or Distinctive Speech**
Speech may be marked by lack of rhythm or odd intonations. Many appear like "little professors" with a very formal speech delivery and a superior attitude. Often they lack empathy or interests in another person's concerns or problems.
- **Routines**
Some children with Aspergers have rules and rituals which they methodically maintain. They become anxious or upset if there is a disruption to their patterned behaviors. If there is to be a change in their routine, preparation for the change must be prepared well in advance.
- **Social Isolation**
Because of their poor social skills and narrow interests, children with Aspergers are often isolated. They can become withdrawn and are often lonely because of their inability to connect with other children. They do not understand humor, figures of speech, or the need for appropriate distance or space when interacting with people.
- **Sensory Difficulties**
One or all of the senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch or taste) may be either intensified or underdeveloped. These children may have differing perceptions of loud noises, bright lights, intense smells, food textures and materials. Simple songs, a fire truck passing by, can cause a sudden and sometimes unusual response from the child. A light touch on the shoulder or the scrapping of a chair along the floor can cause a knee jerk reaction as the child may not perceive the touch or the sound in the same way as other children.

Working with a child who has Asperger syndrome can be challenging to the catechist. It can take a lot of patience to enter into that child's world, but the catechist will be blessed with the sense of knowing that the child's world can also be opened to the presence of a God who knows, accepts and loves that child.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER AND/OR A LEARNING DISABILITY

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is a focusing disorder. For various reasons, the child cannot focus on a particular task. When the disorder is complicated by hyperactivity, it is known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Learning Disability (LD) is a processing disorder. The child can focus or zero in on the task but has problems interpreting or performing the task.

All three disorders occur across all social strata. None of these disorders is caused by a problem with intelligence; in fact, the disorders are particularly frustrating for children with average or above average intelligence who desire to learn but have difficulty doing so. A high percentage of children with ADD/ADHD also have LD. If you can't focus, you can't process! When circumstances are such that the subject matter is new or novel and there is immediate feedback, the child may learn better. The disorder is more obvious in school situations because of the restricted structures. Children do not outgrow ADD/LD, although many develop coping mechanisms.

Characteristics of ADD and ADHD

- **Distractibility.** The difficulty for the child is not short attention span but an inability to focus on a single item; the mind pays attention to everything. It is like a wide-angle camera that takes in everything. As one child said, "My brain is like a TV screen, but someone else is playing with the remote!" As a result, the child feels confused about what to focus on. Which item is the catechist talking about? Distractions can be visual (clouds, sun, birds, a sunbeam) or auditory (air conditioner, lawn mower, siren in the distance, a voice). Auditory perception seems to present more difficulty.
- **Dysfunctional memory.** The child can have a phenomenal memory for battles or ball game scores yet cannot recall simple prayers.
- **Impulsivity.** The child appears to have no inhibitions and will say inappropriate things, not out of malice but because he/she doesn't take time to think. The threat of punishment does not prevent the child from calling out in class. A short fuse makes this child liable to haul off and hit someone. The child can't wait his/her turn. Everything is in chaos: The child can't find a book, misplaces take-home letters, and forgets his lunch. This child's motto seems to be Ready! Fire! Aim!
- **Hyperactivity.** Children with ADD and ADHD were often active in the womb, in the bassinet, in their sleep. Their bodies are always in motion, with wiggling and squirming beyond average. They literally cannot stay in their seats. They "bug" everyone and talk incessantly, even when no one is listening. Like the Energizer bunny, they just keep going and going.

Characteristics of a LD

A learning disability or learning disorder is not a problem with intelligence. Learning disorders are caused by a difference in the brain that affects *how* information is received, processed, or communicated. Children with learning disabilities often have trouble processing sensory information because they see, hear, and understand things differently from their peers.

Language and communication learning disabilities involve the ability to understand or produce spoken language. This includes the ability to tell a story, follow directions, achieve fluency in speech, and understand the meaning of words and parts of speech. Many children with LD see words in waves rather than in straight lines of letters; many see words and letters in reverse. Problems in visual perception include missing subtle differences in shapes, reversing letters and numbers, skipping words, misperceiving distance or depth, and problems with eye-hand coordination. Problems in comprehension can arise because the child is focused instead on distinguishing a “b” from a “d,” or “saw” from “was.” Some children with auditory perception disabilities cannot hear the differences in the sounds of letters; some children are highly distracted by background noises and can hardly hear the teacher’s voice above the distractions.

