

Shaping the Hearts

of Kids with Special Needs



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Worth the Risk

As a ministry consultant, I've often been asked to help churches assess the risks and costs associated with having a special needs ministry. The first questions asked are usually about physical accessibility—wheelchair ramps, parking issues, elevators, and automatic doors. Most of these accommodations are easily remedied through small building

- What are our responsibilities toward the medical conditions of chronically ill and medically fragile children?
- What happens if a child has a seizure? What protocols do we follow?
- Is it going to cost our congregation additional insurance premiums to cover the cost of welcoming the differently-abled to our ministry?

Living in our litigious society, these concerns often stop ministry to people affected by disability before the ministry even begins.

Truthfully, we are all headed toward disability. As medical technology makes strides that allow people to live longer, churches are experiencing rapidly growing senior citizens groups that deserve just as much pastoral attention as the youth and children's ministries. Some of these elderly members use assistive devices for hearing and mobility that are very similar to those used by children with disabilities. So what is the difference between the disability issues of senior adults who worship with us and those of children with similar issues who want to come and learn? The answer is simple: fear.

"There is only love, trust, and open communication within the body of Christ to aid in the understanding of each person's limitations and challenges."

-Vangie, Georgia

projects or minimal classroom reassignments.

Questions about other obstacles often go unasked (perhaps out of fear), or they are addressed under the topic of "insurance liability." With the purest of intent, leaders want to know if the liability issues are greater when children of disability are included in activities on their building premises. Questions asked may include:



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It frightens us more when we see children with oxygen tanks, walkers, and hearing aids, because it seems somehow out of place. Children aren't supposed to hurt and experience chronic illnesses that cripple their lifestyles. We prefer to view childhood as an idyllic time of freedom, endless energy, health, and peace. But some children will never experience childhoods marked by these ideals. For these children, knowing the love of God, who embraces those who suffer, is all the more important.

There is no such thing as "special needs insurance" that churches can add to their policies to give them fuller coverage for times when children with autism, Down syndrome, or seizure disorders attend church activities. There is no special coverage for including adults who use walkers, wheelchairs, or have pacemakers. *There is only love, trust, and open communication within the body of Christ to aid in the understanding of each person's limitations and challenges.*

The key to dispelling fears and myths is open communication. Don't be afraid to ask parents and caregivers the following questions:

- How would you want us to respond if your child has a seizure?
- How does your child communicate best? Can he talk or does he prefer to use gestures or pictures? Can you show us how to use his communication device so we can "talk" with him?
- Can your child feed herself or does she need help? What can we do to make sharing in snacks and fellowship meals easier for your family?
- What are your child's self-help skills? How can we make trips to the restroom easier for the child?
- Are there things about being at church that concern you for your child? (i.e. sensitivity to noise, smell, touch, etc.)

Don't forget to ask what kinds of things their child enjoys doing. Never forget that this person has been made in the image of God. As a fellow image bearer, he probably enjoys some parts of God's creation the same way you do. Understanding how the person is more like you than he is different from you is an important step in welcoming the individual into your community.

Will welcoming adults or children with disabilities cost something? Well, yes. Doesn't it cost something to welcome any individual or family into your community? But it is well worth the cost and the perceived "risk." The better questions to ask might be: What will it cost us if we exclude these individuals? What will we miss by not having them as part of the body of Christ?

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Summer 2015
Toddlers & 2s Teacher.

Toddlers & 2s

Creature Comforts

Summer unit 1 for *Toddlers & 2s* focuses on God's activity in creating animal life. This topic may capture the interest of children with developmental delays or special needs, even though they may seem disinterested in other lesson topics presented.