Many of the characteristics for LD are also found in the child with ADD and ADHD.

Suggestions for Working with the Child Who Has ADD/ADHD/LD

You cannot meet all the needs of this child, nor should you try to diagnose various symptoms. It is important to get feedback from parents and possibly classroom teachers. It is crucial that the catechist is well prepared to meet the needs of the child.

- **Use visual clues.** Point to the item on a blackboard or flannel board as you speak about it. Face students as you speak as some children need to see your lips move. Make the child look at you when either of you is speaking. Use a highlighter to mark key concepts on a page.
- **Allow for individual adjustment.** Cut back the number of pages in a required reading or shorten the class session; perhaps a shadow aide can be provided to help the child stay on track. A Confirmation project can be simplified without undermining what the regular group is doing.
- **Speak in concrete terms.** Rephrase “Father will put the host in your hand,” to “Father Jones will put Jesus in your hand, Rachel, in your hand Maddie,” and so forth. Say “Put down the crayon” rather than “Do you mind putting that crayon away!” Don’t harangue with a lot of words; the child cannot process it all. Speak slowly and quietly; give bite-sized directions that take a task step by step. Remember, the ADD/ADHD/LD child often cannot figure out what comes next, which is why tasks go unfinished. The catechist needs to be a “guardian angel” to the child, helping the child see what comes next.
- **Remove distractions.** Make sure the learning environment is free from distraction. Keep chalk on the teacher’s desk. Gerbils or a fish tank can be a disaster in the room of an ADD/ADHD/LD child. When a child appears to be easily distracted or is distracting to others, sit the child up front.
- **Allow doodling.** Research has shown that doodling helps learning to take place with some ADD/ADHD/LD children.
- **Be emotionally supportive.** Children with ADD/ADHD/LD find it very difficult to perceive themselves as lovable. They perceive themselves as rejects; often, they are the loners in a group. If constantly corrected, the child may become sensitive, leading to angry outbursts and low self-esteem.

1 Surgeon General’s Report. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000.

Understanding the Child with an Emotional Disorder

Emotional disorders among children are fairly common. According to the Surgeon General, about 20 percent of American children suffer from a diagnosable emotional disorder during a given year.¹ Pressures on today's families, traumatic experiences, genetic imbalance, environmental factors, and psychological trauma are a few of the reasons for the rising number of children who face emotional issues.

Two distinct patterns of behavior characterize children with emotional issues: externalizer patterns (aggressive, disruptive, acting out) and internalizer patterns (withdrawn, anxious, depressed). Emotional disorders may further manifest themselves in conduct patterns of aggression and disobedience, in personality patterns of withdrawal, anxiety, and physical complaints, and in immaturity patterns of passivity, poor coping, and lack of desire for socialization.

The catechist who works with an emotionally disturbed child may experience personal anxiety that an outburst of anger could occur at any time with no real provocation. That spark may be lighted by something that is perceived and reacted to deep within the disturbed child. Catechists will find it helpful to remember the compassion and ministry of Jesus toward persons who suffered from emotional disturbance, such as those who were possessed by the devil or those who were rejected by society because they had a disability. It is in the Church community through a supportive catechist that the child may be able to experience the unconditional love, forgiveness, and acceptance that are so needed.

Two Types of Emotional Disorder

- **Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD).** The child or young teen with ODD displays an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, hostile, and annoying behavior toward people, particularly those in authority. The behavior often disrupts the child's normal daily activities, including activities within the family and school. Symptoms of ODD include repeated temper tantrums, excessive arguing with adults, being spiteful and seeking revenge, swearing and using obscene language, frequent moodiness, being easily frustrated, and low self-esteem.
- **Depression.** Depression may first appear in a child as irritability, sadness, or unexplained crying and an unusual lack of interest in peers, school, or sports. Depression is thought to be caused by an imbalance of chemicals called neurotransmitters that send messages between nerve cells in the brain. Children with depression often have other disorders along with depression, such as an anxiety disorder, eating disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Many turn to drugs and alcohol in order to relieve their symptoms.

Suggestions for Working with the Child Who Has an Emotional Disorder

Presenting religious concepts to children with emotional disorders poses special challenges. It is important for the Director/Coordinator and catechist to establish and maintain open communication with the child's parents or guardians in order to determine which factors might contribute to—or provide relief from—fears, anxieties, and obsessive thinking. Learning something about the student's emotional disorder and the nature of any professional help being provided will help the catechist respond appropriately and with compassion.

- **Provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere.** Children with serious emotional disorders are best placed in a small group or in a one-on-one teaching situation. A child who is mainstreamed must be able to cooperate with general classroom procedures. Children recognize immediately whether or not a catechist wants to be with them. Children with emotional disturbances frequently have problems building positive relationships. Catechists should consider the student's need for closeness or distance and act appropriately.

- **Stress positive religious concepts.** Positive concepts include God’s unconditional love for us, God’s concern and presence with us in time of need, and the joy of the resurrection! Avoid concepts that might be upsetting to the child: hell, punishment for sin, undue stress on the Passion of Christ. Be aware that some children with emotional disorders fixate on death, the crucifix, the devil, apparitions, and concepts such as “eating the Body and Blood of Jesus.” For children who have experienced violence in the home by abusive fathers, approaching God as Father can be difficult.
- **Provide behavior guidelines.** The child with an emotional disorder needs to know that there are parameters of behavior. Be sure to establish routines and discuss outcomes of inappropriate behavior to give the child an understanding of your expectations.
- **Give encouragement.** Encouragement helps to bolster a child’s self-image and self-esteem. Harshness or punishment can undermine self-esteem, make a child feel inadequate, and even make a child want to stop trying. Reward giving can be an effective teaching device for children with emotional disorders.

CELIAC DISEASE AND THE RECEPTION OF THE EUCHARIST

An estimated 15 percent of all people of northern European descent are afflicted with celiac disease, and the numbers continue to grow. Increasingly, children in our catechetical programs are being diagnosed with this illness, and it has become a cause of distress and concern among parents of children preparing for first Holy Communion.

Celiac disease is a disorder of the digestive system that is caused by eating products made with gluten, an ingredient present in wheat flour. This illness poses a particular challenge to Catholics, who believe the reception of Holy Communion in the Sacrament of the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The ordinary hosts consecrated at Mass are made from flour that contains gluten, and such hosts cannot be taken by persons with celiac disease. Pastors and directors/coordinators are asked to show pastoral sensitivity and compassion to anyone with this disease, but especially to the parents of children with the disease who are preparing for first Holy Communion.

The Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has devoted considerable resources to this question for years. Within recent years, the Secretariat has approved and supported the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in a ministry to produce a very low-gluten host that is considered acceptable to the majority of persons afflicted with celiac disease (Newsletter of Secretariat of Divine Worship, November 2003). The hosts are practically gluten-free and have been approved by the USCCB (see Resources).

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, gluten-free hosts must be placed in a pyx or other Eucharistic container and not have contact with other wheat hosts. The minister who handles the gluten-free hosts must not also have come in contact with the regular wheat hosts, as the gluten-free host can become contaminated with the gluten found in the regular hosts. Parents of the child with celiac illness or one of the other ministers at Mass can serve as minister to give the consecrated gluten-free host directly to the child.

The background of the slide features a series of overlapping, curved, grey shapes that resemble stylized leaves or petals. These shapes are arranged in a circular pattern, creating a sense of movement and depth. The colors range from light grey to a darker grey, with some areas appearing more translucent than others.

Practical Implications

Once a child with disabilities is accepted into the parish religious education program, many practical tasks remain: assessing the child's abilities, finding a catechist, and determining which catechetical approach and materials are appropriate. Be sure to keep the pastor informed of all progress. Expect to incur some additional expense for the special texts and/or curriculum that will be needed; the catechist will also need certain "extras" in order to secure the child's attention. Fund-raisers within the parish are a good way to support the program and raise awareness.

Evaluation and Placement of a Child with Disabilities

To gain insight into the specific disability of a child, directors/coordinators should ask parents to complete the Individualized Information Form (see Resources) along with the parish's regular religious education registration form. The child's IEP from the regular school program can help you learn how the school perceives the child and the approach it uses to address the child's needs; ask the child's parents if they would be willing to share their child's IEP with you. Also ask parents to advise you of what they have already done at home to familiarize the child with his/her faith.