Frequently a particular kind of animal has special importance to a child. Maybe children are interested in a specific animal because it is related to a favorite object they own, such as a teddy bear. Perhaps children have visited a local zoo or aquarium and had a positive experience with a certain animal that they now like to interact with in their imaginations. Take advantage of these preferences and incorporate them into your teaching times. Before you begin this unit, ask parents these questions:

- Have you visited any zoos or aquariums recently? If so, which animals did your child particularly enjoy? Are there any animals your child dislikes or fears?
- Does your child have a preference for a certain kind of animal? What do you think made your child become attached to this certain animal?
- As we explore how God made each animal unique and different, how can we remind your child that God made each person special too?

Lesson highlight for:

unit 1 lessons

One Thing at a Time

Even though the recurrence of weekly routine and repetition of unit themes can become tedious as teachers, these lessons can seem fast paced for very young children and children with developmental delays and learning differences. If you detect that your students seem unable to follow basic variations in theme between lesson topics within a unit, consider teaching only one main lesson per unit. You can pull in activities from other lessons in the unit that reinforce the main lesson you are teaching. This will provide more continuity for learners who move at a slower pace.

For instance, for the first five weeks of the quarter, use lesson 5 "God Made All Animals" as your weekly lesson. Repeat activities from that lesson throughout the five weeks, or pull in a few activities from lessons 1-4 that highlight the different kinds of animals God created. Narrowing the focus and limiting the variety of classroom activities may help learners who are overwhelmed or new to a classroom environment.

Lesson adaptation for:

any unit of lessons

Sleepless Nights

Materials

books about nighttime and sleeping

While lesson 13 teaches “God cares for me when I’m sleeping,” many parents of children with special needs or chronic illness might respond “If only!” A common dilemma of young children with developmental delays is an inability to self-regulate, including the capacity to sleep. Parents of children with special needs often report that their children still are not sleeping through the night at ages 8 to 10 years old. Sleep deprivation becomes a way of life for many families affected by disability.

Depending on the severity of the disability, some children may never develop sleeping habits that allow them to slumber for more than two hours at a time. However, for children who are just learning to regulate their sleep patterns, this lesson provides a good opportunity for talking about sleep as a natural part of one’s day.

If you sense this is a need for a family of a child in your class, consider spending more than one week on lesson 13 as a ministry to that family. Add books about nighttime and sleeping to your lesson. Encourage the families to investigate the use of weighted lap pads or blankets that can provide additional comfort for the child with special needs.

Lesson adaptation for:

lesson 13

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Summer 2015
Preschool Teacher.

Preschool

“Point” of Review

Materials

Resources sheet 1 Bible story faces 1a, 2a, and 2b and props 2c and 2d; *Teaching Picture 2*

This activity highlights the great strength of Immerse’s *Resources* for children who learn differently. Once the story has been told, the Bible review activity encourages the teacher to ask questions in such a way that allows students to answer by simply pointing to a visual aid. For children with language delays, this is an excellent strategy for helping them to share what they have absorbed, even though they cannot express their knowledge in the same way as other children. You may be surprised at how much these silent students have soaked up from your lesson! Try using the visual aids from every lesson in this way, rewording the review questions so that children can point to answers rather than saying them aloud.

Lesson highlight for:

“Bible Review,” lesson 2 Bible Discovery

Watch and Stop

Materials

sheets of red and green construction paper, scissors, jumbo craft stick, glue stick, *Resources* CD track 5, CD player

The *Quick Step* “Statues” activity gets children up and moving while introducing a crucial story element. The activity also can provide for needed energy release and teach impulse control to children who have difficulty resisting the urge to follow directions.

Children are directed to walk around the room as you play “With All My Heart.” Whenever the song is stopped, the children are to “freeze in place,” standing as still as statues. Children with hearing impairments may find it difficult to experience success, as they are watching the other children for a cue to stop instead of relying on their sense of hearing. Consider adding the use of a stop sign so these children can watch for a visual cue as you pause the song. Or play the song softly throughout the activity and simply turn off the lights to cue children to “freeze.”

Before Class

Cut two large circles, one red and one green. Place the circles back to back and glue a craft stick handle between the circles, creating a stop and go sign.