Finding the Catechist for a Child with Disabilities

Once there is a basic assessment of the child's strengths and weaknesses, the next step is to locate a catechist to work with the child. A background in special education is certainly a plus, but anyone with an interest in working with a child who has a disability can receive the training through formation courses offered by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office. The prime requisite is a heart open to being with the child. The catechist you seek is able to see beyond the disability to a child who is loved by God and family. "Being with" means journeying with the child toward a greater awareness of God and God's love. Catechists of children with disabilities should

- be patient with the children and themselves.
- have faith that God knows and loves each child and desires that the child know God.
- enjoy their relationship, knowing that it mirrors relationships throughout the Christian community. Being in a nurturing, accepting relationship with the catechist is more important for the faith of the child than mastery of information and facts.
- work closely with parents and possibly, on occasion, the child's regular teachers.
- be generous with time and creativity, as ready-made materials are often not available or practical and catechists must make modifications to better serve the child.
- be free from anxiety or worry over what the child has or has not learned, resting instead in the knowledge that faithfully presenting the material is the only necessary thing and that the Holy Spirit will do the real teaching.
- have a sense of humor that does not take the task (or oneself) too seriously.

HOW TO WORK WITH A CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

Where Does the Catechist Start?

Even with the intake information as a guide, the initial encounters between catechist and child will still involve trial and error. Before beginning work with a published curriculum (or even choosing a curriculum), the catechist will want to simply observe the child. Bible-based storybooks and games and crafts with religious themes can provide a starting point for assessment. The catechist can use simple crafts, manipulative materials, coloring and discussion worksheets, and storytelling to help bring to the surface what a child already knows or what he/she might be capable of doing and learning. The goal of the catechist at this stage is to observe the child over multiple sessions in order to gain insight into how the child learns.

Determining Appropriate Content

A beginning curriculum for the child with disabilities can introduce

- the person and life of Jesus through the infancy narratives, the gospel accounts of miracles, and the parables of Jesus.
- Mary and the Apostles.
- the Bible as the Word of God.
- the Church as the gathering of God's Family.

Textbook curricula for children with disabilities (see Resources) use pictures and icons to bring topics of faith to children who cannot read or who are nonverbal. Be aware that children with disabilities become versed in the Catholic faith according to their ability. Simplicity is key. Hearing about Jesus and God the Father at the same time, for example, can prove confusing for some children. The catechist who is attuned to the child's way of learning will be able to work with a textbook curriculum in a way that is flexible and adaptive.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment in which child and catechist meet should be warm, inviting, and comfortable for the child. The environment should be “prepared” with materials and furnishings that are simple, attractive, and few in number so as not to be a distraction. The furniture should be appropriately sized. The atmosphere should be quiet, peaceful, and sacred, conducive to learning, worship, meditation, and prayer. Green houseplants, which the child can help care for, help create a sense of community and belonging.

Multisensory materials and experiences form an essential part of the environment. Some children demonstrate acquired knowledge by pointing to an object or picture, placing figures on a flannel board, or working with manipulative materials. Listening to stories, singing songs of faith, and communal prayer offer deep experiential learning. For a lesson on the liturgy, a catechist might bring the chalice and cruet—beautiful articles the child normally sees at Mass—into the environment for the children to see and to touch. Providing a small model altar for the child to prepare fosters learning about the Eucharist. (For more on learning styles, see Resources).

The child who needs assistance staying focused may enjoy taking care of the environment. Children with ADD/ADHD/LD or mild autism often appear restless, may have difficulty remaining seated, and are frequently distracted. It’s difficult for them to wait their turn; they interrupt often and have a hard time listening. Quiet, purposeful activities such as polishing a chalice or watering the plants allow the restless child to engage in movement, practice fine motor control, and contribute to the community. Inviting children to listen to their own breathing gives them a way to become quiet and to focus on their own. Ringing a soft chime to signal movement to a new activity infuses the space with order and calm. Using a soft tone of voice, speaking slowly, and allowing a few seconds of silence before giving directions can help the child who is easily confused.

To nurture the spiritual life of children, the catechist must do more than transmit information and facts. This is especially true for children who live with physical and intellectual disabilities. Children sense that, despite all that is revealed to us in scripture and the liturgy, God remains a deep mystery. The catechist must be careful not to strip that mystery away but to always point to it. After a scripture reading, open-ended questions (“I wonder how Mary felt after the angel left her?” or “I wonder how the women felt when they saw the empty tomb?”) keep the focus on the transcendent and allow every child to participate.



Sacramental Considerations

“Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the ecclesial Community”

— Code of Canon Law, canon 214

Accepting a child into the Religious Education program usually implies that at some point the child will receive first Eucharist and Confirmation. Questions always arise, and have been raised for years, about the reception of the sacraments by children with disabilities.

Every child should have a period of preparation before receiving a Sacrament. The type of preparation should be tailored to the ability of the child. In cases where the disability is more complicated, exceptions regarding preparation can be made, especially for reception of the sacrament of Confirmation. It is important that preparation be kept simple without unnecessary requirements or pressures placed on the family.

Statement from the Bishops

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released the document *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities* in 1978. In this statement the bishops developed a vision for broader integration of persons with disabilities into the full life of the Church through increased evangelization and catechesis and by fuller participation in the sacramental life of the Church. In response to requests for clarification and guidance on how to provide fuller participation, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* followed in 1995. Summaries of pertinent topics from the 1995 Guidelines are provided below; however, directors/coordinators are encouraged to read both documents in their entirety for a fuller explanation and understanding of this pastoral question, to know how to proceed, and to be assured of making appropriate decisions. Copies of both documents can be purchased online for a small fee on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (see Resources).

Baptism -

Disability is not a barrier or impediment to receiving Baptism once it is determined that the parent or guardian will ensure that the child or adult with a disability be brought up in the Catholic faith.

Eucharist -

The basic requirement for reception of the Eucharist by a child with a disability is that the child can distinguish the Eucharistic bread from ordinary bread and that the child has a sense of sacredness and/or reverence about receiving the Eucharist. This reverence can be indicated by a gesture, a longing look when accompanying the parent who is receiving, or a spoken desire to receive. Sometimes the only way a child can demonstrate an understanding is through a physical response, such as pointing to a picture of the host when asked “Show me God’s Holy Bread” and pointing to a picture of plain bread when asked to indicate “the bread we eat for lunch.” In response to the concern that the child cannot understand what or Who is being received, a wise old priest once replied, “Who of us really understands this gift of God? Why do we require that a child with a disability understand more than we do?”

Reconciliation -

Reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by a child with disabilities may be delayed until after reception of First Eucharist to a time when the child has a more adequate understanding of the meaning of sin and has the ability to comprehend in a meaningful way what it means to avoid sin in the future. Parents of children with disabilities are often the best persons to know whether or not the child is ready for Reconciliation.

Confirmation -

Confirmation is a Sacrament of Initiation that may be administered once the baptized person has reached the age of reason, generally about seven years of age. The child with disabilities should be prepared according to his or her ability and would usually receive at about the same age as the other children in the parish. Preparation should be kept simple. It is likely that candidates with disabilities would have trouble learning the Creed and naming and understanding the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. However, they can be taught that Confirmation is the sacrament where God's Holy Spirit comes to them in a way that increases God's love in them, gives them more courage, and makes them stronger children of God. An explanation of who the Bishop is, what his cross and miter represent, and what will happen during the ceremony is generally enough additional information for the child with disabilities.

"The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the sacrament. "

*— Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments
with Persons with Disabilities, USCCB, 1995*

CONFIRMATION FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

The Archbishop of New York celebrates Confirmation with children in the Archdiocese who have disabilities. These children, who so often find themselves on the sidelines of special events, are recognized at this Confirmation ceremony in a unique and joyful manner. For many parents, the Archdiocesan celebration is a high point not only in the life of their child, but in their lives as well.

Participation in the Confirmation ceremony is an alternative to celebrating the sacrament in the family's local parish. Several months before the Confirmation, the Catechetical Office director of special religious education notifies the pastors and the directors/coordinators of each parish of this upcoming event. The directors/coordinators then reach out to the parents of children with disabilities in the parish to inform them of this option for their child. Ultimately, the decision to take part in this special ceremony should be left to the parents, and directors/coordinators should do whatever is necessary to meet the wishes of the parents. The directors/coordinators are asked to act immediately on information regarding this event when it is received from the Catechetical Office. The available space for this ceremony fills rapidly, and applications cannot be processed after the deadline.



Resources

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATIONS

Children with disabilities are so unique and varied, there is no single method, textbook, or curriculum that can be universally used. The three curriculums described below offer guidance in designing a program for several or more children or for working one-on-one. Ideally, one or more of these resources should be available to catechist who works with children with disabilities.