Activity adaptation for:

“Statues,” lesson 6 Getting Started

It's summertime and warmer weather leads many of us to think about the fun of cooling down in the water. But families of children with assistive hearing devices often dread this time of year. One mother said, "Everyone has a swim party. Every year at VBS there is either a whole day devoted to water play or water activities are included each day. Summer service projects include car washes. . . . It's so frustrating because my kids can't get wet. I mean they can, but they have to take off their devices and that leaves them deaf. They'd rather stay home. We hate summer."

There may not always be a good accommodation for every activity that includes water, but consider the following:

- Ask: Is there a way to accomplish the activity using colored rice or packing peanuts as a substitution for water?
- Ask: What is the safest way to add water to the lesson while insuring that the child with assistive hearing devices doesn't get wet?
- Talk with the parents and caregivers about ways they think you can change lessons or make accommodations for their child. Even if you can't make a change, they will never forget that you remembered the needs of their child!

Activity adaptation for:

"Water Wonder," lesson 1 Getting Started; "Water Play," lesson 1 More! Getting Started; "Dig a Ditch," lesson 4 Getting Started; "Stream Jobs," lesson 9 Getting Started; "Little Seas," lesson 11 More! Getting Started

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Summer 2015
Pre-K & K Teacher:

Pre-K & K

More Than a Box

Materials

large appliance box, utility knife, props as needed (see activity ideas)

Turn a large appliance box on its side (or cut a door opening) and create a place where children with special needs can retreat to and get a quick break from the classroom energy. You may want to use the box as a quiet place where a child who needs a 5- to 10-minute respite can sit quietly and read a book about the day's lesson or where the lesson can be reviewed one-on-one with a teaching assistant.

With a little creative thinking, the box can be used as a story aid for all children. Here are some ideas: lesson 6—hang strips of orange, yellow, and red crepe paper inside the box to represent the flames of a fiery furnace; lesson 8—add stuffed lions for a lion's den; lesson 9—throw a tan sheet over the box to create a tent at Gideon's campsite; lesson 10—place a basket of dried wheat shocks inside Naomi and Ruth's "house"; lesson 11—place the box on a blue sheet and crawl inside the "large fish's belly"; lesson 12—add soft, velvety pillows for Queen Esther to sit on.

Lesson highlight for:

various lessons in units 2 and 3

Favorite Bible Stories

Materials

copies of *Resources* CD Favorite Bible Stories printable file, colored chalk, bowls of sugar water, paper towels

Before Class

Dissolve 1 teaspoon of sugar in a cup of water. Let children dip the chalk into the sugar water and then color the picture. Chalk dipped in sugar water creates bright colors that do not smudge.

Providing printed pictures can help *all* children as they remember stories about God and review the lessons they have learned. Once the pictures have been colored, ask volunteers to show their pages. Point out what the pictures show about God. Phrase questions about the various Bible stories in a way that children who are nonverbal can answer too. **ASK: Can you point to a person in this picture who God helped? Show me whom God showed His love to in this story.**

Activity highlight for:

"Favorite Bible Stories," lesson 7 Grow and Go

From General to Specific

Materials

materials as needed for specified activities (see activity)

A developmental characteristic of most pre-K & K children is the desire to accomplish tasks independently. The children appreciate being free to select an activity from a set of options provided by the teacher. However, for children who experience developmental delays, the “free time” can be overwhelming; they simply aren’t ready to make the choices without more direction from an adult. Additionally, when offered opportunities for open-ended cooperative activities, a child who has difficulty with impulse control may need clearer parameters set than other children.

For instance, in the lesson 10 “Building a Farm” activity, instead of allowing children to act out farming jobs at their own pace, consider providing centers where children experience planting, weeding, and harvesting separately. Or before children prepare a banquet in the lesson 12 “A King’s Banquet” activity, assign specific tasks to children who you know need more guidance. Providing a small amount of additional structure can go a long way!