1. Welcome One, Welcome All

The Welcome One, Welcome All series features a simple reading format, icons and pictures, and good overall assistance to the catechist. Topics include theology, administration, lesson preparation, and behavior management. Sample forms for registration and evaluation of ability levels are provided. The icons in the teacher's manuals are extremely useful when instructing children who are nonverbal. *The Sacraments: Gifts for All* component includes individual teacher manuals on the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Confirmation that describe how to effectively prepare the child with disabilities to receive the sacrament. Student books use images and limited vocabulary to give the child a simple but meaningful grasp of each sacrament. Supplemental texts are available to use in the years not devoted to sacramental preparation. These topics include Mary, Prayer, the Rosary, Saints, the Apostles Creed, and the Beatitudes.

Available from:

Institute for Pastoral Initiatives
300 College Park
University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio 45469-0314
1-888-532-3389 • <http://ipi.udayton.edu>

2. Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Program to Improve Religious Education for Children with Mental Retardation

This program contains simplified lessons on the sacraments and basic Catholic beliefs in a manner suitable for understanding by children with disabilities.

Available from:

RCL Benziger
877-275-4725 • www.rclbenziger.com

3. Loyola Press Adaptive Preparation Kits for Individuals with Autism and other Special Needs

The tools in this kit have been used successfully by many individuals to enter fully into the faith experience.

Available from:

Loyola Press
800-621-1008 • www.loyolapress.com/special-needs

4. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a particular approach to faith formation based on Dr. Maria Montessori's principles of child development. This method of religious education which engages all of the senses is by its very nature inclusive.

Information is available from:

The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
www.cgsusa.org

SUPPLEMENTAL READING

Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community

by M. B. Walsh, A. Walsh, and Bill Gaventa
(The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, 2008)

This compendium of essays written by church leaders, parents, and persons involved in the life of an autistic person gives valuable insights into why church participation by families with autism is both needed and fulfilling.

Available from:

The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center
on Developmental Disabilities
335 George Street
P.O. Box 2688
New Brunswick, NJ 08903-2688
732-235-9300
<http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter>

In My Heart Room:

21 Love Prayers for Children

by Sister Mary Terese Donze, A.S.C..
(Liguori Publications, 1998)

I Can Pray About Anything

by Sister Mary Terese Donze, A.S.C.
(Liguori Publications, 1994)

Two unique books for teaching children about prayer, using everyday objects as a way to concretize a relationship with God. Useful for almost all children with disabilities and an asset to any catechetical program.

Available from:

Liguori Publications
800-325-9521
www.ligouri.org

Opening Doors: Vol.I and II A Parish Resource Guide for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities

Available at:

www.ncopd.org
202-529-2933

Signing the Scriptures:

A Starting Point for Interpreting the Sunday Readings for the Deaf, Year A

[Years B and C also available] (Liturgical Training Publications, 2007)

Available from:

Liturgical Training Publications
1-800-933-1800
www.ltp.org

The ABC's of A.D.D. for Catechists

by Madonna Wojtaszek-Healy, Ph.D. (2003)

This pamphlet provides helpful ideas for teaching religious concepts to children with Attention Deficit Disorder and Learning Disabilities.

Available from:

Rooted in Love
815-741-5188
rootedinloveinc@aol.com

AWARENESS RESOURCES

Douglas, the Boy Who Knew God

by Sister Patricia A. McCarthy, CND
(Patricia A. McCarthy, 2005)

This delightful story familiarizes the young child with the giftedness of children who have a disability.

Available on Amazon.com

How Difficult Can This Be?

The F.A.T. City Workshop

(Eagle Hill Outreach, 1989)

Experience through simulated activities (70-minute DVD and discussion guide) what it means to be learning disabled in the classroom and in society. DVD's are produced by Richard La Voie, an expert in training teachers in what it means to be disabled.

Available at the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office.

The Green Kid

(Candid Camera, 2003)

This is an excellent DVD for teaching acceptance and understanding of those who are different from us. Useful in teaching all children what it means to be disabled.

Available at the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office.

What's Wrong with Timmy?

by Maria Shriver
(Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2001)

Simple story that acquaints young children with the reality that we all have differences but can all accept one another.

Available from Amazon.com

WEBSITES & PHONE NUMBERS

National Catholic Partnership on Disability

www.ncpd.org

This organization works collaboratively to ensure meaningful participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of the life of the Church and society

Autism Speaks

www.autismspeaks.org

This organization gives valuable information on autism, including networking, events, community outreach, resources, and more on the national and local level.

Catechetical Office of the Archdiocese of New York

www.nyfaithformation.org

Director of Special Religious Education. Resource for support, guidance, and information regarding students with disabilities.

Network for Inclusive Catholic Education (NICE)

www.udayton.edu/~ipi/nice.htm

Resources include Sacrament preparation and overall planning materials for a Religious Education program for those with disabilities.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

www.usccbpublishing.org

Available for purchase for a modest fee:

Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities, 1978

Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, 1995

Catholic Deaf Centers

(212) 988-8563 - Manhattan

(914) 452-1400 x. 4211/4212 - Poughkeepsie

The Xavier Society for Blind/Visually Impaired

(212) 473-7800 or (800) 637-9193

Benedictive Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

(800) 223-2772

altarreads@benedictivesisters.org

The form on pages 37 - 41 may be photocopied for use in the parish Religious Education program.

FORMS AND GUIDELINES TO COPY
PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM
Individualized Information Form

Date _____

Child's name _____ DOB _____

Parent's/guardian's name(s) _____

Religious education goal: The child and his/her parents/guardians desire that _____

Please identify your child's disability _____

Are you willing to share a copy of your child's IEP with us? *Yes* *No*

It is understood that the IEP contains confidential information not to be shared outside of our program.

Signature of parent/guardian _____ Date _____

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BACKGROUND:

Is your child able to attend Mass? *Yes* *No*

Please comment. _____

Has your child had previous religious education classes: *Yes* *No*

If yes, please indicate location and level(s) _____

Has your child received any of the following sacraments: (circle all that apply)

Baptism Reconciliation Eucharist Confirmation

How will the catechist know if your child is becoming unhappy, agitated, or emotionally upset?

Please describe behaviors. _____

What types of events might trigger these behaviors? _____

What are some ways/techniques a catechist might use to help your child regain emotional composure?

How does your child relate to other persons? _____

Is your child able to read? _____

Please comment. _____

My child

_____ needs someone to read with him/her

_____ needs assistance in writing

My child learns best from

_____ what he/she hears

_____ what he/she sees

_____ what he/she touches/handles

_____ what he/she does

_____ what he/she talks about

_____ other (please describe) _____

My child needs assistance with

_____ cutting

_____ coloring

_____ pasting/gluing

_____ writing

_____ copying from board

_____ buttoning

_____ zippering

_____ tying/fastening shoes

_____ other (please describe) _____

My child needs assistance with

_____ sitting down

_____ standing up

_____ walking short distances

_____ walking long distances

_____ putting on coat

_____ other (please describe) _____

My child is partially sighted/blind. *Yes* *No*

What accommodations need to be made? _____

My child has partial hearing. *Yes* *No*

What accommodations need to be made? _____

Does your child have any allergies (food/drink, animals, bee stings, etc)? *Yes* *No*

If yes, please describe _____

What do we need to know to protect your child from an allergic reaction? _____

Is your child currently taking any medication? *Yes* *No*

If yes, what kind and at what time? _____

LESSON PLAN

CHILD'S NAME _____ DATE _____

GOAL OF LESSON: _____

MESSAGE (WHAT IS THE LESSON TELLING US?): _____

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES WILL THE CHILD HAVE TO SHOW THAT AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE LESSON HAS TAKEN PLACE? (e.g., icon identification and placement, art, music): _____

MATERIALS NEEDED: _____

YOUR EVALUATION OF THE LESSON: _____

The material on pages 41 - 44 is adapted from Variety of Learning Activities in Inclusive Religious Education by Mary L. Brosseau, Diocese of Orange, California, © Diocese of Orange and is reprinted with permission. You may copy and share this material provided you credit the source.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Techniques that involve the student in the learning process help motivate the student, focus his/her attention, and reinforce learning. They also help you evaluate the student's progress.

Most people remember 20% of what they hear
 30% of what they see
 70% of what they say
 90% of what they do.

Some students have auditory, visual, speech and language, and/or mobility impairments. Teach to the student's strongest learning mode: auditory, visual, or kinesthetic. Right brain, intuitive styles of learning such as music, art, drama, and prayer are especially recommended for persons with cognitive limitations. Once you've discovered what works for a particular student, remember it and be ready to use it again as needed to refocus student's attention.