Activity adaptation for:

“Building a Farm,” lesson 10 Getting Started; “Beach Party,” lesson 11 Getting Started; “A King’s Banquet,” lesson 12 Getting Started; any open-ended cooperative activity

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Summer 2015
Early Elementary Teacher.

Early Elementary

How Hard Is It?

Materials

pictures of various-aged people (baby, young child, teen, adult), pictures of objects used by various-aged people (tricycle, video game, college-level book, tools, car, etc.), reusable adhesive (or tack magnets)

Activities that are easy to do for typically developing students may be quite difficult for children with disabilities. A simple activity modification can offer a more neutral way of discussing *easy* and *hard* activities, rather than personalizing the discussion.

On a wall (or whiteboard), display pictures of various-aged people. SAY: **Some activities are hard and others are easy for people to do. Let's look at some pictures and talk about which activities would be hard or easy for these people to do.** One at a time, show each picture of an object beside the various people pictures. Ask questions, such as "Could a baby read this big book, or would that be too hard?" "Can a grown-up ride a tricycle? Would that be hard or easy?" Continue until all the pictures have been discussed.

SAY: **Each of us has things that are hard for us to do. Sometimes trusting God is also hard to do. We know from today's Bible lesson that God is always faithful, even when trusting Him is hard!**

Activity adaptation for:

"How Hard Is It?" lesson 3 Make It Real

Bible Review Activity

Materials

poster board, marker, glittery stickers, colorful self-stick notes, *Resources* CD lesson 4 Review Questions printable file

Before Class

Draw the outline of a robe (or coat) on a piece of poster board.

Taking turns and working on a team can be difficult for some children with special needs. An activity adaptation will allow each child to work at his or her level, without the worry of answering incorrectly or making his team miss a turn. The adaptation can visually reinforce the story of Joseph and his beautiful coat.

Use the printable file to ask review questions about the Bible story. As the class answers questions correctly, allow each child a turn to add a "jewel" or color to the robe.

SAY: **Even though Joseph's coat was beautiful, it was just something to wear. The coat did not protect Joseph from encountering problems in his life. Joseph's hope was in God, who was with Joseph all the time. God promises to give us hope and to be with us too.**

Activity adaptation for:

"Bible Review Activity" lesson 4 Bible Exploration

Early Elementary

Forgiveness

Materials

Activities p. 11, whiteboard, dry-erase marker

Before Class

Write on the board these steps for forgiveness:

- Person who did wrong:
TELL what happened.
ASK for forgiveness.
- Person who was wronged:
LISTEN to the other person.
TELL why you feel hurt.
SAY, "I forgive you."
STOP feeling bad toward the other person.

Forgiveness is an abstract and difficult concept—even for adults! Teaching a process can be helpful for kids with developmental disabilities as they learn what they should do if they wrong someone and what they should do if someone does wrong to them.

SAY: **Forgiveness is something we all need, and something we all should learn how to do. But forgiveness can be very hard! Let's look at some pictures and talk about steps of forgiveness.** Distribute the activity page. Ask children to look at the first picture and tell what they think happened. Allow kids to create a story that accompanies the picture, and then help the kids work through the steps for forgiveness. Discuss what the person who did wrong should do. Then talk through what the person who was wronged should do.

SAY: **Sometimes it is very hard to forgive other people. I am thankful to know that whatever happens, God *always* forgives us whenever we ask Him!**

Activity adaptation for:

"They Need Forgiveness," lesson 5 Focus In

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Summer 2015
Middle Elementary Teacher.

Middle Elementary

Positive and Negative

Materials

pictures of activities and foods that kids might like or dislike (swimming, reading, sports, music, broccoli, hamburgers, cookies, milk, etc.) reusable adhesive, self-stick notes, pencils

Before Class

On walls around the classroom, display the gathered pictures of activities and food.