Auditory Learning Activities

- **Lecture.** Teacher speaks, student listens.
- **Storytelling.** Stories can be used to inform, motivate, and entertain.
- **Music.** Music is an excellent means of helping students remember key concepts because it engages both sides of the brain.
- **Silence.** A time with no verbal input, possibly with a quiet musical background, can provide students with a chance to reflect on, assimilate, and integrate what they have learned; it can provide a time for interior prayer.

Visual Learning Activities

- **Objects.** Real objects are preferred to photographs, drawings, or words.
- **Pictures.** Photographs are more realistic and easier to understand than most drawings. Photographs of the parish site help student connect with the content. Some students have difficulty transferring what they learn about a generic church to their own church, about any priest to their own parish priest, and so forth.
- **Drawings.** Drawings can help focus attention. Check for clarity. The more images in the drawing, the more difficult it is to understand. The more abstract the image, the more difficult it is to identify.
- **Reading.** Reading ability levels are likely to vary. The Contemporary English Version of scripture is now approved for the children's sacramentary and is easy to understand. Focus on the main idea of a lesson and help students identify and highlight or circle it. Have students work in pairs or triads and ask for one of the partners to volunteer to read quietly aloud to the other to ensure that students with low reading skills cover the material.
- **Audiovisual.** Give an introduction with specific instructions as to what to look and listen for. Turn off the sound and provide your own narration if vocabulary and concepts are not within the students' capability.

Activities Calling for Verbal Responses

- **Reading.** Always ask for volunteers to read out loud so that students with low reading ability are not embarrassed by being called upon. Short choral reading engages all of the students and allows those who have more difficulty reading to echo what they hear.
- **Singing.** Singing aides in memory retention. Short songs to melodies everyone knows can reinforce the main concept you are trying to get across.
- **Puppets.** Sometimes a student who is hesitant to speak for himself/herself will speak through a puppet.

Kinesthetic Learning Activities

- **Writing.** A student unable to write may use: rubber stamps, stickers, or paper and a glue stick to express their thoughts.
- **Manipulative.** A student who is unable or hesitant to speak may respond by pointing, drawing, sign language, gesture, rearranging words or materials, writing, facial expression, pantomime, or using pictures or a word board. Simple questions can be answered with colored response cards: red for “yes,” green for “no.”
- **Physical activity.** Build in needed movement by sitting for some activities, standing for others, folding hands to pray, or moving from seat to prayer center.
- **Art.** Use art activities to reinforce learning by continuing to connect the concept the students are learning to the activity they are doing. Do not assume that they automatically make the connection.
- **Flannel board.** This activity requires minimal motor skills and is helpful in narrating a story line and helping a child recall key concepts, people, and words.
- **Drama.** Narrate a story to be mimed or have students repeat the lines of their characters after you narrate. Example: Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” Student who is playing the role of Jesus repeats, “Peace be with you.” (Students remember best what they say.)
- **Role-play.** Set up a situation and have a student respond to it. If the response is inappropriate, ask the class, “How else could he/she respond?” After student gives input, start over: “Let’s try this again.”
- **Experiences.** Provide life experiences on which to base religious concepts. Be sure to make the connection between the activity and the point of the lesson.

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ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Alternatives to Reading

- Use a flannel board
- Tell a story
- Act out a story
- Listen to a story on computer or tablet
- Draw a story in symbols, using colors, textures
- Use puppets to tell a story
- Play background music as teacher reads
- Dress as a saint and tell story in 1st person
- Dance a story
- Role-play a story (a few simple props are important)
- Add pictures or objects that make the story more concrete, more real

Alternatives to Writing

- Take and show digital pictures
- Collages (tear paper rather than cut with scissors)
- Discussion (small or large groups)
- Dioramas (with individual child or small groups)
- Dramatization
- Posters, murals, time lines
- Bookmarks: make for self or for others, such as nursing homes
- Flower with petals: use petals to note good deeds done each week
- Tape recorder
- Music

Dear Lord,
We are all different
We are different colors
We are different sizes
We are different ages
We have different abilities

But
In the eyes of Jesus
We are all the same
We are God's children
We all sing His praise
We all dance in His honor
We all speak His name
We all share His love
We all grow together in God's Care

written by
Jonathan Perez
at age 11
Student at Cooke Foundation for Special Education