Standing Firm

Materials

feather, wad of tissue paper, piece of cardboard, brick, electric fan

Use an activity adaptation to make the concept of responding positively or negatively more concrete for kids with varying abilities. The adaptation will allow kids to learn more about the likes and dislikes of their classmates. Walking around the room to put notes on the various pictures will help students who need to move during the lesson.

SAY: We all have things that we like and dislike. When we like something, we feel positive about it. When we don't like something, we feel negative. Give each person several self-stick notes. Have the kids walk around the room and look at the pictures. The kids can show their reactions to each displayed picture by placing notes with plus (+) signs on the pictures of things they like or have positive feelings for. Kids should add notes with minus (-) signs on pictures of things they don't like or feel negatively about.

SAY: Some people react positively when they hear God's Word. Others have a negative feeling. Let's discover how someone in the Bible responded to God's Word.

Activity adaptation for:

"From Positive to Negative," lesson 3 Focus In

The "Don't Give In" linking arms activity might be difficult for kids who have a physical disability, sensory issues, or poor motor planning. In addition, "standing firm" is an abstract concept for which some kids will need a more tangible and visible way to understand.

SAY: Do you know what it means to "stand firm" on a belief? It means that we believe something 100%, and we will do our best to keep believing no matter what other people say or do. Let's experiment with some different objects to show what standing firm looks like.

Put the feather on the ground near the fan. Turn on the fan for a few seconds, and then turn off the fan. Ask the children to describe what happened. (Answer: The feather blew away.) Repeat with the tissue, cardboard, and brick.

ASK: Which object did not move at all when we turned on the fan? (brick)

SAY: God wants our faith to be like the brick. No matter what other people say or do, God wants us to always trust Him and stand firm in the truth that He is God.

Activity adaptation for:

"Don't Give In," lesson 10 Focus In

Middle Elementary

Doing Good for God

Materials

whiteboard, dry-erase marker, index cards, hole punch, book rings, markers (or colored pencils) (Optional: Doing Good Cards reproducible page, scissors)

Note

See the teacher contents page for the location of reproducible pages. Reproducible pages are also provided on the *Resources* CD.

The “Ways to Do Good for God” activity, in which students need to guess the activity taped to their back, could be difficult for students with social or language issues. An activity adaptation can help to clearly identify ways each student can glorify God in the coming week.

SAY: We each have the ability to do good works for God. Let’s brainstorm a list of good things we can do for God. Then you will choose specific things you plan to do for God. Lead kids in brainstorming things they can do for God. (Examples: help a grandparent, give to a local food bank, send a card to someone who is sick) Write the kids’ ideas on the board for reference.

Give each student seven index cards. Tell the kids that they are to draw or write on each card something they plan to do for God this week. Allow time for kids to reflect and work on their cards. Circulate around the room and work individually with any student who needs extra help. Hole punch the cards and give students book rings to keep their sets of cards together.

Ask for volunteers to share with the class something they plan to do in the coming week to do good for God. **SAY: There are many ways to do good for God—and everyone can do good for God!**

Teaching Tip

The Doing Good Cards reproducible page includes ideas kids might want to use on their index cards. Print a copy of the page and cut apart the cards. Ask for volunteers to read the cards to the class. The ideas can be added to the brainstorm list created by the class.

Activity adaptation for:

“Ways to Do Good for God,” lesson 11 Make It Real

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Summer 2015
PreTeen Teacher.

PreTeen

Range of Emotions

The lessons in summer quarter, units 2 and 3, cover a number of emotional topics, including forgiveness, isolation, worry, and depression. Kids with autism spectrum disorders may have a difficult time discerning the appropriate responses when participating in activities that explore such topics.

Offer visual cues and help these kids understand the process or steps involved in dealing with the various topics. Establish “buddies” and, whenever possible, partner the student who has a developmental delay with a kid who is emotionally mature. Talking through abstract feelings and perceptions with a typically functioning peer can go a long way in helping every child understand the best response for dealing with the range of emotions explored in these lessons.

Activity adaptation for:

lessons in units 2 and 3

Who's Who?

In this activity, the use of “Hurt” and “Pain” as symbolic last names (i.e., Tyler Pain, Jordan Hurt) rather than actual feelings would be extremely confusing for a literal thinker. A kid on the autism spectrum is likely to become frustrated in trying to figure out the proper use of the words in the activity.

As the story is read aloud, draw stick figures on a whiteboard and create a “comic strip” that illustrates what is taking place in the story. Label the people in each scene to help kids see the symbolic usage of the words.

Materials

Activities for lesson 7, whiteboard, dry-erase marker, copies of The Uptown Gazette reproducible page (1 per student)

Note

See the teacher contents page for the location of reproducible pages. The reproducible page is also provided on the *Resources CD*.

Activity adaptation for:

“The Uptown Gazette,” lesson 7 Focus In

God Can Use You!

Materials

Bibles

The word “abilities” is used often throughout the lessons in unit 4. This is where a student with disabilities might feel inadequate. Instead of using the How Did We Get the Bible? *Resources* CD file, have a Bible drill that lets kids find in their Bibles examples of faithful men of God being used despite their disabilities. Examples to find could include: Exodus 4:10-12 (Moses, speech disorder); 2 Samuel 9:3-6 (Mephisbosheth, physical disability); Mark 2:3-5, 12 (man who was paralyzed); Mark 10:46-52 (Bartimaeus, blind); Luke 10:1-10 (Zacchaeus, short in height); and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (Paul, physical discomfort).

Kids can work with partners or in small groups to find Bible passages. ASK: **What is a disability?** (restricted capability to perform particular activities; a medical condition that restricts activities) **Can you always see a disability?** (no) **What is the difference between a disability and a disadvantage?** (A disability is usually caused by a physical condition; a disadvantage is based on one’s surroundings or a poor situation.) Be sure kids understand that God can and does use people who have both disabilities and disadvantages.

Activity adaptation for:

“Optional Bible Skills Builder—People Used by God,” lesson 11 Explore His Word

Tips and Encouragements

for families and
volunteers

immerse
in His Word

A Note from the Editor



I have some exciting news to share! This is the last issue of *Shaping the Hearts of Kids with Special Needs*. NEW! for fall 2015, Immerse's special-needs-friendly activities will be included in each age level's teacher guide. Just look for the Special Needs Friendly symbol to find activities that work well with *all* kids, including those with special needs. The resources CDs and 21st Century Christian website will feature additional helps for reaching kids with special needs—and their families! Be sure your teachers know about the easier-to-use tips that can help them include *every* child.

May God bless you as you make a difference—in a child's future, in a family's church experiences, and in your congregation and community.

Sincerely,

Immerse Editorial Staff

Zooming Out

The details and facts of weekly lessons may seem lost on children with more severe developmental disabilities. If you find this to be the case with a child in your classroom, try an adaptation called “zooming out.” Like the lens of a camera, you can pull back from the details of each lesson and zoom out for a larger picture of a single biblical truth you are trying to teach the child. One way to zoom out is by calling attention to the *focus* of each lesson. Rather than asking the student to recall details of a Bible story, repeat together the focus statement as often as possible. Sometimes reminding ourselves of the bigger picture sparks ideas that allow us to think outside the box for lesson application.

Photo Array

Throughout the Immerse curriculum, students are prompted to cut pictures of people from magazines provided by the teachers. Shape the hearts of kids to include people with different abilities by including pictures that show children and adults with special needs.

Most communities have free parent or family magazines that highlight resources for children with special needs. Ask local schoolteachers if they have access to such resources. Nurses and therapists also may be able to help you, since the magazines often are made available at no cost to parents of children with special needs in therapy centers and doctors' offices.

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